Recognising cinematography: the industrial, technical and aesthetic role of the cinematographer with reference to films directed by Gillian Armstrong

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Thesis
Submitted to Flinders University
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
May 2024

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ABSTRACT

This research makes a contribution to knowledge and to pedagogy in the field by identifying the skill-set cinematographers bring to films and by articulating the creative, technical and organisational work of cinematographers particularly Australian and their crews. It elucidates the multi-faceted role of the cinematographer as visual artist, directorial collaborator, technical expert and Head of Department. Using films directed by Gillian Armstrong as the principal point of reference, I employ interviews with cinematographers, background research and close visual analysis to identify the ways in which the work of cinematographers collaborating with Armstrong reveals a range of distinctive styles. My research has been aided by the generosity of many of the cinematographers corresponding with me regarding their working practices. The thesis shows how, even within the output of a single director, the work of individual cinematographers is demonstrably distinctive.

The works studied span forty years of cinema, from the 1970s to 2015. They include 16mm film, video and digital formats, and demonstrate a range of industrial and creative practices, from low-budget documentaries to Hollywood features. Visual analysis reveals the flexibility and creativity with which cinematographers must respond to widely differing industrial contexts. The broad time-frame of the analysis also reveals the ways in which cinematographic practices have evolved. In particular, digital technologies continue to transform aspects of the cinematographer's role, not only during shooting but also in pre- and post-production.

NOTE ON THE EBOOK

The thesis is accompanied by an ebook entitled *Conversations About Cinematography: A Review of Cinematography in Films Directed by Gillian Armstrong*. This includes the primary source materials I generated, interviews and correspondence I conducted with cinematographers to inform the Chapters in the thesis. Beginning with a Q&A run by the Australian Cinematographers Society, where Russell Boyd speaks about shooting *Picnic at Hanging Rock* with Peter Weir and concluding with Geoffrey Simpson's essay on the *Gaffer - DOP relationship*, the text captures revealing historical information about the work of Australian cinematographers. It also stands as an important learning resource in its own right, and hence I append in its entirety with the intention that can function as a learning resource.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis: 1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university 2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and 3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: H Carter

Date: May 27/05/2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the contributing cinematographers who emailed and answered many questions: Anna Howard, Geoffrey Simpson, Malcolm Richards, Russell Boyd and Tom Cowan. Thanks also to producer Tim Sanders as well as Ernie Clarke, Rod Bolton and the SA branch of the ACS. And of course, none of this would be possible without the films directed by Gillian Armstrong. I've watched them so many times and still love them.

The motivation for this research was to inspire and teach my students about cinematography. Thanks to the many students who have worked with me on films, as camera assistants, operators, grips, gaffers, data wranglers and colourists. Thanks especially to Ella Burton who has spent hours standing with me beside the camera, keeping an eye on absolutely everything.

Thank you to my Screen Team colleagues at Flinders University for academic advice and filmmaking collaborations: Mike Walsh (Supervisor), Julia Erhart (Associate Supervisor), Ruth Vesey, Alison Wotherspoon (original Associate Supervisor), Nicholas Godfrey, Tom Young (my filming buddy), Matt Hawkins, Claire Henry, Cameron Nelson, Todd Pursche and Cole Larsen. Other Flinders colleagues also keep me going: Katie Cavanagh, Shane Bevin, Sarah Peters and Scott Castledine. Thanks also to Susan Thwaites and Tim Thomas from ASPERA who listened to my initial ideas and encouraged me to give it a go. Thanks to those who read drafts and found my typos: Ruth Vesey, Julia Erhart, Steph Edwards and Andrew Bunney, and also Sara Craig for attention to detail and help with referencing. Thank you to associate supervisor Julia Erhart for discussing the films and especially for sharing the NFSA interviews. Linda Kennedy did a beautiful design for the eBook.

My siblings always encourage and inspire me. Thankyou Simon for regularly asking about my 'Professor Paper' and Mia for rewarding my writing with bubbles, and singing along with and crying over *Little Women*. Will, Simon, Mia and Jeremy you mean the world to me. My parents introduced me to Gillian Armstrong. Mum took me to see *My Brilliant Career* in the opening week and Dad, who loved musicals, took us kids to see *Starstruck*, as well as buying me the sheet music and the fantastic vinyl record.

Neil has been very patient and kindly left the house to play golf so I could write in peace. Thanks to Beth and Ben for giving me so many excuses to procrastinate and avoid working on my PhD.

And finally, Mike Walsh has met with me fortnightly for six years, reading my drafts, discussing the films and helping me consolidate my ideas about cinematography. The expectation to produce pages for the meetings is what really kept me going: I was terrified of letting him down. Thank you for teaching me how to use colons and for steering me away from technological determinism. For someone who has never shot a film, Mike knows a great deal about cinematography and seems to never tire of discussing it. I will really miss our regular meetings but hope to make up for this watching the Redbacks play.

Chapter One

Introduction

> Only cinematographers really understand that cinematographers are filmmakers. Everyone else sees them as technicians and as a result, they don't take it into consideration. It's a challenge, but it's also an opportunity, because I've been able to parlay my cinematography experience into language that helps those people see me as someone with a deep understanding of filmmaking.
>
> Aaron Schneider ASC[1]

Everyone agrees that cinematography is important, but few people know how to talk about what cinematographers do. This thesis aims to explicate the practice of the cinematographer. As a teacher of cinematography students at university level, I feel it is important to develop a critical practice attuned to what it is that cinematographers actually do. Cinematography is a specialised, technical aspect of filmmaking and is also usually collaborative, working closely with directors, designers and producers. The primary question--what is the unique contribution cinematographers bring to filmmaking—will be addressed through a smaller-scale, and hence more detailed, study of what specific cinematographers have contributed to a significant body of (mostly) Australian films. The secondary question is, what can we discover about the artistic, technical and organisational work of cinematography crews? By looking closely at cinematography, filmmaking and viewing can be made a richer experience, and the teaching of cinematography will hopefully be provided with a new tool.

The central area of enquiry is an examination of the ways the cinematographers who have worked with director Gillian Armstrong, have made a distinct contribution to the films. Using the director as a control against which to locate difference, the role of the cinematographer becomes prominent. What is the relationship between the cinematographer and director and how do the films of a single director differ when working with a different cinematographer? What is the style of the cinematography in these films and what creative and technical choices are made in the construction of the films and images?

Cinematographers are not inclined to write about their experience and practice of making films, but they are often very willing to talk about it. The research in this thesis is informed by primary research interviews and correspondence with cinematographers Tom Cowan, Malcolm Richards,

[1] Aaron Schneider, ASC, "Aaron Schneider ASC looks back on a turning point," *The ASC,* 2016, accessed September 2018. Please note: At the time of thesis publication The ASC website was undergoing site maintenance, and as a result, several articles are no longer accessible via their hyperlink.

Russell Boyd, Anna Howard and Geoffrey Simpson who have thoughtfully described and shared details about their use of cameras, lights and film stock and their collaborations with others, especially in this case, Gillian Armstrong. Due to COVID restrictions on travel, these conversations were mostly conducted by email correspondence with the benefit of communicating over time and as questions arose relating to my research. In 2019 I travelled to Melbourne to record and interview with Malcolm Richards at his Camerquip office. In that meeting I jogged his memory by playing clips from *14's Good, 18's Better* (1980). I first met up with Russell Boyd when he was invited to speak in Adelaide to the local branch of the Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS) about his long collaboration with director Peter Weir, and I was invited to film the event. Following that, Boyd and I corresponded by email over a period of a year. Other cinematographers I communicate with during the course of my teaching and freelance work, for example Erika Addis, Malcolm Richards and Bryan Mason, serendipitously provided opportunities to ask questions. Producer Tim Sanders holds academic status at Flinders University, and I interviewed him during a visit here because he had worked with Russell Boyd as location manager on films directed by Peter Weir. Geoffrey Simpson is confident writing about his work as cinematographer and in addition to exchanging emails, answered some of my questions in the form of two short essays titled: *What is cinematography?* and *DOP/Gaffer relationship*. This correspondence forms the basis of my primary research and is a means to explain and verify aspects of cinematography not previously written about. Rather than speculate about possible reasons for particular technical choices, I asked the cinematographers directly.

Many examples of vague and uninformed writing about cinematography can be easily found. One review of *High Tide* (1987 Director of Photography [or DOP][2] Russell Boyd) despite claiming the highlight to be the films' 'outstanding cinematography', then fails to actually name the cinematographer.[3] Boyd rose to prominence over a decade before *High Tide* with his second feature film, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1976) which foregrounded an ethereal, softly-lit style reflecting an interest in Australian Impressionist painting. Though Boyd is one of Australia's finest cinematographers, winning many awards both in Australia and internationally, most film audiences have never heard of him, nor would they learn much from this type of articles about his achievement. Things have scarcely improved. In 2018 *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was made re-made as a television series with three named directors, though a review by Luke Buckmaster describes the auteur of the series as 'the cinematographer Garry Phillips, whose images are frequently striking: bright, bold, intensely moody and at times experimentally framed.'[4] Although Buckmaster's article is structured around six images from the series, it does not mention again the

[2] Note: The terms cinematographer and director of photography (DOP) are used interchangeably by the Australian film industry to refer to the role. DP is the US equivalent of DOP see https://cinematographer.org.au/award-categories/
[3] Dean Biron and Suzanne Gibson, "Hearts adrift revisiting Gillian Armstrong's 'High Tide,'" *Metro Magazine,* no. 194 (2017): 104-107.
[4] Luke Buckmaster, "'The Picnic at Hanging Rock' TV series: Six exquisite shots," *Daily Review,* 16 May 2018, accessed 9 September 2021.

cinematography or cinematographer in the body of the text. The emphasis is entirely on the director and actors. Although there are obvious differences between the cinematography in a film and a television production, stylistic decisions must also be invoked to account for the differences between these two versions of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. The study of these decisions might be used to open up the terrain in which this study will involve itself.

Image 1.1: *Picnic at Hanging Rock* 1976
DOP: Russell Boyd ratio 1.66:1[5]

Image 1.2: *Picnic at Hanging Rock* TV Series 2017[6]
DOP: Garry Phillips ratio 16x9 (or 1.78:1)

Most obviously, the film version (Image 1.1) for a theatrical viewing employs the European widescreen standard (1.66:1), and the television series (Image 1.2), shot in the contemporary digital television standard (16x9) have different aspect ratios. The film frame, although not so wide as the digital television frame, is designed for larger cinema screens and thus has a more expansive scale, making use of the height and depth of the frame, whereas the television frame communicates the necessary information (faces) in a more immediate way. These frame captures from equivalent moments in the two versions of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, suggest the similarities and differences between the two productions. Boyd explains that the film version was shot with a net (wedding veil fabric) over the lens, for 'every shot of the film' in order to soften the light reflected from the costumes, and thus to warm and break up the image and lessen the contrast (perhaps in keeping with Boyd's invocation of the Heidelberg School of Impressionist painting).[7] The net itself physically diffracts the path of photons onto film and consequently the viewer sees the image in an altered way. In order to compensate for the decrease in contrast, the depth cues within the frame are reinforced by the use of strong backlighting. The image from the television series has a sharper digital look, with higher contrast and cooler whites. Both compositions make use of foliage in the foreground and rocks in the background, with characters in between. The lower camera position in the film version accentuates the depth staging, with the framing placing the characters lower in the frame behind foreground grasses. However, as the film version is shot

[5] "'Picnic at Hanging Rock,' 1975," *Australian Screen – An NFSA website,* accessed 24 March 2022.
[6] Image source: *Amazon*. Accessed through: Jennifer Mass, "'Picnic at Hanging Rock' showrunner tells us her 'cockamamy' theory about missing girl's fate," *The Wrap,* 29 May 2018.
[7] Russell Boyd, ACS, ASC, OAM, "Russell Boyd oral history excerpt – Interview by Martha Ansara," NFSA ID: 227563, 1978, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia*, accessed 26 September 2023.

using a longer lens, it has a shallower depth of focus and allows more possibilities for variation in focus and clarity of image, including softer and less defined foreground grasses. Out-of-focus foreground and background elements appear as tiny circles of light called bokeh and the shape and colour are unique to the type of lens and aperture used. The two images are also exposed quite differently. The film frame contains more shadow and under-exposed areas, while the television frame is bright and more evenly exposed with camera placement and reflectors eliminating highlights and shadows. In both shots colour is influenced by cinematography with Boyd's the use of the net and backlighting creating a golden hue while Philips employs a cooler mise-en-scène and digital colour grade. The whites in the television dresses are flatly exposed, retaining lots of detail, while in the film version, dresses have bright highlights with shadow areas and obscured detail.

This cursory analysis of two frame captures seeks to establish the immense amount of decision-making that goes into the construction of film images. While some of these decisions may reside with the director, the cinematographer is, at the very least, charged with the transformation of these decisions into images. The purpose of this study is to define the contribution of the cinematographer through this type of close examination of a particular body of work. I hope to bridge some of the gap between researchers, scholars and practitioners writing in this area. It is a founding principle of this study that the details of image construction I have pointed to are significant, both industrially and aesthetically. It is crucial to recognise that they lie within the province of the cinematographer. This is not to claim that the images are solely the cinematographer's work, but simply to recognise the prominent position of the cinematographer in any evaluation of the filmmaking process. Importantly for my purposes here, cinematography is an area of increasing interest not only to critics and audiences but to film students who demand greater detail about how films are actually shot and aspire to career pathways in camera departments rather than the giddy heights of writer-directors.

Theoretical underpinnings

I locate my theoretical methodology in relation to the distinction between hermeneutics and poetics. My approach will derive from what David Bordwell has called 'a poetics of cinema.'[8] Bordwell pointed out that the strongest tradition in film studies has been hermeneutic, or interpretive-based—centred on seeing 'through' films to underlying meaning (both conscious and symptomatic). Critical studies of cinema within universities, rather than coming from a practitioner basis, have more often come from literary, psychoanalytic and cultural studies perspectives which embrace this hermeneutic approach. Most notably in the psychoanalytic tradition, the image functions as the manifest text, which is of little interest in itself but merely disguises the latent

[8] David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

meaning beneath. While I do not necessarily wish to follow Bordwell in criticising these approaches, I simply point out they have given birth to a tradition that ignores the material processes which comprise the making of a film. The downside of this is that there is often a huge gulf between teachers of screen production and those working in critical studies where the film itself is merely the surface to be mined for underlying meaning. Bordwell, and many who have followed him, open the door to my approach but do not themselves step through it, often limiting their interest to director studies. In my research, by focusing on the way in which the specific images were constructed and the minutiae of the camera crew process, different aspects of the work will come to the fore. As Susan Sontag commented in her essay 'Against Interpretation', 'The function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means.'[9] This view elevates the material form of the film as an object of interest and study in its own right, giving fresh prominence to the people and processes which brought it into existence, which for my purposes should include the cinematographer and camera crew. More formal analysis has the potential to invoke a stronger appreciation of the film artefact, as well as identifying more contributions to the authorship of the work. This is in line with what Karen Pearlman and John Sutton have referred to as 'distributed creativity' they further explain as 'a view of filmmaking creativity as distributed across the brains, bodies and tools of collaborators who "make" the film together.'[10] Such an emphasis on creative collaboration can be an important bridge between critical film studies and production practices.

I do not wish to reject meaning. However, as a cinematographer, it is my contention that the process of achieving the shots is an indispensable part of the creation of meaning in the completed film, and both should be considered and studied. The metaphor of vision (generally attributed to the director) has often been important to critics —though primarily as a bridge into the hermeneutic. Arnold Zable reflects on the short film Armstrong directed while at Swinburne, *The Roof Needs Mowing* (1971), observing that the film 'heralds the distinctive, eccentric vision of a filmmaker who has sought to balance bold, edgy feature films with documentaries concerned with social issues – Armstrong's stories are driven by a deep affection for her wide range of characters, both contemporary and historical, and a deep empathy for human fragility.'[11] Vision is understood here as a metaphor referring directly to a set of themes and attitudes. It is important, however, not to understand vision merely as a metaphor. Pearlman and Sutton note that this vision metaphor is a means of rendering creativity as 'hidden, private, inner' in preference to the more material poetics

[9] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and other Essays* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1966), 14.
[10] Karen Pearlman and John Sutton, "Reframing the director: Distributed creativity in filmmaking practice," in *A Companion to Motion Pictures and Public Value,* edited by Mette Hjort and Ted Nannicelli (USA: John Wiley & Sons Incorporated, 2022), 87.
[11] Arnold Zable, "Film in 1970s Melbourne: The enduring human drama," *Pursuit,* 17 May 2016.

proposed by Bordwell, which entails seeing a film as 'the result of a process of construction—a process that includes a craft component (such as rules of thumb).'[12]
As far as cinematography is concerned, this includes aesthetic qualities such as lighting and composition, the staging and placement of actors relative to the camera, camera movement, lens choices, and aspects of mise-en-scène including colour, texture and tone. These aspects are often attributed by reviewers and theorists to a totalising Director's Vision and the director is too often exclusively attributed as the film's sole author or creator. Shot construction and coverage are also the domain of the cinematographer and the cinematographer can, and should, be considered an authorial source in any account of a film's production.

It is, therefore, my founding contention that as part of a poetics of cinema, a more comprehensive examination of the role of cinematographer is required. The cinematographer, as often as the director, is a presence unifying the various phases of production. Cinematographers are primarily involved in the pre-production and production phases of filmmaking (and often postproduction as well) and it is important to learn more about these processes and the decision-making that has transpired, rather than simply interpreting the completed film for an analysis of their authorship. In this study, I interview cinematographers and their crews in order to define their contribution to the completed film. I also examine where available, industrial documentation such as call sheets, camera sheets, equipment lists and films stocks used, as well as behind-the-scenes (BTS) photos and videos.

I am not alone in pointing to the central importance of cinematography both in film studies and filmmaker education. There exists a small, but growing body of work pertaining to the role, influence and work of cinematographers by writer/cinematographers such as Jacqueline Frost and Blain Brown, who have previously shot films and now teach filmmaking at universities in the US. However, more work needs to be done, especially in an Australian context.[13] Cinematography in the films directed by Armstrong includes rich collaborations with significant cinematographers and studying this (and analyse cinematography from primary sources such as Boyd, Simpson, Richards and Howard) is a means to address some of the vagueness, inaccuracies and omissions. Australia has produced many internationally renowned feature film cinematographers, with some significant examples of Australian directors and cinematographers partnering over time; these include Beresford and Peter James ASC, ACS as well as Peter Weir and Russell Boyd ASC, ACS.

[12] Karen Pearlman and John Sutton, "Reframing the director: Distributed creativity in filmmaking practice," in *A Companion to Motion Pictures and Public Value,* edited by Mette Hjort and Ted Nannicelli (USA: John Wiley & Sons Incorporated, 2022), 92.
[13] Jacqueline Frost, *Cinematography for Directors: A guide for creative collaboration* (California: Weise Productions, 2009); Blain Brown, *Cinematography: Theory and practice, for cinematographers and directors, 4th ed.* (Massachusetts: Routledge, 2021); Dennis Schaefer and Larry Salvato, *Masters of Light: Conversations with contemporary cinematographers, 2nd ed.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, 1st ed., 1984).

This study places an emphasis on the collaborations between Armstrong and cinematographers Russell Boyd and Geoffrey Simpson.

That this increasing emphasis on the image as image is significant for film studies is shown by the development of the field of cinemetrics and new software tools for the analysis of the image.[14] For example, Movie Barcode, a tool that scans every frame of a film and lines them up in chronological order, is a new way to examine the use of colour and its relationship to the story structure as it changes throughout a film. [15] I use these examples in my classes when teaching students about the history and basic components of colour grading. Viewing an entire film as a barcode schematic demonstrates the occurrence of light and dark scenes and provides an overall impression of the type of lighting, production design and colour grading used in the film. For example, the code from *Starstruck* (Image 1.3) shows warm tones, with some blue throughout, while the *High Tide* code (Image 1.4) shows the prominent use of blues and greater contrast (between light and dark) of images in the film. I sent the *Starstruck* barcode to the film's cinematographer, Russell Boyd, and he replied with the following:

> All I can say is that near the left end of the barcode is very dark and my guess is that is the Lizard Lounge scene. Brian Thomson (Production Designer) wanted to get me fired after he saw how dark the set was lit. It does look a bit adventurous but good on the big screen. The right side of the barcode must be the finale which were mostly interiors.[16]

Image 1.3: *Starstruck* 1982 DVD scan

[14] "Cinemetrics: Movie measurement and study tool database," *University of Chicago,* 2016.
[15] "Movie Barcode," *Tumbler,* accessed 9 September 2021.
[16] Russell Boyd, ACS, ASC, OAM, in email correspondence with the author, 20 May 2020. See appendix: Helen Carter, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 38.

Image 1.4: *High Tide* 1987 DVD scan

The dominance of particular colours stems partly from production design and lighting which is further refined during the colour grade. As these films had the same cinematographer, it is interesting to consider how and why they came to have different colour palettes. Analysis of the compiled frames contained in the film *Starstruck* provide an alternative way of viewing the film's use of colour, light and texture. The use of warm tones interspersed with blue scenes is more obvious here. Watching the film in the cinema, gives the impression of a vibrant use of colour throughout, whereas seeing the frames here, demonstrates that much of the film employs muted colours. The bright colours, primary red and blue, are reserved for the beginning and ending, with red occurring during the conflict two thirds of the way through the film.

Definitional work

(a) The Work of the Cinematographer

In order to reprioritise the role of the cinematographer, it is important to answer the question, what do cinematographers and their crews actually do? In a practical sense the cinematographer provides a bridge between the director, crew and audience in producing the visual style of the film. A cinematographer may be defined as the person in a film production crew who is responsible for supervising the image capture process. The peak membership body representing cinematography in Australia, the Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS), states, 'A cinematographer is a person with technical expertise who manipulates light to transfer visual information by the use of a camera into aesthetic moving images, onto motion picture film or electronic recording systems.'[17] This is a role that will ideally (though not necessarily) extend through pre-production, production and post-production phases. The ACS also advocates for the cinematographer's right to participate in re-framing of shots and colour grading of films in postproduction and Australian cinematographer

[17] Australian Cinematographers Society, "Cinematography: By definition," *Australian Cinematographer* 87 (September 2020), 3.

Peter James argues strongly 'It is only when we have control of the DI (Digital Intermediate) and telecine grading, that we can deliver the vision we promised the director and producer.'[18]

In reference to my own teaching and cinematography practice, I have found it useful to categorise the work of a cinematographer into three key areas of responsibilities: technical, organisational and aesthetic.[19] Although there are many intersections between these areas, these distinctions provide a convenient method to comprehensively cover the process of cinematography. An example of the intersection of these responsibilities is articulated by Simpson, when writing to me about the pre-production on *Oscar and Lucinda*. He wrote that 'being armed with the references was a big help, but much of the lighting evolved under the influence of the location, the natural light and how to get things done in the time.' [20] The ability to synthesize considerations of aesthetics, time management and the calculations required to combine natural and artificial light sources is what constitutes the best summary of the cinematographer's work.

The cinematographer may work alone to achieve the image capture process or in a small crew such as on a documentary shoot. On a large-scale drama production with many assistants and related crew the cinematographer is constantly making aesthetic decisions about tiny technical details such as whether to film at T2.8 or perhaps a slightly higher aperture such as T4, to allow a little more depth of field. Cinematographers also make operational decisions such as whether or not to squeeze in a scene before lunch, while the cast and crew are on a roll, or to push it later on in the day when the light is more suitable for the narrative, bearing in mind the actors' time on set might be limited, creating pressure to light and shoot quickly.

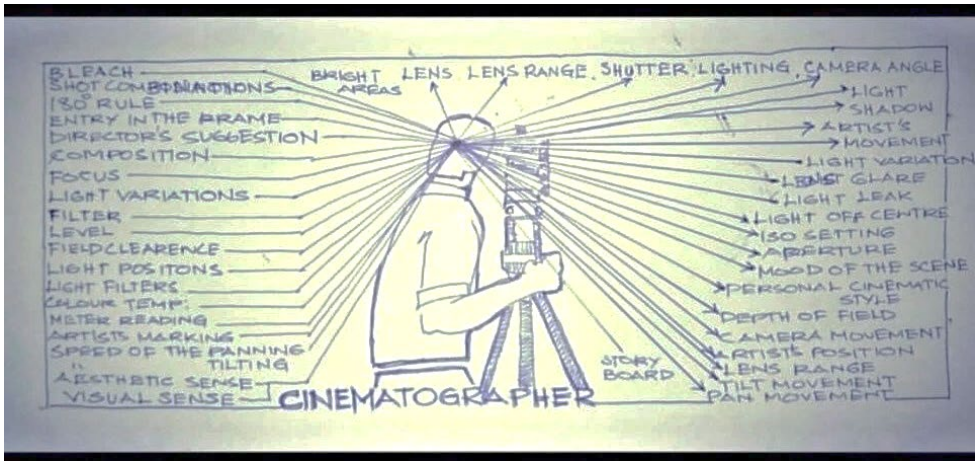

Image 1.6: *Cinematographer* – posted by the ASC on Twitter. Author unknown. [21]

[18] Dick Marks, OAM and Peter James, ACS, ASC, "From the Editor" and "Your Opinion," *Australian Cinematographer,* no. 53 (March 2012), 6-7.
[19] 100 Day Film, "How does a cinematographer begin a project?" *YouTube,* 24 August 2023.
[20] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, in email correspondence with the author, 10 June 2021. See appendix: Helen Carter, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 163.
[21] American Cinematographer, "Would love to know who created this illustration detailing the many technical and creative issues," *Twitter,* 8 July 2023. Image Posted on twitter by Indian cinematographer KK Senthil Kumar 1/6/19

The cinematographer is a specialist but is also located at the intersection of a range of work practices. Erika Addis, President of the ACS and previously Head of Cinematography at Griffith Film School approaches the role in this way. Addis states 'Cinematographers need a combination of creativity, technical ability, spatial skills, people skills and stamina – both mental and physical.'[22] Another Australian cinematographer, Greig Fraser ACS, ASC, (*Dune* 2021) describes the role as 'half practical and half art.'[23] In *Masters of Light, Conversations with Contemporary Cinematographers*, Dennis Schaefer and Larry Salvato state that 'the consummate cinematographer is able to meld all the required technical and supervisory skills together so that he [sic] is an efficient line manager and a superb technician as well as a visual artist'.[24] This directly addresses the requirement of the cinematographer to be a leader in three areas I have identified (technical, organisational and aesthetic) and points out the complexity of thought processes and problem-solving while filming. This is summarised in Image 1.6, posted on Twitter by *American Cinematographer* from a white board drawing at IMAGO, the International Federation of Cinematographers. This drawing demonstrates the position of the cinematographer as a point of intersection in what Pearlman and Sutton have called 'rich networks of practical action.'[25]

The cinematographer's leadership of the camera department can play a large role in the viability of the production and final look of the film. This might be determined by budget size, choice of equipment, make-up of the crew, time in pre-production, how the time is used on set, working relations with other crew, especially the first assistant director (1st AD) and communication between the key heads of department.

In pre-production cinematographers are responsible for choosing the camera and lenses used on the shoot, which might mean they hire a basic camera kit in order to save money for lighting equipment or hiring a gaffer, or (like Bill Bennett) they might choose to use their favourite ARRI Signature Prime lenses because they have a 'gentle feel to their contrast and resolution.'[26] The cinematographer also chooses the camera, lighting and gripping crews, sometimes in consultation with the producer and/or director, sometimes alone. For example, the director may have a preferred camera operator because they work closely with them on the camera movement and performance, while the cinematographer might work more closely with their preferred gaffer. For *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1976), director Weir promoted the use of John Seale as the operator as

[22] Erika Addis, "Why aren't there more female cinematographers," *If Magazine,* no. 192 (26 February 2020).
[23] Gary Maddox, "The Australian cinematographer on the cusp of Oscars history," *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 23 March 2022.
[24] Dennis Schaefer and Larry Salvato, *Masters of Light: Conversations with contemporary cinematographers, 2nd ed.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, 1st ed., 1984).
[25] Karen Pearlman and John Sutton, "Reframing the director: Distributed creativity in filmmaking practice," in *A Companion to Motion Pictures and Public Value,* edited by Mette Hjort and Ted Nannicelli (USA: John Wiley & Sons Incorporated, 2022), 93.
[26] ARRI, "Cinematographer @CineBill (Bill Bennett): 'The #ALEXALF creates a luscious image with the large sensor," *Twitter,* 24 March 2018.

the two had previously worked together. 'Peter understood how important the operator was,' Boyd says, 'and John had a huge influence on both of us.'[27] The operator works in a triangular relationship between the director and cinematographer to ensure the shots capture the performance as well as the lighting and production design. Armstrong notes the importance of the operator and focus puller in capturing moments where, due to a strong or emotional performance the actor misses their mark. She states, 'A really great team of operator and focus puller can see and guess how much they are off' and still get the shot.'[28]

Organisation of the camera department is frequently omitted from discussion about cinematography. With particular reference to lighting pre-production, Simpson writes 'it's an incredibly important part of what we do. Pre-production is all about preparation and is vital to maximise shooting time.'[29] Selection and size of crew, supervision of the crew on set and keeping the production on schedule intrinsically relate to and impact the quality and style of cinematography. The choice to spend all of one's time on set lighting, allowing very little time for rehearsal or set dressing, will impact on the look of the film. In the same way, attention to detail in pre-production may result in more suitable locations or sets. Cinematographer Peter Holland describes this as 'Calculated Creativity' where careful pre-production planning and choices result in a 'calculated space, a safe structure and road map' thereby freeing up time and resources for the cinematographer to be creative on the set.[30] Armstrong frequently speaks about the size and impact of the budget on the scale and possibilities in production. For example, in the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) interviews with historian Graham Shirley, she describes the difficulty of filming *Oscar and Lucinda* in Australia and the UK, with the glass church and star cast all within a budget of $A16 million, the church itself costing $1 million.[31] Armstrong notes that there was a short period of pre-production in the UK which continued in Australia after the first part of the shoot. This restricted the opportunity for DOP Geoffrey Simpson to attend rehearsals which would have an impact on decisions such as coverage of performance and staging.

Aesthetic and creative considerations include colour, texture, composition, coverage, lighting and the mixture of light sources, shot length and movement. These aspects are often influenced and created through working relationships with other key creatives such as production and costume designers, the key grip and gaffer, the colourist and, of course, the director. Boyd explains, 'the cinematographer spends quite a lot of time with the director and production designer and the art

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[27] Jean Oppenheimer, "Russell Boyd, ASC, ACS: Vision Accomplished," *American Cinematographer* 99, no. 2 (2018): 54-61.
[28] Helen Carter "Interview with Gillian Armstrong @ AFTRS," DVD accession number, AFTRS ID: 46692, 2002, 28:31, *Australian Film, Television and Radio School*.
[29] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, "DOP – Gaffer relationship," *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 163.
[30] James Cunningham, "Shooting 'In Like Flynn': An interview with cinematographer Peter Holland," *AC Mag,* 30 November 2018.
[31] Graham Shirley, "Gillian Armstrong interviewed by Graham Shirley: Oral History," NFSA ID: 1050278, Film, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,* 22 November 2011 – 11 January 2012.

department discussing and viewing visual references to form an idea of the approach to the mood and style.'[32] Another Australian cinematographer Andrew Commis agrees, 'Great production design is an almost unspoken secret to successful cinematography.'[33] In my role as a university lecturer, I note that students often approach filmmaking through the equipment at the expense of pre-production planning and conversations about the visual style, so it is therefore very important to encourage them to expand their conception of cinematography beyond simply working with cameras.

The technical work of cinematography during the production phase, on sets or locations, encompasses operation of the camera(s), gripping, lighting gels and equipment, film and/or digital processes, exposure, focus, resolution, frame rate, focal length, depth of field, colour grading and LUTS. (A LUT or Look Up Table determines the look of the image, similar to applying a grade to the camera, for visualisation on the set.) Cinematography is usually very physical, often requiring long days and weeks working on sets and locations. The camera crew must pay attention to the minute details of camera operation and control every aspect of the image. Cinematography involves a synthesis of technology and techniques to produce aesthetic results. Russell Boyd articulates the value of technical experience for the cinematographer saying 'it enables you to throw behind you the technical side, which lets you get on with the kinetic side of it.'[34] He believes that becoming familiar with the technology means that the cinematographer can 'push themselves visually.'[35] Boyd elevates visual style and creativity above the technical but also acknowledges the latter as a fundamental part of the work.

Cinematography is often described (as in Salvatto and Schaefer's influential book *Masters of Light*) in vague terms about the manipulation of light.[36] While this is relevant it is also misleadingly reductive. Important to cinematography is the use of light for both illumination and exposure (luminance) as well as for creative expression including brightness, contrast and the use of colour (chrominance). Light sources might be naturally occurring, available or daylight, or artificial, such as tungsten, fluorescent and LED film lights and often a mixture of both. In Australia, the gaffer is the head of the electrics departments and the person responsible for rigging and operating the light sources, the use of electricity and the supervision of the lighting crew. Their work is both highly technical and creative and theirs is one of the most important relationships with the cinematographer. Geoffrey Simpson writes that he always tries to select the gaffer first so that they

[32] Russell Boyd, ACS, ASC, OAM, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 10.
[33] James Cunningham, "'Babyteeth': Shot by Award-winning cinematographer Andrew Commis, ACS," *Australian Cinematographer* 87 (September 2020): 40.
[34] Trevor Hogg, "Picture Perfect: A conversation with cinematographer Russell Boyd," *Flickering Myth*, 12 January 2011, accessed 12 February 2022.
[35] Trevor Hogg, "Picture Perfect: A conversation with cinematographer Russell Boyd," *Flickering Myth*, 12 January 2011, accessed 12 February 2022.
[36] Dennis Schaefer and Larry Salvato, *Masters of Light: Conversations with contemporary cinematographers, 2nd ed.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, 1st ed., 1984).

can be used as a sounding board.[37] An example of the type of work the cinematographer and gaffer do together is described by Russell Boyd, who admits a tendency to 'always start out with more light than you think you'll need, and then knock it back with wires, diffusion and cutters; crafting the light.'[38] Boyd here refers to both the technical skill of cutting and reducing light, while also making aesthetic choices about shaping and modeling light. In describing the relationship between cinematographer and gaffer, Vilmos Zsigmond ASC explains that 'the cinematographer is in charge of the *concept* of the light, and the gaffer is responsible for *implementation*.'[39] This may include the rigging of a light, bouncing light off a reflector or controlling existing light through the use of cutters and cloths. Simpson describes working with Australian gaffer Reg Garside on *Last Days of Chez Nous* (1993), where filming inside a small house with few windows required the addition of small lamps: 'Kino Flo florescent tubes had been around for a while and their low profile helped a lot. Reg keeps very up to date with new developments in lighting products, so can often suggest things that have just come out. He was very helpful in how to rig the tubes to keep out of shot and give the lighting output required.'[40]

Ideally, cinematographers like to be involved with image manipulation beyond the principal photography phase. A close technical and aesthetic relationship exists between the cinematographer and the film laboratory and/or digital postproduction house. Most of the films considered in this study were shot on film, requiring raw footage to be sent daily or weekly to the laboratory for processing. Until the early 1990s, the processed negative was then printed as a positive work print and sent back to the crew for a rushes or dailies screening. Each day the camera assistants would call the laboratory to get a negative report, to make sure the film stock had been properly handled, exposed and in focus. The cinematographer would arrange in advance with the laboratory for the print to be exposed at certain printer lights, or in some cases request a corrected workprint. At the screening of the print, the cinematographer could see how technical details such as exposure, colour temperature, grain and focus were captured. The producer, director and cinematographer could then discuss how the look or visual style is fitting with the pre-conceived plans. The DOP will also discuss any focus or film handling issues with the focus puller. Around 1993 in Australia it became common place for the film negative to be telecined and transferred to video tape (usually VHS) for viewing. Following camera and film stock tests, the cinematographer and telecine operator would agree on the transfer qualities, with telecine having the additional capability to set contrast, saturation and hue.

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[37] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, DOP, "Gaffer relationship," *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 162.
[38] Mitch Kennedy, *"*A class of their Own," *The ASC,* accessed February 2018. Please note: The ASC website was undergoing site maintenance, and as a result several articles are no longer accessible via their hyperlink.
[39] Benjamin, B, "DP's and Gaffers who does what," *The ASC*, accessed November 2018. Please note: The ASC website was undergoing site maintenance, and as a result several articles are no longer accessible via their hyperlink.
[40] Geoffrey Simpson, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

The cinematographer often comes back to the laboratory or post-production house to work with a colourist or grader to make final corrections to the image. Historically, using a photochemical process, the cinematographer would provide notes to the colourist and view screenings of answer and trial prints until everyone agrees the film looks as it should. By the mid-1980s, for a video finish, the colour grade took place in a high-end digital suite on a Rank Cintel or DaVinci system with a computer interface. The digital intermediate would then be output back to film, to create a new master negative from which film prints, the Digital Cinema Package (DCP), or other release materials could be struck. By the time Armstrong directed *Women He's Undressed*, with an entirely digital pathway, the video files for each day could be copied to a hard drive and viewed by the cinematographer. The relationship between cinematographer and colourist is very important because the colourist is now the final person to make adjustment to shots and ensure that the desired look is what ends up on the screen. Unfortunately, in digital filmmaking, this is an area where cinematographers have increasingly lost a lot of control and influence over the final look of the film.[41]

(b) Cinematographer and Director

Given that I am studying the work of cinematographers through the films of Gillian Armstrong, some discussion of the relation between the two roles is in order. Not all creative relationships are collaborative but for the purpose of this study, I will presume a strong working relationship between directors, producers and cinematographers with the focus on defining and foregrounding the contribution of the cinematographer. The aesthetic qualities of a film are often attributed exclusively to the director in terms of the visual style of the film or 'director's vision', partly due to a misunderstanding or narrow reading of auteur theory. Andrew Sarris pointed out that auteurism never claimed that a director was responsible for everything, but rather that good films tended to be good when their creative inputs were most unified—and that the director was the person generally best placed to produce this unity.[42] The general public annually embraces the celebration of the cinematographer's creative role in the context of the Oscars ceremony, but immediately after the show the emphasis goes back into the directorial box with Wes Anderson being a key name in film marketing, while long-time cinematographer Robert Yeoman is consigned to anonymity. As Peter Wollen noted, the attribution of primacy to a director might be a piece of critical shorthand, but it was never meant as a viable description of the complex work processes involved in the creation of a film.[43] Every day on a large feature film set, the director and cinematographer are asked hundreds of questions by the cast and crew, and there is no possibility the director could be across all of those details.

[41] Christopher Lucas, "The modern entertainment marketplace, 2000-present," in *Cinematography,* edited by Patrick Keating (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014), 157.
[42] Andrew Sarris, "The Auteur Theory and the perils of Pauline," *Film Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1963): 26-33.
[43] Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 1969).

A common demarcation is that the director often works with the performers, continuity and camera operator, while the cinematographer will supervise the remaining on-set crew. The first assistant director manages the entire shoot and works closely with all of them to keep the shoot moving efficiently. It is unlikely the director would attend the pre-production camera tests or participate in the precise selection of camera body, sensor, film stock or lenses although the director and cinematographer may discuss the broader consequences of these choices. Some directors (famously Stanley Kubrick) are highly interested, or even involved, in these decisions but that is unusual.

The visual component of the film is a product of collaborative, creative and consultative processes. The use of zoom shots, for example, encapsulates the nature of the relationship between director and cinematographer. In the film *Starstruck* (DOP Russell Boyd, Dir Gillian Armstrong,1982), the final sequence at the Sydney Opera House includes a shot that zooms from the back of the audience, into a mid-shot of the star Jackie Mullens, performing on stage. In order to execute this shot, a long enough zoom lens and a zoom motor had to be requested and hired for the shoot. A decision to use the zoom for that camera on that shot would have been discussed by at least the camera department. A camera assistant would have attached the zoom motor and controller to the lens and probably a grip carried the whole set-up to the back of the auditorium. A zoom lens requires more light than a prime lens, so there would have been a discussion about t stops (aperture). The director may or may not have been involved in this decision, but she (in collaboration with the editor) has elected to include the shot in the final edit. Cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond has worked extensively with zooms, perhaps most notably on films with Robert Altman, and reflects that he only does so if the director is also willing:

> If I worked with a director who really hated the zoom, and I could not convince them that we would get a better result, we didn't use it. You cannot fight directors, you can suggest something to them, and if they buy it, they buy it, and if they don't, we do whatever the director wants to do. But I don't remember any directors who were that stubborn. Sometimes I introduced the zoom to the director who wasn't used to working with one.[44]

Each cinematographer has their own method of collaborating with the director and the crew (and vice versa), and this also varies on each new production. Despite professional working standards, films will inevitably be influenced by the cinematographer's own temperament and emphases. Speaking about collaboration with directors, Don McAlpine comments, 'From the day the first

[44] Benjamin B, "Vilmos Zsigmond, ASC, HSC, received the Pierre Angenieux ExcelLens in Cinematography Award during the 2014 Cannes Film Festival," *The Film Book,* 2014, accessed 30 April 2019. Please note: Article is no longer accessible.

clapper comes out, there are three people making the movie: the director at the top of the triangle, the director of photography and the designer at the lower corners of the triangle. And the three of them are the ones that really do construct the movie.'[45] This provides a very hierarchical view of the relationship, with the director at the top of the heap, while excluding sound recording and the post-production process entirely. However, it places emphasis on a close working partnership between cinematographer and designer. Boyd describes a relationship developing over time between the director and cinematographer, 'the working relationship grows so that the collaboration becomes more instinctive and often the understanding between the two develops as the trust grows.'[46] Pearlman and Sutton, while arguing for a distributed, collaborative model of artistic creation, suggest an attribution of "director et. al." in citations (a suggestion which the editor of the anthology in which their chapter appears, promptly ignores). This seems to keep the director enshrined as a kind of first amongst equals.

DOP Malcolm Richards (*14's Good 18's Better*, dir Gillian Armstrong, 1980) harks back to Bordwell's notion of creativity involving rule-of-thumb calculations when he argues that cinematographers, like directors, are often chosen for their individual strengths and styles:

> [I]t could start even at the producer level, the director will tend to like a particular style. They obviously can see films and say, 'I like that lighting style' or 'I like that way they'd shot' and then they'll work out who can shoot like that. And that's when they'll hire somebody that can shoot like that, as long as they get along with them alright. You don't want to be working with somebody you hate, it never works. So then it's not just necessarily the director of photography whose style it is, but it's a style that the director likes and the cameraman's chosen because of that style.[47]

Auteur criticism commonly looks for ways of showing underlying similarities between films, whereas I will look for differences between them. Just as two different directors could produce different versions of the same script, there is no way that a director collaborating with one cinematographer could produce the same outcome when working with a different cinematographer. An example might be a comparison between the period films *My Brilliant Career* (1979) and *Little Women* (1994) both directed by Gillian Armstrong but with different directors of photography, Don McAlpine and Geoffrey Simpson respectively. Armstrong nearly turned down *Little Women*

[45] Bec Caldwell interviews McAlpine, ACS, ASC. The Popcorn Show, "Popcorn - S1 E09 – Don McAlpine," *You Tube,* 27 April 2015.
[46] Russell Boyd, ACS, ASC, OAM, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 10.
[47] Malcolm Richards, *Cameraquip Rentals, Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 66.

because initially it seemed too close to *My Brilliant Career*.[48] The narratives in both these films contain similar themes: a female writer surrounded by family, produces a book on which the narrative of the film is based. Both are period dramas. They were shot on 35mm film cameras, using Panavision lenses, with an aspect ratio of 1:1.85. However, the cinematography in these films is very different and provides a mechanism to differentiate the work of McAlpine and Simpson when working with the same director.

The endings of the two films (Images 1.7 and 1.8) demonstrate very different approaches to composition. Although both shots are staged around the fence, the first (Image 1.7) from *My Brilliant Career* has the character placed in the mid-distance and blending into the warm, dry landscape, facing the setting sun, whilst the second shot (Image 1.8) from *Little Women* has the characters placed as dark foreground figures, separate from the wet, misty and very green landscape. The first image has the camera just below eye level, with a clear horizon on the top third line, with the line of the fence drawing attention forward in the frame, whereas the second has a higher camera angle, with the characters' faces shaded by the umbrella but in close proximity to the audience and indicative of a more traditional Hollywood ending.

Image 1.7: *My Brilliant Career* (1979)
DOP: Don McAlpine

Image 1.8: *Little Women* (1994)
DOP: Geoffrey Simpson

By positioning the actors in shadow contrasted against a lighter background, attention moves from the foreground characters to the rear of the shot. As will be seen in later chapters, this technique of drawing attention deep into the frame is frequently seen in films shot by Simpson. There is a prominent difference in the quality of light with the first image exposed by warm, bright, setting sunlight, which creates deep shadows and bright highlights. The differences in colour are not only a product of the light used, but also the way the negative has been treated in the laboratory to boost values of red, cyan, or green to affect the colour balance and hence the mood of the scene. Because a smaller aperture (possibly T16) is used, the focus extends deep into the frame in the first image. The second image is lit very softly with diffusion while the umbrella creates areas of

[48] Rachel Handler, "How 1994 'Little Women' Director Gillian Armstrong convinced men to see her film," *Vulture,* 23 December 2019.

deep but soft shadow. A larger aperture (likely T4) is used, resulting in diminished definition in the background. The focus and depth-of-field help to control where we look. In both these images, the dark costumes also contribute to the exposure of the film and the way in which the audience' eye is drawn to the faces.

It might be argued that the two images are different because of different narrative materials, industrial contexts, or even different 'vision' on the part of an auteur director. But this is only the beginning of an analysis, rather than its end. Attending closely to formal aspects such as these supports the argument for the cinematographer to be considered as an aesthetic presence, working alongside the director. Critical appraisal is not a zero-sum game, and the point is not to detract from an appreciation of the director. As Pearlman and Sutton note:

> While directors are not sole creators, it is not necessary to take anything away from the recognition of directors as creative artists. Rather we can add a more informed, empirically demonstrable understanding of the generation of ideas in the distributed cognitive systems in which films are made,[49]

(c) The scope of the study: the choice of Gillian Armstrong

It may seem paradoxical to study the work of cinematographers by foregrounding the films of a single director, but in this thesis the director functions as the control against which the cinematographer's work is measured and defined. In some cases, my research uses genre as a control, for example where Armstrong and Weir both directed Australian period films, *My Brilliant Career* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* respectively. At times there is a departure to consider a long-standing collaboration between Weir and Boyd, who made six films together. By focusing on the films directed by Armstrong, my intention is not to remove her as a major creative force, but rather to position her films as a means for highlighting the diverse contributions of the cinematographers. My own perspective, being as a practicing cinematographer, a long-term member of the Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS), a lecturer in screen production and someone who has worked in the Australian film industry during approximately the same time period as Armstrong (and her cinematographers), enables me to write authoritatively about the cinematography in these films and to add to the understanding about what a cinematographer actually does. I will not study all of the films directed by Armstrong. I have chosen to look more closely at specific films and DOPs Boyd, Simpson, Richards and Howard because (1) they have markedly different styles, (2) they have worked with Armstrong in radically different industrial and technological contexts, and (3) for

[49] Karen Pearlman and John Sutton, "Reframing the director: Distributed creativity in filmmaking practice," in *A Companion to Motion Pictures and Public Value,* edited by Mette Hjort and Ted Nannicelli (USA: John Wiley & Sons Incorporated, 2022), 88.

practical reasons because I have access to them through the ACS, and they were willing to engage in correspondence with me.

Table 1.1 below provides a summary of the films directed by Armstrong, the cinematographers who shot them as well as significant technical detail on each of the films. Interviews with the cinematographers, email correspondence with crew and production paperwork have provided information used here. By recording this detail, it is my aim to write cinematography back into the history of Australian cinema.

Table 1.1: *cinematographers and camera equipment*

year	film	DOP	Camera, lens, film stock	Genre/type
2016	*The Inspiring Story of Us*	Crowd sourced footage	Over 50 hours of crowd sourced footage: Go Pro, mobile phone, skype, digital cameras	Documentary 23 minutes
2015	*Women He's Undressed*	Anna Howard	ARRI Alexa Classic 2k 16x9 Angenieuix 12-120mm zoom, Zeiss MkII superspeed prime lenses of 18, 25, 35, 50 and 85mm	Feature length Documentary
2009	*Love Lust & Lies*	Paul Costello	Panasonic P2 HD 16x9	Feature Documentary 87 minutes
2007	*Death Defying Acts*	Haris Zambarloukos	Panavision Panaflex Millennium XL, Panavision E-Series and Hylén Lenses, 35mm, 2.35, Deluxe London and Atlab (post)	Feature – drama
2006	*Unfolding Florence: The Many Lives of Florence Broadhurst*	John Radel	Super 16mm and HD	Feature - Documentary
2001	*Charlotte Gray (UK)*	Dion Beebe	Panavision Panaflex Millennium, Panavision Primo Lenses, 35mm, 1.85, Technicolor London Stock: 5274 200T	Feature - drama
1998	*Oscar and Lucinda*	Geoffrey Simpson ACS	Panavision Panaflex Gold II, Panavision C-, E-Series lenses: 35mm, 40mm, 50mm, 75mm, 155mm and	Feature - drama

			180mm primes, plus 50-500mm and 40-200mm zooms. Anamorphic. 35mm, 2.35, Atlab, Vision stocks.	
1996	*Not Fourteen Again*	Steve Arnold Cam assist: Rod Bolton	ARRI SR II, Zeiss super speeds, Zeiss zoom T2.2. Stock: 7293, 7298 Atlab, ratio 4:3	Feature - Documentary
1994	*Little Women (USA)*	Geoffrey Simpson	Panavision camera and spherical lenses, 35mm, ration 1.85	Feature – drama
1993	*Last Days of Chez Nous*	Geoffrey Simpson	35mm, Arriflex 535 with spherical Zeiss lenses	Feature – drama
1991	*Fires Within, aka: Little Havana (USA)*	David Gribble	35mm, ratio 2.35	Feature - drama
1988	*Bingo, Bridesmaids and Braces*	Steve Arnold Malcolm Richards	Eastman Color Neg (7291), Arriflex 16SRII, Zeiss 10-100T3 Zoom, Zeiss Super Speeds Mk1, Cinevex Film Lab	Documentary 90 minutes
1987	*High Tide*	Russell Boyd Additional photography David Gribble	Lenses and Panaflex Camera by Panavision, 35mm, Colorfilm Sydney	Feature 100 minutes
1986	*Hard to Handle, aka: Bob Dylan in Concert*	Don McAlpine TV studio shoot		documentary
1985	*A Decade of Women*	Sally Bongers		Short 1 minute United Nations International Decade for Women
1984	*Mrs Soffel (USA)*	Russell Boyd	Panaflex Camera and Lenses by Panavision, Medallion Film Lab, 35mm, ratio 1.85	Feature - drama
1984	*Bop Girl*			Music video 3:33 By Pat Wilson
1983	*Not Just a Pretty Face*			Documentary

1982	*Starstruck*	Russell Boyd 2nd Unit DOP Malcolm Richards	35mm Panaflex Camera and Lenses by Panavision, Colourfilm Sydney	Feature
1980	*14's Good, 18's Better*	Malcolm Richards with Kerry Brown Tom Cowan	Eastman Color Neg (7247), Arriflex 16BL, Zeiss 10-100T3 Zoom, Zeiss Super Speeds Mk1, Cinevex Film Lab, ratio 4:3	Documentary 47 mins
1980	*Touch Wood (doco)*	Malcolm Richards	Eastman Color Neg (7247?), Arriflex 16BL, Zeiss 10-100T3 Zoom, Zeiss Super Speeds Mk1, Cinevex Film Lab	Documentary 30 minutes
1979	*My Brilliant Career*	Donald McAlpine	Panaflex Camera and Lenses by Panavision, Colorfilm, 35mm, ratio 1.85	Feature 100 minutes
1978	*A Busy Kind of Bloke*	Malcolm Richards	Eastman Color Neg (7247?) Arriflex 16BL, Zeiss 10-100T3 Zoom, Zeiss Super Speeds Mk1, Cinevex Film Lab	Documentary 30 minutes
1977	*A Time and a Place*			Short
1977	*The Singer and the Dancer*	Russell Boyd Cam assist Malcolm Richards	16mm Eastman Color Neg (7247) Arriflex 16BL, Zeiss 10-100T3 Zoom, Zeiss Super Speeds Mk1,	Short (long) 52 minutes
1976	*Smokes and Lollies*	Tom Cowan	ARRI 16 BL, Schneider 10-100mm zoom lens, 16mm, 4:3, Eastman colour negative 7247	Documentary 23 mins
1973	*Satdee Night*	Fred Richardson Bill Constable David Gribble	16mm colour	Short AFTS 17 mins
1973	*Gretel*	Tom Cowan	16mm colour	Short AFTS 24 mins
1973	*One Hundred a Day*	Ross King	16mm, ratio 4:3, B/W	Short AFTS 7 mins
1972	*Decision*			short
1971	*Shit Commercial*			Possibly with Hayden Keenan and Esben Storm

1971	*The Roof Needs Mowing*	Roger Scholes	16mm, ratio 4:3, B/W	Short, experimental, 8 mins, Swinburne
1969	*Four walls*		16mm	short
1970	*Old Man and a Dog*		16mm	short
1968	*Storytime*		16mm	short

Armstrong is a pioneer among Australian filmmakers, succeeding at the highest level as a feature film director both in Australia and overseas. Her significance is supported by her frequent inclusion in lists of top Australian directors, such as *Culture Trips*' list of 10 directors who have produced 'artistically bold films that stand the test of time'.[50] When Armstrong directed *My Brilliant Career* (DOP Don McAlpine,1979) it had been 46 years since a woman had directed a feature commercially released in Australia.[51] Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka describe it as 'the jewel in the crown of the worthy period-film cycle.'[52] *My Brilliant Career* screened in competition at Cannes and won five Australian Film Institute awards, including best cinematography. However, Armstrong is important for reasons other than just critical acclaim. Her filmmaking spans an important period in Australian cinema, ranging from different film formats through to digital image capture processes. The modes of production encompass a wide variety including short and long form, fiction and non-fiction, period and contemporary drama, low budget and higher budget, filmed in Australia, in the Hollywood studio system and in Europe, using local and international crews. Film reviewer Ally Johnson describes this broad body of work as 'versatile, moving through genre.'[53] It encompasses films that succeeded critically and commercially, alongside work that failed commercially. Julia Erhart characterises her directing as 'dexterous, multi-sited industrial competence' especially for her ability to transition between narrative features and dramatised documentaries.[54]

Examples of Armstrong's feature length fiction work include *My Brilliant Career* (DOP Don McAlpine, 1979) and *Starstruck* (DOP Russell Boyd, 1982) both of which were produced on modest budgets in Australia, *Little Women* (DOP Geoffrey Simpson, 1994), made with a larger Hollywood budget in America and *Charlotte Gray* (DOP Dion Beebe, 2001) filmed in the UK and France, also with a major studio budget. All of these films were shot by Australian cinematographers. The only film Armstrong directed with a non-Australian cinematographer was

[50] Isabell Greigeritsch, "Top 10 Australian directors you should know," *Culture Trip*, 18 April 2016.
[51] Graham Shirley, "The McDonagh Sisters: Pioneering female filmmakers," *National Film and Screen Archive of Australia,* accessed 26 September 2023. Russell Boyd shot *The Golden Cage* in 1975, directed by Ayten and Ilhan Kuyululu, but the film was not commercially released.
[52] Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a national cinema, vol. 2* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 32-33.
[53] Ally Johnson, "'Little Women' and Gillian Armstrong's brilliant career," *Roger Ebert,* 6 March 2020, accessed 26 September 2023.
[54] Julia Erhart, *Gillian Armstrong: Popular, Sensual and Ethical Cinema* (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 18. See also Shirley 2011, 31.

Death Defying Acts (2007) with Cypriot DOP Haris Zambarloukos (*Thor, Batman Returns, Mamamia, Belfast*). Armstrong's discontent with directing *Fires Within* and her subsequent removal from the edit has been well documented and will therefore not be covered in this thesis.[55]

Films directed by Armstrong all contain a strong sense of place and of landscape. Examples include the Possum Gully homestead and property in *My Brilliant Career*, the March family home in *Little Women*, and Bellingen River in *Oscar and Lucinda*. The portrayal of landscape crucially requires technical skill and opens up a range of aesthetic decision making from the cinematographers. Boyd describes the importance of this in his process, saying that 'locations, which are an element of the story, have to be visited often to get a feel for the surroundings and how best to photograph them.'[56] Particularly at the outset of the Australian feature renaissance of the 1970s, comparisons were frequently made between Australian films and Australian Impressionist paintings. This was a vague reference, which provided a shorthand way of invoking both visual artistry and cultural nationalism. Nevertheless, *My Brilliant Career* can be seen as featuring the Australian bush landscape in a way comparable to the Heidelberg painters working with available light to create impressionist paintings. Scenes in the Possum Gully pub are reminiscent of Tom Roberts' *Shearing the Rams*. National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) curator Paul Byrnes describes the cinematography as having:

> great contrast – the flat, barren landscapes of the Melvyn family's farm in the midst of drought gives way to green and verdant homesteads of the landed gentry. Cinematographer Don McAlpine gives some of these scenes an impressionist look, emphasising the sense of privilege. [57]

The use of colour and props in the example below (Image 1.9) deliberately invokes Roberts' *Lady with a Parasol*. Beyond the obvious quotation of the red parasol, the film makes similar use of the bush landscape, with dappled lighting and shallow depth of field.

[55] Julia Erhart, *Gillian Armstrong: Popular, Sensual and Ethical Cinema* (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 18. See also Shirley 2011.
[56] Russell Boyd, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, p10.
[57] Paul Byrnes, "My brilliant career: Before and after restoration trailer," NFSA ID: 6989 (1979), *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia.*

Image 1.9: *My Brilliant Career* 1979
DOP: Don McAlpine

Image 1.10: Tom Roberts 1889
Lady with a Parasol

Painters and art movements are commonly cited by Australian cinematographers working with directors on the mood and visual style. Geoffrey Simpson describes poring over art books and photographs with Armstrong in pre-production for both *Little Women* and *Oscar and Lucinda*. Having both studied visual art and design they share a common interest in communicating this way. The connection between paintings and cinematographers will be further explored and discussed in the chapters on Boyd and Simpson.

While film criticism has concentrated on the primacy of the director, it has been claimed that Australian cinematographers are generally more experienced and have enjoyed greater international stature within the film industry.[58] As cinematographer Tom Cowan wrote to me, 'Up 'till the 70s, the camera 'person' was the boss - because they had more experience than directors.'[59]

For his work on *My Brilliant Career*, McAlpine won the Australian Film Institute (AFI) award for Best Cinematography and the ACS award for Cinematographer of the Year. It was his 11th feature film and resulted in his own brilliant career working and filming in the US. As is often the case in director/DOP partnerships (particularly in Australia) McAlpine was considerably more experienced than Armstrong when they worked together on this film. Malcolm Richards comments that, although it was Armstrong's second feature, 'Don McAlpine had a reasonable amount of experience.'[60] McAlpine's career took off rapidly and this was their only feature film collaboration. Armstrong says, 'after *My Brilliant Career*, I could never get him again. He went on to shoot *Romeo and Juliet*. He was just too busy.'[61]

[58] Martha Ansara, *The Shadowcatchers: A history of cinematography in Australia* (NSW: Austcine Publishing, 2012), 117-118.
[59] Tom Cowan, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 54.
[60] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.
[61] Gillian Armstrong at Q&A at *Sydney Film Festival,* 2018*,* attended by the author*,* personal notes.

I have admired the work that cinematographers who collaborated with Armstrong have undertaken with other directors, and there are other examples of Australian director/cinematographer collaborations that could be considered here. For example, Russell Boyd and Peter Weir worked on six feature films together, including *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Gallipoli* and most recently the *Far Side of the World*.[62] Bruce Beresford and Don McAlpine made ten feature films together including *The Getting of Wisdom*, *Breaker Morant* and *Puberty Blues*. By considering Armstrong-directed films, her collaboration with Boyd (*The Singer and the Dancer, Starstruck, Mrs Soffel, High Tide*) can be compared with a similar collaboration with Simpson (*Last Days of Chez Nous, Little Women, Oscar and Lucinda*), using Armstrong as the control or common director in the partnership. Their body of work encompasses a broad variety of genres, budgets, locations and styles which provide ample scope for analysis, while their collaborations took place over a similar time period.

The non-fiction works that Armstrong directed include observational documentaries, shot in Adelaide (known as the Adelaide Girls series) over many years, by a variety of cinematographers, with the first film *Smokes and Lollies* (DOP Tom Cowan) released in 1976. This was Armstrong's first paid job as director. The latest iteration *Love, Lust & Lies* (DOP Paul Costello, 2009) incorporates footage from the previous four films. These contrast with more recent documentaries, highly stylised feature-length works *Unfolding Florence* (DOP John Radel, 2006) and *Women He's Undressed* (DOP Anna Howard, 2015). Armstrong explains, 'there can be more poetic, visual things now in documentary', commenting on both the animated and camera original scenes.[63] Examining the approaches to filming in these very different documentary forms provides an opportunity for analysing the relationship between Armstrong and her camera department. How does the cinematography vary across the different technologies, budgets, industrial contexts and with different size crews (and therefore collaborators)?

[62] "In Conversation: Russell Boyd, cinematographer on the making of Gallipoli and Australian film in the 70s," *North Sydney Community Centre.*
[63] Graham Shirley, "Gillian Armstrong Interviewed by Graham Shirley: Oral History," NFSA ID: 1050278, Film, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,* 22 November 2011 – 11 January 2012.

Image 1.11: *The Roof Needs Mowing* (Scholes)

Image 1.12: *Women He's Undressed* (Howard)

There are many images that recur throughout the Armstrong-directed films and these provide a basis for learning more about the cinematography used. These repetitions are useful to this study because they set up an opportunity for comparison and highlight a variety of choices and styles in the cinematography. An example is the recurrence of the man in the boat, on a fake sea used in Armstrong's early film, a short drama *The Roof Needs Mowing* (DOP Roger Scholes, 1971, Image 1.11) and then in her feature length documentary *Women He's Undressed* (DOP Anna Howard, 2015, Image 1.12). A study by Carter, Hawkins and Young found that directors and producers were able to use short films as a proof of concept for attracting funding to produce a longer form project and that directors will often repeat a device or technique from an earlier short film in a longer form project.[64] For example Jennifer Kent was able to draw on techniques used in short film *Monster* (2005) when making her feature film *The Babadook* (2014). In Armstrong's case a similar technique is applied in both a documentary and drama context. In both cases the boat is revealed to be stationary with the actor directly addressing the camera. The shots are similar in content but approached very differently by Scholes and Howard. Most obvious is the difference in aspect ratio and the stylised use of colour in the newer version. Scholes makes use of available light while Howard, working with a larger budget and crew is able to light the face with artificial sources providing a highlight on the right side of the face. There is less diffusion of the light in this second image, which is most notable in the heavier shadows in the eye sockets. The result is a more modelled face with variation in light and shade providing depth cues. There is a stylisation of colour pointing to the collaboration with production design, a point I will return to in Chapter Five.

[64] Helen Carter, Matt Hawkins and Tom Young, "The transition by emerging filmmakers from the short film to the longer format feature film or TV project," *Arts and Humanities as Higher Education,* December 2016. *Feature Film or TV project* Arts and Humanities as Higher Education, December 2016.

Image 1.13: *High Tide* (Boyd)

Image 1.14: *Little Women* (Simpson)

Image 1.15: *Last Days of Chez Nous* (Simpson)

Another example of the repeated use of visual motifs across films is the use of window frames the foreground of the shot and through which the subject or actor is seen. Examples include the restaurant scene in *High Tide*, *Little Women*, where members of the March family are frequently seen looking out of their window to the house next door as well as the family home in *The Last Days of Chez Nous*, seen from the street. All of the cinematographers involved in these shots have their own approach to lighting the interior scene and exterior window frame as well as the mix of daylight versus tungsten-balanced light.

As this last example indicates, one of the most important cinematographic problems to solve in many of the films directed by Armstrong, both documentary and drama, is the positioning of actors and subjects in front of windows where different light sources and exposures are mixed. However, on closer look, different cinematographers have unique ways of dealing with over-exposed highlights and increased dynamic range, providing unique solutions. Examples will be found in all of the films and the approach is subtly different every time. In *Smokes and Lollies*, Diana is seated in front of a blown-out window for an interview, making use of the latitude inherent in 16mm negative film, while in *Last Days of Chez Nous*, Simpson tented the rear courtyard with sail cloth in order to achieve an acceptable exposure both inside and outside the house. In *Women He's Undressed*, Howard ensured the schedule was planned for filming at the right time of day so that the view outside the window, behind the interview subject, was not overexposed when filming with a digital ARRI Alexa. These are all examples of different technical requirements for filming with different cameras, film stocks and lighting situations, decided on, and executed, by each cinematographer with their respective solutions. Placement of subjects and characters in front of windows and the different visual style this creates will be looked at more closely in each of the following Chapters.

Finally, Pearlman and Sutton note that their 'distributed creativity' approach opens up space so long denied to women in the film industry. If the role of male cinematographer is usually overlooked, then consider the 'woman cameraman' who is completely invisible. Women have been shooting films since at least 1915 and have mostly been referred to as cameraman since then.[65]

[65] Pamela Hutchinson, "Ever heard of a woman cameraman? Why female cinematographers get overlooked," *The Guardian,* 26 January 2018, accessed 9 November 2021.

The first woman to be accredited by the Australian Cinematographers Society (ACS) was Jan Kenny (*Mary, Fran, Round the Twist*), in 1976.[66] The first woman to be nominated for Cinematography at the Academy Awards was Rachel Morrison (*Mudbound, Black Panther, Dope*) in 2018. In Morrison's own words, 'I've never understood why there are so few female DPs. I really believe it speaks to everything we do well. Multi-tasking, empathy, emotion.'[67] Although Armstrong usually distances herself from this kind of gender essentialism, preferring to be considered simply a director, rather than a feminist or female director, she has consistently chosen (and/or been invited) to make films about women. In 2015, Armstrong worked on a feature film with a female director of photography Anna Howard for *Women He's Undressed*. [68] Howard observes, 'I think generally women don't get offered big films. I don't know many. I mean Mandy [Walker] has obviously done really well, but as far as getting really big-budget movies, maybe you do get overlooked.'[69] Like Armstrong, Howard has been working with Australian crews since the early eighties and their combined experience enhances their filmmaking collaboration.

Literature Review

The literature concerning the question of approaches based on poetics as opposed to hermeneutics (with Sontag and Bordwell) and distributed creativity, (with Pearlman and Sutton) as primary exemplars has already played an extensive role in my previous section on theoretical approaches. Beyond these central theoretical issues, my specific interest in the literature has centred around three questions: (a) how has the subject of cinematography been organised and presented in professional and critical literature? (b) how does the literature on cinematography conceive of the general collaboration between director and cinematographer? and (c) what does the literature on Armstrong tell us about this specific example of the director-cinematographer relationship?

(a) Cinematography in general

As previously noted, there are very few books about the work of individual cinematographers, especially when compared to books about directors or actors. I was unable to locate any books solely about leading Australian cinematographers McAlpine, Russell Boyd, Geoffrey Simpson or Dion Beebe. The most prolific strand of writing in this area deals with cinematography in a purely technical light and is designed for working cinematographers or students who aspire to the profession. Technical roles and instruction are well presented in a variety of handbooks and

[66] Jan Kenny was head of Cinematography at AFTRS during my time as a student there.
[67] Note: DP is the US equivalent of DOP. "The cinematographer: Rachel Morrison - First woman to be nominated for an Oscar in cinematography," *Time,* 3 March 2018.
[68] Armstrong collaborated on a 1-minute short *Decade of Women* with Sally Bongers in 1985.
[69] Harry Windsor, "The DP roundtable: IF chats to some of our leading female cinematographers," *If*, 15 September 2016, accessed 10 November 2021.

camera manuals, most importantly the *American Cinematographer Manual* known in the industry as the 'Filmmaker's Bible' and currently in its eleventh edition. [70] The first edition was published in 1935 and current editions of the book are still used as a reference by camera assistants, film technicians, visual effects supervisors and cinematographers. Reading through the contents page is a useful introduction to the skill-set required in the field. Camera operating techniques described in the manual include focus charts, exposure, white balance and colour temperature correction, lens size and parameters, panning speeds, aspect ratios, digital or film capture, and the actual camera itself. It also covers camera support (tripods), rigging and movement as well as lighting equipment, visual effects and green screen technique. The ninth edition of the manual begins with a definition of cinematography by one of its members, 'Cinematography is a creative and interpretive process that culminates in the authorship of an original work of art rather than the simple recording of a physical event' thereby laying claim to authorship by stressing artistic creation over technical reproduction.[71] It expands on the functions or crafts used by cinematographers as 'physical, organisational, managerial, interpretive' lending support to my own definitional taxonomy. Importantly this book has been written and updated over nearly a hundred years by cinematographers, gaffers and assistants for use by camera departments all over the world. Much of the working knowledge of cinematography that is evident in this thesis has its source in this book.

If we move to instructional textbooks, *Shooting Movies without Shooting Yourself in the Foot* (Anderson 2012) contains useful observations about on-set processes, such as definitions of crew roles, completing camera sheets and the procedure for calling shots. In the preface, Anderson describes cinematography in this way:

> The job of Director of Photography demands an ability to be creative and artistic while dealing with technical requirements, communication and organizational skills, budgeting, planning, and cost consciousness. As an artist, he or she is in charge of the entire visual component of a motion picture, and as a manager, he or she is responsible for directing a small army of technicians and crafts people in working together to achieve an artistic vision. [72]

[70] David Mullen, ASC, and Rob Hummel, ASC (eds), *American Cinematographer Manual, 11th ed.* (Hollywood, California: The ASC Press, 2022); Michael Maher, "Film societies: What do those abbreviations mean?" *Premium Beat,* 19 January 2016.
[71] John Hora, "Definition of cinematography," in *American Cinematographer Manual, 9th ed,* edited by Stephen H. Burum, ASC (Hollywood, California: The ASC Press, 2007), 1.
[72] Jack Anderson, *Shooting Movies without Shooting Yourself in the Foot* (Massachusetts: Focal Press, 2012), vii (preface).

Anderson supports my contention that the role of cinematographer, is simultaneously technical, organisational and aesthetic. His book contains practical examples and minute-by-minute detail of what happens on a film set but is probably only of interest to those with direct experience of working in camera, lighting or grips departments.

Introduction to Cinematography (2018) by Tania Hoser is a more recent publication, winning a prize for the Best new Textbook in Humanities and Media Arts.[73] Photographs and detailed instructions for camera assistants provide information on how to build a camera, use filters, measure and interpret focus as well as manage camera department documentation and procedures. This highly useful and accessible book is primarily aimed at students and camera assistants while also being relevant to technicians supporting students and running equipment stores. The sheer quantity of technical detail contained demonstrates the complexity of thought processes that a cinematographer brings to every shot.

Bordwell observes in *Poetics of Cinema* that many filmmaking practices involve rules of thumb that are often learned without much awareness and that filmmakers often 'know a great deal more about their activity than they articulate.'[74] But when asked the right questions, I have found that cinematographers are able to articulate a great deal about their work. I have been fortunate to correspond with cinematographers Cowan, Richards, Boyd and Simpson who have described in detail their use of cameras, lights and film stock and their collaborations with others particularly Armstrong.

There are numerous video interviews with cinematographers where they discuss their work but these are typically non-specific, romanticised versions of the role, with little detail. For example, Robert Hardy, writing for website *No Film School* wanders into familiar territory when he argues, 'The other important aspect of all of this is how you define your voice as a cinematographer. This is perhaps the hardest part of working your way into any artistic profession because it's intangible and uniquely personal in many ways.'[75] Voice, like vision, is another of those metaphors which quickly falls into a romanticised, vague description of the role. Once again, this points to the divide between writing about technology and technique that needs to be bridged.

For this reason, it is necessary to have writers who are both academics and filmmakers asking pertinent questions of cinematographers with the knowledge to document and communicate the knowledge. *Hollywood Cameraman* by Charles Higham, published over 50 years ago, was one of the first general critical books to include interviews with cinematographers who speak in detail

[73] Tania Hoser, *Introduction to Cinematography* (London: Routledge, 2018).
[74] David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 25.
[75] Rob Hardy, "Live & die by your images: Bradford Young on what it means to be a cinematographer," *No Film School,* 19 August 2015.

about their working methods. James Wong Howe puts it simply: 'I have a basic approach that goes on from film to film: to make all the sources of light absolutely naturalistic.'[76] This is relevant because it describes a process and intention which continues across films and working relationships. All cinematographers bring specific skills and interests to the films they shoot, which exist outside of the prescription of scriptwriters and directors. *Hollywood Cameraman* is written primarily for cinephiles in order to understand better what takes place within camera departments on a film set.

Debates around the history of cinematography have begun to find their way into university curricula and Patrick Keating is the leading author seeking to do this. Keating's book *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir* documents the conventional approach to lighting required by studios during the formative period of 1917 to 1950.[77] Keating's primary source material is drawn from the writings of cinematographers in technical journals of the time. He uses this material to demonstrate the way that cinematographers talked *to each other* about their profession. While these debates were not for public consumption, they show that cinematographers were capable of thinking critically about the larger issues involved in their profession. An expectation that cinematographers would adhere to an *unobtrusive style* (what James Wong Howe described as naturalism) became important as Hollywood transitioned to the use of sound. The distinction between mannerist and classicist styles, which is at the heart of this industrial debate, is one that remains useful to my thinking about ways of distinguishing the styles and strengths of cinematographers such as Russell Boyd and Geoffrey Simpson. Keating also edited *Cinematography*, a collection of academic essays that assembles a historical overview of the practice of camera departments in order to make camera and lighting more accessible to those interested in learning cinema. [78]

The chapter on *New Hollywood 1981-1999* by Paul Ramaeker is particularly relevant to the time Armstrong spent directing in the US. This chapter is almost entirely devoted to the technical innovations arising during the 1980s and 1990s, including the new Kodak Vision films stocks, use of colour and lighting, the influence of spherical lenses and super 35 gates, new lab techniques and the emerging use of computers to control cameras remotely. It was during this period that cinematographers became highly sought after for their individual style and practice, rather than to practice a house style expected by the studio. According to Ramaeker the 1990s 'saw a virtually unprecedented breadth in the range of possibilities open to cinematographers, and the uses they made of them have continued to inform American cinema since.'[79] *Little Women* (1994) demonstrates high production values, examples of wide angle lenses to record scenes with several

[76] Charles Higham, *Hollywood Cameramen: Sources of light* (UK: Thames and Hudson, 1970).
[77] Keating, Patrick, *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[78] Patrick Keating (ed), *Cinematography* (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014).
[79] Paul Ramaeker, "The new Hollywood: 1981-1999," in *Cinematography*, edited by Patrick Keating (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014), 107.

performers, higher speed film stocks (Kodak 5298 500T) for filming interiors as well as night scenes and cranes, dollies and Steadicams for capturing action and dramatic movement.

Australian cinematographers have made a significant and lasting impact on both local and international films. Martha Ansara's *The Shadowcatchers: A history of cinematography in Australia* is a pictorial survey and honour roll of Australian cinematographers and their crews that provides a local perspective on the issues raised in Keating's book. [80] Ansara carefully documents the use of cameras and lighting equipment and captures technical detail relating to shooting and post-production. *The Shadowcatchers* is highly influenced by policies and opinions of the Australian Cinematographers Society. The chapter on *A New Era (late 1960s -1970s)* provides a summary of cinematography at the time, including the emergence of high-speed film stocks, lighter, more portable cameras and faster lenses. Ansara notes that during the resurgence of Australian filmmaking in this period in Hollywood during which cinematographers were 'the most experienced members of any crew, were highly valued for their creativity and resourcefulness.'[81] Cinematographers (and other crew members) might shoot multiple projects in the time it takes a director to prepare and complete one feature film. For this reason, the camera department have greater opportunity to practice their craft and build their working relationships and usually have more varied film making experience than the director. This attribute was highly regarded in Hollywood and no doubt paved the way for Armstrong to bring her cinematographers (Boyd, Simpson and Beebe) along with her on international productions as well as her 1st AD Mark Turnbull and other crew.

(b) Collaboration between director and cinematographer

Examining the intersection of authorship between director and cinematographer will provide some clarification on the unique contribution of the cinematographer. There is a spectrum of possibilities for the relationship which vary across aesthetic philosophies, historical and industrial contexts, and prior experience. The first, and perhaps most prevalent, might be termed a relation of subordination. As students at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS), we were constantly reminded that our primary task was to convey the director's vision rather than impose our own visual style. Anna Howard (*Women He's Undressed*) who teaches at the Academy of Film, Theatre and Television, supports this view that 'Ultimately, it's the director's vision. All I'm doing is creating their vision for them as a cinematographer.'[82] As Patrick Keating has shown, this attitude of subordination has a long history in the internal debates conducted by cinematographers.[83] Roger Deakins (DOP *Skyfall, True Grit, Blade Runner 2049*) is very vocal on this subject and

[80] Martha Ansara, *The Shadowcatchers: A history of cinematography in Australia* (NSW: Austcine Publishing, 2012).
[81] Martha Ansara, *The Shadowcatchers: A history of cinematography in Australia* (NSW: Austcine Publishing, 2012), 118.
[82] Brooke Boland, "Teaching beauty to emerging filmmakers," *Arts Hub,* 2 August 2016.
[83] Patrick Keating, *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

frequently quotes cinematographer Freddie Francis when he says that there's 'good cinematography and bad cinematography and then there's the cinematography that's right for the movie.'[84] Deakins is always of the view that it is the director's movie and the cinematographer must serve their vision. The cinematography and lighting should be 'seamless' and not in the audience's face.[85] (Of course, those who have seen *Blade Runner 2049* or *1917* may wonder how well Deakins' practice fits his theoretical stance.) This summarises a longstanding view that the best cinematography is invisible or unnoticed.

A good cinematographer was often seen, in the classicist tradition Keating identifies, as one whose work is subordinated, not to the director, but rather to the processes of narration. An alternative position therefore is that the cinematography originates in the script rather than any individual's 'vision'. For example, Dion Beebe (DOP *Charlotte Gray,* 2001) makes this observation: 'My feeling with technique is that, at the end of the day, we read a script that fills us with ideas that ultimately have to be achieved somehow. We have to find the tools and technology to realize these ideas.'[86] For Beebe, narrative and screenplay, rather than a director, dictate the aesthetic concerns, which in turn drive the technological requirements of the cinematographer's field of responsibility.

At the other end of this spectrum are writers who presume the direct and unmediated creative input of the cinematographer. Rachel Morrison has stated that: 'Cinematography is so much about instinct and intuition — you want the same range of experience going into behind the camera as what you see in front of it. Your life experience will come through the lens.'[87] The implication is that although the story and initial ideas may originate elsewhere, the underlying visual qualities come directly, even if unconsciously, from the cinematographer. A study titled *One Film, Three Visons*, by Costa from Lusófona University in Portugal found that when three different cinematographers worked on the same script, with the same crew and director, very different choices were made with respect to aspect ratio, type of camera and lenses, camera placement and movement.[88] By analysing the footage and through audience feedback at screenings, the research found that different cinematographers had an impact in terms of 'mood and sensation'.

Some authors attempt differing versions of a complementary relationship based on collaboration rather than subordination. Beach describes the nexus between director and cinematographer in his book *A Hidden History of Film Style: Cinematographers, Directors, and the Collaborative Process.*

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[84] Evan Luzi, "25 pieces of juicy filmmaking knowledge from cinematographer Richard Deakins," *The Black and Blue,* accessed 20 November 2021.
[85] The Complete Interviews conducted from 2003-2005 American Society of Cinematographers in: Jon Fauer, ASC, *Cinematographer Style, vol 1* (California: ASC Press, 2008), 73.
[86] The Complete Interviews conducted from 2003-2005 American Society of Cinematographers in: Jon Fauer, ASC, *Cinematographer Style, vol 1* (California: ASC Press, 2008), 31.
[87] "The cinematographer: Rachel Morrison, first woman to be nominated for an Oscar in cinematography," *Time,* 3 March 2018.
[88] Antonio Costa, "One film, three visions," *Cinematography in Progress,* 9 December 2019.

‘As a general paradigm, the cinematographer is responsible for discovering, inventing, introducing, and improving new visual technologies that the director can then apply in the creation of cinematic art. However, the functions of the cinematographer and director are by no means mutually exclusive, nor are they rigidly fixed.’[89] This approach reformulates the relationship as a complementary one, with the cinematographer operating in the realm of technique and technology, with the director finding applications for these techniques.

Other attempts at formulating a relation of complementarity are *Cinematography for Directors* and more recently *Conversations with Contemporary Cinematographers* by Jacqueline Frost, who seeks to define cinematography practice in detail, drawing directly from the cinematographers she interviews, so that directors may understand how to collaborate more fully with their camera crew.[90] Frost’s research most closely aligns with my own methodology, which is to interview the cinematographers and camera crews and incorporate the new knowledge back into the writing about the process. On the subject of authorship she writes, ‘The cinematographer is responsible for the visual interpretation of the film; she or he is the “author” of the images, whereas the director is the “author” of the performances.’[91]

Philip Cowan addresses this issue in a more flexible way, suggesting that the director-cinematographer relationship is a partnership open to negotiation on a case-by-case basis:

> The relationship between the director and the director of photography (DOP) is a difficult one to define, and the balance of creativity and collaboration between these roles varies from partnership to partnership, film to film. Often directors work with the same DOP regularly: for example, Powell and Cardiff, Bergman and Nykvist, Bertolucci and Storaro, Wyler and Toland, Hitchcock and Burke, Coen and Deakins, Kubrick and Alcott, Wong Kar Wai and Doyle and Aronofsky and Libatique, because they come to a mutual understanding about visualization. DOPs are not however limited in their creative expressions to only long-standing partnerships. Toland’s most significant work is *Citizen Kane*, and he famously only worked with Welles once. [92]

[89] Christopher Beach, *A Hidden History of Film Style: Cinematographers, directors, and the collaborative process* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).
[90] Jacqueline Frost, *Cinematography for Directors: A guide for creative collaboration* (California: Weise Productions, 2009).
[91] Jacqueline Frost, *Cinematography for Directors: A guide for creative collaboration* (California: Weise Productions, 2009).
[92] Phillip Cowan, “Underexposed: The neglected art of the cinematographer,” *Journal of Media Practice* 13, no. 1 (2012): 75-96.

(c) Films directed by Armstrong

The existing literature on Armstrong is heavy on interpretation without much sustained analysis of what I am calling poetics, or more specifically, visual strategies. Considering Armstrong as an auteur has provided writers with a framework for discovering the similarities between the films and the meanings (particularly those relevant to gender) they convey. As is often the case, the assumption of director as author also consequently negates or minimises the contribution of the other collaborators and specifically obscures the work of the cinematographer. By considering the vital contribution of the cinematographer to these films, I will dwell rather on the differences and inconsistencies between and within the films.

Felicity Collins' monograph *The Films of Gillian Armstrong* (1999), details the first twenty years of Armstrong's directorial career from *My Brilliant Career* (1979) to *Oscar and Lucinda* (1998).[93] This book examines the feminist, artistic and national values in the films as well as performance and limited discussion of visual tropes. Aside from a chapter which includes some detailed description of the shots and coverage in *High Tide*, there is very little on the subject of cinematography. Collins comprehensively cites articles about the films, and positions Armstrong historically in Australian cinema. What she does not do is comment on *American Cinematographer* technical articles such as "Religious Passage" on the cinematography in *Oscar and Lucinda* and "Vision Accomplished" on Russell Boyd's career.[94] Since the book was published (24 years ago), Armstrong has directed five more feature films, rendering many of the conclusions now outdated or incomplete.

Julia Erhart's, *Gillian Armstrong: Popular, Sensual and Ethical Cinema* (2020) provides an updated perspective on the films, including those released since 1998. Similar to Collins, Erhart's emphasis is on the genre, gender and authorial voice demonstrated in the films and although the book includes some detail about industrial contexts within which the films were produced, it also does not cover aspects of production or cinematography. Erhart covers in some detail the short films Armstrong directed while studying at the AFTS (now the AFTRS) describing the films as 'harbingers of things to come', demonstrating common themes and visual tropes seen in these early films.[95] Erhart identifies these early films as being experimental and playful, an attribute seen in later documentaries *Unfolding Florence* (2006) and *Women He's Undressed* (2015), thereby positioning an overarching unity to Armstrong's career.

A series of interviews with Armstrong by Graham Shirley, shot by Russell Boyd for the NFSA and recorded over three days in 2011-2012 provide insight and additional detail on production

[93] Felicity Collins, *The Films of Gillian Armstrong* (St Kilda, VIC: ATOM - Australian Teachers of Media, 1999).
[94] Ron Magid, "Religious Passage," *American Cinematographer* 79, no. 2 (1998): 90-94; Jean Oppenheimer, "Russell Boyd, ASC, ACS: Vision Accomplished," *American Cinematographer* 99, no. 2 (February 2018): 54-61.
[95] Julia Erhart, *Gillian Armstrong: Popular, Sensual and Ethical Cinema* (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 5.

development and filming. Shirley and Armstrong discuss the films in chronological order, including the documentaries, shorts and TVCs along with the feature films.[96] Although I was able to glean some useful detail for the spreadsheet (Table 1) the conversation centred mostly around performance and production design and provided very little detail on camera technique or practice. Based on my own 2002 Armstrong interview, I believe this is primarily due to the line of investigation. For example, due to my own knowledge and interest in cinematography, I was able to discuss in detail with Armstrong the triangular relationship between director, cinematographer and camera operator.[97] For this research, I undertake a dialogue directly with cinematographers and propose more technical questions in the hope of revealing more detail about the cinematographic process in these films.

The narrow journalistic interest in Armstrong's work as a female director of female-centric films, while obvious and obviously important, ignores the diverse working practices and myriad of aesthetic choices evident in her films and denies the opportunity for broader critical analysis which centres on Armstrong as an Australian filmmaker collaborating with other filmmakers. Armstrong herself consistently resists being categorised as a feminist director. 'I got branded as a feminist director because it was a feminist story, but then that's all I was offered: women achievers – first woman to fly a plane, climb a mountain, ride a camel. I really fought against that labelling.'[98] An examination of her collaboration with cinematographers and camera operators provides an opportunity for me to make a fresh contribution to knowledge in my field, and to contribute to the rehabilitation of other roles in the filmmaking process—for example, the work that Karen Pearlman has done to refocus interest on editors.

Second Take: *Australian film-makers talk* by Raffaele Caputo and Geoff Burton (1999) includes an interview with Armstrong about her experiences on *Little Women* (DOP Simpson 1994).[99] She makes useful observations about working with Simpson: attending rehearsals, shooting with fake snow and the joint decision to change the opening of the film. Rather than opening the film the way previous versions had, with Mamee reading a letter from father to the girls, 'we were to begin with a big crane shot which revealed Laurie's house and then, still from outside, to see Laurie framed by the window looking up at Orchard House.'[100] This did not eventuate either, and the film begins with a montage of tracks and wide shots to establish the location, climate and context for the film (Image 1.16). Several of the Armstrong films begin with tracking shot(s) through landscape

[96] Graham Shirley, "Gillian Armstrong Interviewed by Graham Shirley: Oral History," NFSA ID: 1050278, Film, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,* 22 November 2011 – 11 January 2012.
[97] Helen Carter "Interview with Gillian Armstrong @ 2002 AFTRS," DVD accession number, AFTRS: 46692, 2002, *Australian Film, Television and Radio School*.
[98] James Robert Douglas, "Gillian Armstrong: I used to think, 'I did it, why can't all the other women?'" *The Guardian,* 30 August 2016.
[99] Gillian Armstrong, "Little Women: Little by little," in *Second Take: Australian film-makers talk,* edited by Raffaele Caputo and Geoff Burton (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, (with *AFC* funding) 1999), 114.
[100] Gillian Armstrong, "Little Women: Little by little," in *Second Take: Australian film-makers talk,* edited by Raffaele Caputo and Geoff Burton, 114.

establishing the environment. As this trope is consistent across the body of work, I surmise that this is the influence of the director rather than the cinematographers and is an example of director and cinematographer collaboration with the cinematographer finding the means of getting a shot a director required. An alternative reading might be that, as with Toland and Welles (*Citizen Kane*), the practice was established by a cinematographer early on and has been replicated in subsequent films. As Cowan proposes, we should be open to a range of possible relations, rather than bound by dogmatic presumptions.

Image 1.16: from the opening sequence of *Little Women* DOP Geoffrey Simpson

Uniquely, *American Cinematographer* magazine and website includes detailed and technical conversations with cinematographers who have worked with Armstrong. For example, Ron Magid writes on *Oscar and Lucinda*, describing filming in a little cottage in England, where Simpson and Armstrong had agreed to cover the scene in a single wide shot.[101] But the decision to shoot the film using anamorphic lenses, in a very small space while also needing to light to T4 for depth of field, made this a very difficult shot to achieve. This is an example in which camera choices involving lens, lighting and depth of focus have a direct impact on aesthetic decisions.

It is not the intention of this research to ignore or minimise the role of the director, especially Armstrong whose work I greatly admire. Rather it is to amplify and consider more closely the role cinematography plays in filmmaking, especially in collaboration with other department heads. Armstrong summarises the director's role by concluding, 'the craft of storytelling, no matter what format you shoot it on, or where it's seen, you still need the same skills. You still need some

[101] Ron Magid, "Religious Passage," *American Cinematographer* 79, no. 2 (1998): 90-94.

imagination, some vision.'[102] Once again, the term vision is called into play to mean a multitude of things to different people. It is time to take it more literally.

Structure of the thesis

In order to define the unique contribution of cinematography in these films, this thesis will include four chapters subsequent to this introduction. This introduction has provided a taxonomy for my distinction between technical, organisational and aesthetic aspects of cinematography and framed a discussion of the place of the cinematographer in the filmmaking process. The following chapters will examine distinctly different collaborations with cinematographers that often coincide with major phases of Armstrong's career.

Chapter Two will consider the similarities and differences between the observational documentaries that combine to make the Adelaide Girls series. This series commences early in Armstrong's career and the initial instalments are shot on 16mm film. The final film in the series is shot using digital image capture technology. Each film contains footage of the same characters and locations but was shot by different cinematographers. By looking closely at the cinematography of three of the films, it is possible to distinguish radically different approaches to lighting and composition, when shot by each different cinematographer. Research methods for this chapter includes a scrutiny of email conversations with cinematographers and camera crew, reviewing details of camera sheets and pre-production paperwork, and analysis of images from the films and data gathered from production stills. An example of this is contained in the camera sheets for *Not 14 Again*, with equipment lists, location surveys and film stocks. This information can be used to learn more about the lighting and focus conditions of the shoot and the contribution of the cinematographer on this production. The cinematographers directly referenced in this Chapter include Tom Cowan, Malcolm Richards and Paul Costello.

Chapters Three and Four will provide an overview of the work of Russell Boyd and Geoffrey Simpson respectively, the two key cinematographers with whom Armstrong collaborated on feature length dramas. These Chapters will primarily seek to identify the distinctions between the creative practices of the different cinematographers. They will introduce close case-studies by comparing the work of Simpson (*Last Days of Chez Nous, Little Women and Oscar and Lucinda*) and Boyd (*The Singer and the Dancer, Starstruck, Mrs Soffel and High Tide*), with a common director, Armstrong, and a common genre, the period film, as the controls. By examining the films in detail and drawing on correspondence with Simpson and Boyd, I will investigate the collaboration and differentiation between cinematography in these films. Along the way I will depart from Armstrong

[102] Graham Shirley, "Gillian Armstrong Interviewed by Graham Shirley: Oral History," NFSA ID: 1050278, Film, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,* 22 November 2011 – 11 January 2012.

and detour into a comparison of *My Brilliant Career* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, films which have a close genre link to provide a basis for the comparison of cinematography.

Chapter Five will concentrate on Armstrong's late career return to documentary films (*Unfolding Florence, Women He's Undressed and Love, Lust & Lies*). These films were shot after the introduction of digital cinematography in early 2000s, facilitating an exploration of a different film production pathway, as well as covering the relationship between director and female cinematographer (Anna Howard). This Chapter will specifically examine the collaborations with cinematographers John Radel, Paul Costello and Anna Howard and cover the significant transition from film to digital capture. How has digital film capture changed or influenced the cinematography used in Armstrong documentary films? Are there similarities between these films and the earlier Adelaide Girls films shot using a photochemical and analogue film process?

The final Chapter will summarise the findings of the research and the practice of cinematographers who collaborated on the films. Christopher Beach describes the inherent problem with academics writing about cinematography, when they themselves have little knowledge of the technical detail of the work. The people who do have this understanding and knowledge, are generally out working on films sets, not writing about it. In this research, I will capture some of the writing and knowledge from cinematographers themselves.

Each of the Chapters in this thesis will foreground the technical requirements and industrial contexts while comparing and contrasting the use of genre (period and contemporary), camera capture (film versus digital), budgets and crews. Making a film for an American studio is a very different process from working with a Screen Australia grant or under the 10BA tax benefits scheme. This will necessarily have an impact on the fundamentals of cinematography mentioned earlier: aesthetic, technical and organisation. I conclude with Sontag, 'the function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even what it is, rather than to show what it means.'[103] Through this research I will seek to define what the cinematographer actually does and articulate the range of processes and practice. A student of mine recently asked me, 'so what does a cinematographer actually do?' and I could not provide a succinct or immediate answer. The primary motivation for this thesis is to confidently answer that deceptively simple question.

[103] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and other essays* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1966), 14.

Chapter Two

Observational Cinematography in the Adelaide Girls series: Cowan, Richards and Costello

> I think documentary filmmaking is very, very hard. It doesn't completely suit my personality. I like to control my film visually and you don't have that control in documentary: you are in the hands of whoever is shooting.
>
> Gillian Armstrong[104]

The Adelaide Girls series of five documentaries, often seen as an Australian version of the British *Seven Up!* Series, follows three working-class women, Diana Doman, Josie Petersen, and Kerry Carlson, over 33 years as they age, change partners, have children, and embark on different careers. Though they return to the same protagonists and locations, the films have different cinematographers and widely different production contexts. The series began in 1976 with *Smokes and Lollies (*DOP Tom Cowan*)*. The second instalment, *14's Good, 18's Better* (DOP Malcolm Richards) followed in 1980. The cinematographers on these two films have both communicated with me (see the material in my accompanying eBook) about their involvement with these films. Three more films have subsequently been released in the series: *Bingo, Bridesmaids and Braces* (DOP Steve Arnold, 1988), *Not 14 Again* (DOP Steve Arnold, 1996), and *Love, Lust & Lies* (DOP Paul Costello, 2010). The last of these films is shot digitally, a technological distinction of profound importance to any study of contemporary cinematography.

For most critics, these films have the appearance of being a unified series with styles and themes consistent throughout. Belinda Smaill writes, 'the series is characterised by repetition and accumulation… These same tables, and the original scenes featuring them, return in each subsequent film.'[105] An example of this repetition over the course of the series can be seen in the dinner table scenes (images 2.6 and 2.7) in the home of Kerry's parents, filmed from the same perspective with the same table and background furniture in both *Smokes and Lollies* (1976) and *Bingo Bridesmaids and Braces* (1988). However, despite the repetition of these motifs across the series, the episodes look very different from each other, using a variety of camera and lighting equipment and with different crews. They span a time of radical transition in film technology, in the industrial structure of the Australian cinema, and in Armstrong's own career. As Armstrong becomes a recognised director, resources, budgets and running times expand. The consistency of content and themes across the five films provides an unusual opportunity to differentiate the cinematography in these similar but also distinct films.

[104] Julie James Bailey, *Reel Women: Working in film and television* (NSW: AFTRS Publications, 1999), 20.
[105] Belinda Smaill, "History, feminism and time: Gillian Armstrong's documentary series," *Metro Magazine* 167 (2010): 103.

By closely examining the cinematography in each film, it is possible to differentiate aesthetically between lighting styles, composition and coverage in order to identify the contribution of the cinematographers. For my purposes here, I will emphasise the distinctive differences between the work of the cinematographers involved. Despite having the same director, same cast and locations, as well as similar shot-lists, each film is subtly, and often very obviously, different. The director (Armstrong) provides the control factor across the films, enabling a new reading of the role of the cinematographers and emphasising their individual contributions. An example of this is the framing on close-ups where Armstrong made the 'creative visual decision' to film interviews 'very, very close' a directorial style seen across much of her early work.[106]

The skills required by cinematographers to light and frame a documentary are similar to those required to shoot a fiction film—though often they will have to be executed with greater speed, less preparation, and a smaller crew. Armstrong acknowledges that 'whoever is operating the camera has visual control.'[107] Framing choices can draw the viewer's eye to certain details which will enhance information about the subject or circumstances. The way light falls on a face can make a person look hard or elicit emotional empathy. In the case of observational documentary, the cinematographer usually tries to be discreet and unobtrusive. Sometimes the camera is more obvious and the interviewer is present in the film. Initially in this series, the director is not seen or heard and is present only in the form of an off-screen eyeline. As the series progresses, Armstrong becomes more visible, conversing with characters and appearing onscreen herself as a way of claiming common ground with her subjects (Images 2.54 and 2.56).

Despite the variety of cinematographers working on the films, the shots and sequences share common characters and these visual tropes such as interviews, still photographs, cut-aways, mirror shots and travelling shots. These similar images tie the films together visually and create a 'style guide' that gives a broad sense of consistency to the series. Cinematographers would have been able to view previous films when developing shot lists and strategies for filming, however they are filmed in different ways and identifying the subtle differences between them provides a key to the unique cinematography within each episode.

The shots of the documentaries can be broadly broken down into the following categories:

1. Interviews filmed both as singles and group shots. They are often staged as either two-shots with the women and their current partner or as three-shots with the main subjects as

[106] Lisa French, "Gillian Armstrong: The line between fact and fiction," in *The Female Gaze in Documentary Film: An international perspective* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
[107] Helen Carter, "Interview with Gillian Armstrong @ 2002 AFTERS," AFTRS Accession Number: 46692*,* DVD 76 Minutes*, Australian Film, Television and Radio School.*

a group. With the exception of *Love, Lust & Lies*, the subjects address the implied interviewer, looking off-screen to the opposite side of the frame.

2. Photographs, framed and mounted, are filmed in the locations on bookshelves, mantlepieces and in albums (Images 2.1 and 2.2). These were positioned on location by Armstrong as part of the art direction process. Reflecting a change in technology and budget, photographs in *Love, Lust & Lies*, are digitally scanned and include digital moves across them in the style of a Ken Burns documentary. This technique is less observational and more obviously planned and constructed than what is seen in the previous photo shots. Alluding to the importance of these photographs, Andrew L Urban describes *Love, Lust & Lies* as 'an audio visual "photo album" of their lives.'[108]

Image 2.1: framed photographs art directed by Armstrong in *14's Good, 18's Better*

Image 2.2: Kerry interview, *Smokes and Lollies*

3. Cut-aways (B-roll) of activities such as family life, work, travel and mealtimes that are mostly staged for the camera. Recreations of events are also included. This footage is used as over-lay during interviews and included in montage sequences. It often uses the devices of continuity editing such as match-on-action cutting and eyeline matching. Several of these activity sequences are self-consciously employed in each film, providing the series with an internal unity. These include:

   (a) Staged images of the women putting on make-up or looking at themselves in front of a mirror (Images 2.3 to 2.5). This motif is repeated throughout the series. In these shots the women are often featured as silhouettes, and the shots are usually lit in a high contrast, stylised way, contrasting with the observational footage. As the

[108] Andrew Urban, "Love, Lust & Lies," *Urban Cinefile,* 13 May 2010, accessed November 2019. Now accessed through *National Library of Australia*, accessed on 21 November 2023.

sequences are set in confined spaces, the camera is positioned very close to the subject and there is little room for additional lighting.

Image 2.3: Josie

Image 2.4: Diana

Image 2.5: Kerry

(b) Family dinner table scenes. All the films feature family scenes set around kitchen tables. Armstrong says, 'I had them in the bedroom and in front of mirrors when they were talking about intimate things and I shot meals to show the family dynamic.'[109] The camera is operated from a standing height allowing people to sit and stand, contained within the frame. Images 2.6 and 2.7 show Kerry's family filmed 12 years apart but from an almost identical camera height and angle and with the same light source. The second image 2.7 is much brighter, presumably due to a faster film stock.

Image 2.6: *Smokes and Lollies* (1976), Kerry's family – DOP Tom Cowan

Image 2.7: *Bingo Bridesmaids and Braces* (1988), Kerry's family – DOP Steve Arnold

4. Travelling shots from cars, motorbikes, bicycles and buses feature in all Armstrong films and especially the documentaries. This is a very common motif and provides a low-budget solution to achieve a moving camera.

[109] Peter Galvin, "Serial camera," *SBS,* 13 May 2010. Updated 26 February 2014, accessed October 2021.

(a) In the first films, these travelling shots are filmed using very simple, low-budget means. Malcolm Richards cinematographer of *14's Good, 18's Better* explains:

> [Q]uite often in those days you'd get a station wagon and just open up the back and put the tail gate down, put a high hat in the back of the car and shoot out of the back of the car. Rarely did you have the luxury of having a limpet mount or something you could put onto the car.[110]

These travelling shots are a good indicator of the change in budget and technology throughout the series. In the last film, *Love, Lust & Lies,* a second camera (Go Pro) is mounted on the car dash or bonnet as well as handheld from within the car. These types of shots are improved in this last film through the use of image stabilisation previously unavailable when shooting with film but possible with digital cameras and their lenses.

(b) Filming from cars includes the motif of drive-by family portraits with family vignettes standing in front of their home (Images 2.8 and 2.9), as recorded in *Bingo, Bridesmaids and Braces* and re-enacted in subsequent films, demonstrating changes in financial circumstances, family size and architecture. The camera is handheld and captured from within a car, always travelling horizontally past the family group,. In their staged formality, these images provide the basis for Urban's metaphor of a family photo album and are aesthetically linked to the other images of photographs scattered throughout the series. These screen captures also demonstrate the change in shooting aspect ratio between the two films from Academy 4:3 ratio to widescreen 16x9, due to changes in camera equipment and broadcast specifications. They also suggest a change in visual strategies from planar flatness, flat front lighting and centrality to complementary composition involving layers of depth and modelled side lighting.

[110] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.

Image 2.8: Kerry's family, *Bingo, Bridesmaids and Braces* (DOP Arnold)

Image 2.9: *Love, Lust & Lies* (DOP Costello)

Although the films have the appearance of being shot in an observational style, in the first four films, to ensure enough light for exposure on 16mm, the homes were lit and even pre-lit by the crew in preparation for filming anything that might occur, contrary to the implication associated with observational documentary that the film crew have unexpectedly arrived at the location. This information contained in the call sheet (Figure 2.1) is provided to the crew by the production manager and incorporates examples of the type of coverage planned. This type of documentation demonstrates the way that the films combine staged and observational documentary techniques.

11.00am	Keith & Diana go shopping
12.30pm	Pre-light Diana's house
	Gill's approaching shot if weather matches (overcast)
1.00pm	Finish Diana interview
	Photos albums if relevant
2.00pm	LUNCH
3.00pm	Amy & Kylie get out of school
4.00pm	Group shot of family
	Practise martial arts in park
	Diana & girls dancing
	Amy doing homework
	Amy interview

Figure 2.1: Excerpt from the Call sheet for *Not 14 Again*, Monday 21 August 1995.[111]

I hope to have set up a play of similarity and difference across the series. By closely examining three of the films, it is possible to differentiate the styles, approaches and techniques in the cinematography. This Chapter will directly compare and contrast the work of Tom Cowan in *Smokes and Lollies*, Malcolm Richards in *14s Good, 18s Better* and Paul Costello in *Love, Lust & Lies.*

[111] Figure 2.1: Screenshot of call sheet for Monday 21st August 1995, used on location during filming of *Not 14 Again*. Rod Bolton, "Monday 21st August: Filming the Domain," from production camera assistant Rod Bolton's personal production notes from filming, folder titled: *ROD: Spirited Films, 'Not 14 Again,'* 1995.

Rough style - *Smokes and Lollies* (1976) Tom Cowan

Being the first film in the series, *Smokes and Lollies* was not required to conform to an established style of coverage or lighting. Cinematography in *Smokes and Lollies* is characterised by an inconsistent use of lighting, manually operated zoom and handheld camera. This Chapter will generalise at the outset that the overall style of the film can be labelled as rough and gritty. It is consistent with an aesthetic of documentary realism that includes handheld shakiness, jump-cutting and a general crudeness of technique as markers of immediacy, authenticity and the privileging of an urgent profilmic event over considerations of filmmaking smoothness or professionalism. Macdonald and Cousins note of cinema verité and direct cinema: 'these 'flaws' in themselves seemed to guarantee authenticity and thus became desirable, eventually developing into an aesthetic in their own right.'[112] Gestures such as these were particularly important in Australian documentary which, as Moran shows, had laboured under the tastefulness of Griersonian earnestness and BBC-inflected voiceovers. The lighting used by Cowan is often harsh and flat creating heavy nose shadows and over and under exposed backgrounds. The Oz Movies website is highly critical of this style and underestimates the difficulty filming observational documentary: 'Picture quality for *Smokes & Lollies* wasn't the best, but that's because it was shot on 16mm, with a minimal amount of lighting - the end night scene is in almost complete darkness, and interiors suggest that the budget ran to a couple of redheads.'[113] The use of zooms and fast lighting set-ups is part of a rough aesthetic that creates opportunities to follow unpredictable action and is open to whatever happens.

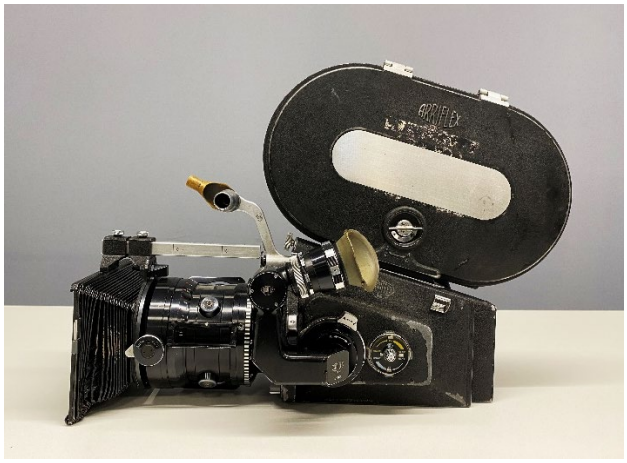

Image 2.10 ARRI BL16mm camera with the distinctive handle and blimped lens

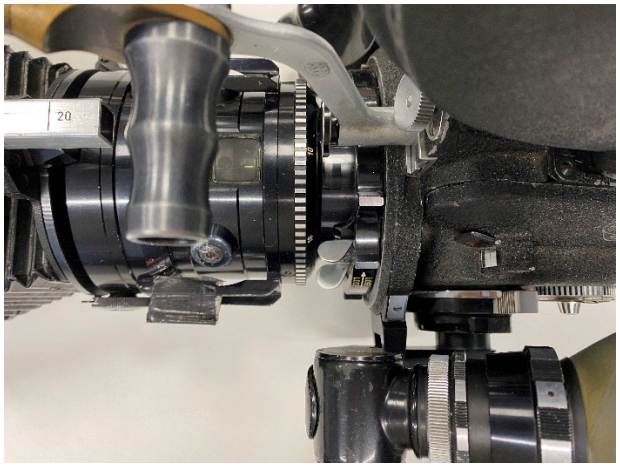

Image 2.11 the blimped lens housing.

[112] Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins (eds), *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 250.
[113] "Smokes & Lollies," *Oz Movies*. Accessed April 2024 (no author)

Smokes and Lollies (director of photography, Tom Cowan) was shot using the ARRI BL16mm camera (a blimped crystal-lock camera, small enough to handhold, Images 2.10 and 2.11) with a 10-100mm zoom and a set of Zeiss Super Speed prime lenses suitable for working in low light.[114] The standard 16mm aspect ratio was 4:3 and Kodak 7247 100T film stock was used, with a Nagra for recording double system synchronised sound.[115] While the film stock (which loses two-thirds of a stop under daylight conditions with a Wratten 85 filter to equate to a speed of 64 ASA) gave acceptable exposures in exterior scenes, Cowan used quite prominent artificial lighting for interiors and night scenes.

Table 2.1: Summary of Tom Cowan director and cinematographer: *cinematography credits and camera equipment used on the films*

2020	*Life Class 1920* Writer, Director	Canon C100 mkii HD Cinematographer: Lee Chittick	1hr 29m Feature Drama
2004	*Orange Love Story* Director/cinematographer	Digi Beta (tape) Cinematography credit shared with Murray Lui, Hugh Miller[116]	83 mins, video, drama
2001	*Survivor* Camera operator (15 eps)	Digital video, multi camera Emmy nomination	1 hour episodes, series
1992	*Backsliding* Cinematographer	35mm, Kodak 5248 Director: Simon Target	88 mins drama
1991	*Antarctica* Co-cinematographer	IMAX 65mm Director: John Weiley	43 mins documentary
1979	*Dimboola* Cinematographer	35mm Panavision ratio 2.35:1 Director: John Duigan Focus Puller: Jan Kenny ACS	1hr 34m Feature drama
1977	*Journey Among Women* Cinematographer and Director	16mm with a blow-up to 35mm Malcolm Richards shares the cinematography credit AFI: Most Creative Feature Film	83 mins Feature drama
1976	*Smokes and Lollies* Cinematographer	ARRI 16 BL, 10-100mm zoom lens, 16mm, ratio 4:3, Eastman colour negative 7247 Director: Gillian Armstrong	23 mins Documentary
1975	*Promised Woman* Director/cinematographer	35mm Cameflex Eastman colour negative 5254 Production Designer, Gill Armstrong	84 mins, drama

[114] Tom Cowan, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 54.
[115] 7247 = Eastman colour negative stock, 100T, (in use 1976-83). Source: "Eastman Colour II Negative, 5247/7247, 1974," *Film Colours.*
[116] Richard Kuipers, "Orange Love Story," *Variety,* 17 August 2004, accessed 29 November 2021.

		Gaffer, Brian Bansgrove Camera assist: Malcolm Richards	
1975	*Pure Shit* Cinematographer	16mm Director: Bert Deling	83 mins drama
1973	*Gretel* Cinematographer	16mm colour Director: Gillian Armstrong	24 mins drama AFTS
1972	*The Office Picnic* Director	35mm Ilford B/W Cinematographer: Michael Edols Gaffer, Brian Bansgrove	83 mins drama

Cinematographer Tom Cowan learned his craft working for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Demonstrating early in his career the desire to work across formats and genres, Cowan reflects, 'At the ABC I learnt on news, rural, religious, light entertainment, drama, docos, staging and graphics. I shot short movies on the weekends for the three years I was a trainee.'[117] After training at the ABC Cowan went to the Commonwealth Film Unit (later Film Australia) in Sydney which had a house style of filming documentaries for the Government. He was part of the youth movement within Film Australia, documented by Albert Moran that was pushing the organisation towards feature film production.[118] Cinematographer Geoff Burton told me in an interview that, 'with documentary, most often the cameramen have more experience than the director. Documentaries attract new directors.'[119] This was certainly the case here. Cowan shot Armstrong's AFTS student film *Gretel* in 1973. Armstrong was employed by Cowan as art director on *Promised Woman* prior to the filming of *Smokes and Lollies.* By 1976 Cowan had already written and produced two fiction features, *The Office Picnic* (1972) and *Promised Woman* (1975) with a third, *Journey Among Women* (1977) in preparation, alongside his other work as a cinematographer, generally in documentary film. His movement back and forth between cinematography and direction suggests a parallel with American direct cinema figures such as D A Pennebaker and Albert Maysles. At the other end of his cinematography practice (and demonstrating great diversity) Cowan was also co-DOP on IMAX film *Antarctica* (1991) and camera operator on reality TV show *Survivor* (2000). Despite an impressive curriculum vitae as cinematographer, Cowan insists, 'I was always a director or rather a film-maker.'[120] Cowan's camera assistant Erika Addis went on to a prominent career as a cinematographer, was the Head of Cinematography at Griffith University Film School in Brisbane and is currently President of the Australian Cinematographers Society.

[117] Tom Cowan,*Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 54.
[118] Albert Moran, "Documentary Consensus: The Commonwealth Film Unit: 1954-1964," in *History on/and/in Film: Selected papers from the 3rd Australian History and Film Conference,* edited by Tom O' Regan and Brian Shoesmith (Perth: History & Film Association of Australia, 1987), 90-100. Access via *Freetopia.*
[119] Geoff Burton, ACS, ASC, OAM, interview with the author by phone, 29 May 2001.
[120] Tom Cowan, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 54.

Image 2.12: *Smokes and Lollies* shoot 1976, screen capture from the credit sequence of *Love, Lust & Lies.* Armstrong is operating the clapper board for a tail or end slate. Tom Cowan is handholding the ARRI 16 BL camera.

Like many cinematographers, Cowan identifies with the Australian Impressionists. 'I love the Impressionist painters - how they went out to places and tried to catch light and life in the open air and real places.'[121] Here Cowan expresses an awareness of looking for available or naturally occurring light sources for use in image composition. Another self-identified goal of his cinematography is to capture the movement of subjects in a realist way, referencing Henri Cartier-Bresson and 'the moment on truth'. As an operator on both drama and documentary, Cowan says, 'with the camera I trained myself to read people's reactions, impulses and body language and could improvise the framing in tune with them.'[122] Through technical preparation and commitment, he feels able to capture these moments. Within these two artistic references, Cowan identifies movement and light, as the key attributes of cinematography. Being able to predict the timing and style of subject movement is a very important skill for documentary camera operation. Cowan brought a great deal to the role when shooting this film. Armstrong credits Cowan's qualities as a 'very gentle, lovely cinematographer' as an important attribute for filming with three 'troubled young girls.'[123]

Many of the shots in *Smokes and Lollies* are energised by the use of handheld camera movement, filming from cars and the inclusion of crash zooms to re-frame and position shots. At times there is beautiful three-quarter lighting but more commonly, the lighting is flat and utilitarian in order to

[121] Tom Cowan, "Melbourne Independent Filmmakers: Tom Cowan," *Innersense,* March 2005, accessed 10 October 2021.
[122] Tom Cowan, "Melbourne Independent Filmmakers: Tom Cowan," *Innersense,* March 2005,.
[123] Lisa French (ed), "Gillian Armstrong: The line between fact and fiction," in *The Female Gaze in Documentary Film* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). Interview with Armstrong included in the chapter.

achieve an exposure and opportunistically cover the action rather than serving an aesthetic purpose. The lighting is generally a hard, artificial source with little or no fill. Heavy shadows are prominent and frequently moving in the background of shots. Lighting cables and power points are frequently seen in the back of shots (Image 2.14), evidence of the preference for a rough style that enables the cinematographer to keep shooting and cover the action.

Image 2.13: Josie in *Smokes and Lollies* – an example of flat, hard lighting.

Image 2.14: Diana in the kitchen, hard light from above.

Smokes and Lollies begins with a car travelling along a road towards the camera (Image 2.15), a shot replicated later in the opening sequence of *High Tide* (Russell Boyd 1987). The shot only lasts 10 seconds and is high energy. The camera is filming from the back of another vehicle which is tracking backwards. There is a rapid zoom out adding extra movement to the shot and the car is positioned with the sun directly behind it, leading to significant lens flare. Using a drama editing technique of crosscutting, the shot is then intercut with a shot of Diana walking along the street with friends (Image 2.16) as though the two events were taking place simultaneously. There is a balance being established here between the visibility of camera technique and the appeal to narrative editing conventions to make the filmmaking process less obtrusive.

Image 2.15: *Smokes and Lollies* car travel shot

Image 2.16: Diana walking inter-cuts with the car shot

This same interplay of visual obtrusiveness and editing unobtrusiveness is evident in the close-ups which follow. Diana and Josie (Images 2.17 and 2.18) are both filmed with camera at eye height, flat to the wall behind them and with an eye-line looking off-screen to Armstrong who is positioned very near to the lens for a tight eye-line. An intense key light (most likely an open face redhead or mini brute) is used to produce strong highlights on the cheekbones and dark shadows in the eye sockets. Close-ups are usually modified by zooms, altering the frame from a wider mid-shot to a tighter close-up and back again. The lighting is very flat, with the hard light source placed close to camera creating hard shadows and very little modelling of the face. There is no distance, or separation, between the subject and background, so the subject shadow falls on the wall behind. Cowan explains 'the tension between the foreground person and their background can be caught in the framing.'[124] As the subject moves, the shadow behind them also moves within the frame. The high contrast film stock and lack of fill in the lighting means there is little detail in the blacks. The style is driven by the requirement to work quickly and for the camera to be ready to roll at any moment. Diana says, 'I'm fat, I'm ugly' as if reflexively commenting on what is being recorded by the camera (Image 2.17). It is gritty, rough and granular aimed at achieving an honesty and immediacy that reflects the content.

Image 2.17: Diana Interview

Image 2.18: Josie Interview

This rough style is particularly evident in the interview footage. Kerry is filmed with a higher camera position (Image 2.2), the window behind her and a wide eye-line to Armstrong. A strong frontal key light is used with heavy shadow down the right side of Kerry's face. Although she has a window behind her, it doesn't provide any backlight or edge lighting. The harshness of the single key light seems to function as a contrast to the aestheticized three-point lighting of Kerry's child portrait positioned beside her. The image of a woman posed in front of a window will be a key one in the analysis of cinematography throughout Armstrong's career. It provides a further control through

[124] Bill Mousoulis, "Innersense Productions: Bill Mousoulis," *Innersense.* Accessed 20 November 2023.

which to assess the choices made by cinematographers in combining light sources of widely different intensity and colour temperature.

Cowan's personal approach to lens choice and depth-of-field includes the combination of backgrounds with foreground elements: 'If you are shooting a social drama you use a wide angle lens where the background is also sharp, placing the character in relation to the background.'[125] He describes the tension between background and subject as the basis of the story.[126] A marker of Cowan's roughened, realist style is the way in which light sources are sometimes mixed in quite an obtrusive way. Images 2.19 and 2.20 are drawn from a single long take that begins with Kerry in an exterior long shot. As the shot progresses the handheld camera follows her inside the shop which is harshly lit with what looks like two Redhead lights with half-blue gels, placed just out of frame. Cowan is obviously testing the latitude of the Kodak 7247 film stock here. Image 2.17 is still a little overexposed and the bluish cast of the daylight only moderately corrected by an 81EF filter is evident. Once inside the shop, there is no attempt to mask the problems caused by the lighting as Kerry is placed in an unlit area of the shop while the shop assistant's intrusive shadow falls prominently between them (Image 2.20). Rather than presume Cowan is simply doing a slapdash job, this extremely ambitious shot is enough to show that he is working at the margins of film stock latitude, testing its abilities to handle divergent colour temperatures and exposures.

Image 2.19: Outside the shop

Image 2.20: continuation of the shot to include the shop interior

The way in which the tungsten-balanced 7247 stock deals with different light sources is foregrounded at other points in the film. As Josie goes to work (Image 2.21) the background of the image is dominated by an interior seen through plate-glass windows, whose fluorescent lighting has a distinctive green hue. There is an immediate cut to an interior dominated by Josie in her blue

[125] Aditya Bharadwaj, "Tom Cowan's advice to cinematographers: Make films," *The Hindu,* 26 February 2018, accessed 10 October 2021.
[126] Tom Cowan, "Melbourne Independent Filmmakers: Tom Cowan," *Innersense,* March 2005, accessed 10 October 2021.

dress grappling with an explosively red soft drink dispensing machine while the white wall retains its green fluorescent cast. The contrast between the colours is quite striking. It also brings to mind John Alcott's observations on the way reds popped with 5247 (the 35mm version of the same film stock) and David Mullen's comments that '[c]inematographers complained that 5247 was brittle and harsh-looking and tended to go green when pushed.'[127] Cowan appears to have embraced what some saw as the limitations of the stock, accentuating them in order to achieve the roughened aesthetic that organised the stylistic systems of the film.

Image 2.21 Exterior entrance to work

Image 2.22 Interior lighting and popping red

Observational footage is often shot at standing height, the camera either on a tripod or shoulder, with characters sitting and standing into the frame. An example of this is a sequence of Josie arriving at work (Image 2.22). The camera is at the height of the other woman sitting in the tearoom, providing depth to the shot. Josie buys a drink from the vending machine then sits at a table and the camera is now at her eye height. Burton says, 'Film especially has to be controlled. You have to know who the characters are and who to roll on.'[128] The whole scene is shot from a central position in the room, at one lens height. The camera is anchored on a tripod with a loose head to facilitate free movement using pans and zooms to accommodate her movement. The positioning of the camera for the end of the shot, ultimately reveals that the whole action and camera move was pre-rehearsed.

This embrace of limitation can be seen once again in the final scene of the film. A night-time exterior sequence (Images 2.23 and 2.24) shows Kerry and her friends joking around and then driving off in their cars, creating a classical symmetry with the opening scene of the film which also features a beaten-up, old car. To shoot the scene at night on 100 ASA stock, lit only by shards of harsh light cast from lights positioned in Kerry's adjacent house clinches the ambition of the cinematographer to meet the limitations of the film stock head on. The use of silhouettes and highlights within a dark frame is the primary strategy to capture footage with so little light available.

[127] David Mullen, ASC, "Popular film socks of the 1970s: David Mullen's reply to Cal Bickford's forum post, 'what were the most widely used color neg 35mm stocks in the 1970s?'" *Cinematography,* 11 January 2008.
[128] Geoff Burton, ACS, ASC, OAM, interview with the author for AFTRS coursework, 29 May 2001

The action is not particularly clear, but it is precisely this lack of clarity that gives the scene an added energy.

Image 2.23: Final night scene

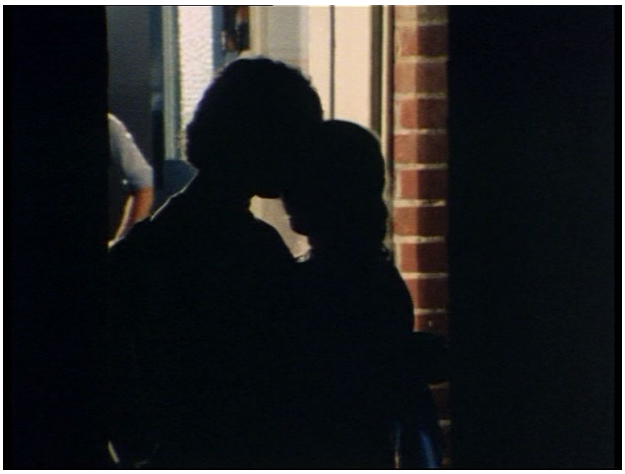

Image 2.24: silhouette

Cowan describes the unique opportunity for the cinematographer to have creative input on a documentary: 'as a cinematographer you go from lots of creative control on documentary'. He further reiterates this with respect to cinematography authorship: 'it happens with documentary.'[129]

Aestheticised commercial style - *14's Good 18's Better* (1980) Malcolm Richards

14s Good, 18s Better was shot primarily by Malcolm Richards, with some sequences shot by Kerry Brown when Richards was unavailable. Crucially for the purposes of the comparison between cinematographers, both this film and *Smokes and Lollies* were shot using the same 7247 100T film stock as well as an ARRI 16 BL camera. On first look, *Smokes and Lollies* and *14's Good, 18's Better* are linked in content and style, with the second film drawing on the first by including, and mimicking, quite a few of its shots. The coverage is typical of many of Armstrong's developing film techniques used in her short drama *One Hundred a Day* and which feature in *My Brilliant Career*, for example big close-ups of faces, use of foreground objects and detailed tight shots of actions and objects. Common to all the films, there is a predominance of close-ups of faces, that work to assist the viewer in recognising the ageing and changing faces. Over time, the number of faces increases and their appearance differs, for example encompassing changes in hair style, making it harder for the audience to remember exactly who everyone is. Cars and bikes also feature prominently and provide a method and motivation for moving the camera.

Cinematographer Malcolm Richards observes, 'Although in many cases you just shot what you felt was the best material, Gill tended to be very organised and had pre-conceived what she wanted to

[129] Tom Cowan, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 54.

shoot and how.'[130] He points out that Armstrong would 'have a tendency to shoot a lot. That was one of the things that I did notice. You'd shoot maybe four or five rolls a day sometimes, which is a lot. In today's terms, it's not very much, 40 or 50 minutes is nothing because people just leave the camera running. But for her it was not uncommon to just shoot a whole roll without stopping.'[131] The choice of what to include or leave out of shots is an iterative process on the shoot with decisions made at different times by the director or cinematographer.

In the period between filming *Smokes and Lollies* and *14's Good 18's Better*, ARRI and Zeiss combined to introduce the Zeiss Super Speed lenses. According to the ARRI website, 'With a maximum aperture of T1.4 (later T1.3), the Super Speeds enabled movies to be shot at night, on location, with practical lights and available streetlights.'[132] Close-ups and longer takes with zooms are the main types of coverage in the later film, with the portable and fast T3 Zeiss 10-100 zoom as the preferred choice of lens (Images 2.25 and 2.26).[133]

Image 2.25 and 26: Richards holding a Zeiss T3 10-100mm zoom lens.

Despite the similarities, the follow-up film employs a significantly different set of techniques. Setting the coverage of this film apart from all the others, *14's Good, 18's Better* contains no three-shots of the girls, no drive-by family portraits and the mirror sequence used is taken from the previous film. Where *Smokes and Lollies* was characterised by immediate, rough camera work, capturing action as it unfolded with strong key lights positioned frontally for exposure regardless of intrusive shadows, *14's Good, 18's Better* is filmed in a more measured style. There is a greater reliance on back and side light sources, using fill to soften shadows, a mix of colour temperatures and a camera placed in the midst of the action, panning and zooming to follow movement in longer takes taking advantage of the flexibility afforded by the improved zoom lens.

[130] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.
[131] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.
[132] Jon Fauer, ASC, "The history of ARRI in a century of cinema," *ARRI,* accessed 23 February 2021.
[133] Although the lens is marked as T2.8, in our conversations Richards refers to it as the T3 lens.

Unlike Tom Cowan who learned his craft filming documentaries for Film Australia, Malcolm Richards came from an advertising background, working under cinematographer Volk Mol, ACS, at Great Southern Films in Melbourne. Richards had also shared a house with Armstrong and shot many of her shorts and television commercials so the two were friends with a prior working process. He defines his cinematography style as soft lighting, with mixed sources of varying colour temperature. Like Cowan, he was interested in using Eastman 7247 for its responsiveness to different colour temperatures and its latitude, but he reads the possibilities of the stock in almost opposite ways to Cowan.

Image 2.27: Diana and window

Image 2.28: Diana and window again

In Images 2.27 and 2.28 we once again see the main characters posed against windows but with profoundly different results. *14's Good, 18's Better* uses window light for backlighting especially for the character of Diana. This is a brave choice given the blown out and uncorrected windows often seen in the rear of the frame. Uncorrected daylight spilling in through the window (Image 2.27) is registered by 7247 filmstock as bright blue. The image shows a mix of softer frontal tungsten and harder blue daylight, typical of Richards' method of lighting. There is a single warm tungsten light source in the room, mixed with the cool daylight coming in through the window. The right-hand side of the frame is allowed to go dark. The light coming in from behind provides modelling for the face and accentuates Diana's dark, curly hair.

Ansara writes that the new Kodak 100ASA film stock, along with a greater range of filters available to cinematographers 'enabled films to be shot with more consistent and artistically satisfying results.'[134] An example of Richards' imaginative and strongly aestheticized lighting set-up can be seen in Image 2.28 with strong rear and sidelight balanced by reflectors on the camera side of Diana's face. The key light is daylight coming through the window, with some bounced fill on the

[134] Martha Ansara, *The Shadowcatchers: A history of cinematography in Australia* (NSW: Austcine Publishing, 2012), 117-118.

shadow side of the face, using an 81EF filter to half correct the daylight.[135] The face is lit by the window key light on the left with the right side in shadow, providing shaping on the face and highlighting her big, curly hair. Shadows are both softer and motivated by the use of naturally occurring light. Diana is framed directly in front of the overexposed window, with a baby's cot in the background. The camera is slightly below eye level, which is also a departure from the handheld style of Cowan, who is more likely to keep the camera at the camera operator's eye level.

When asked about the stylistic choices he had made in filming the girls, Richards commented:

> I don't tend to think about it or didn't tend to think about it that much to the degree of saying, 'I light her like this.' It was more aesthetic. I think I just decided on the day, probably because I shot a lot of commercials that you tend to try to make people look better.[136]

This is an example of the cinematographer bringing his lighting skill and technique into the project rather than the project determining the look, though the contrast in lighting styles does take on a thematic role in differentiating this film and this period of the girls' lives, from that seen previously and in the films that follow.

Cowan is credited as one of the cinematographers on *14's Good, 18's Better* on the basis of the inclusion of the material from *Smokes and Lollies*, and at several points in the film, the opposing strategies of Richards and Cowan to provide a visual means of underlining the differences between the girls at 14, and then at 18. After a recap of images from the first film, Josie is introduced (Image 2.29) in a heavily backlit extreme close up with strong modelling on the side of her face and shoulder with reflectors providing a small amount of frontal fill. Compare this with Image 2.18 with its strong front lighting creating heavy shadows in the eye sockets. The introduction of Diana (Image 2.30), though an interior, is similar in using a daylight source behind the character with reflected light only filling out the strongly modelled face. Richards recalls lighting scenes such as this in the following way: 'The routine was fairly straight forward. It was generally either a blondie or a couple of blondies through the window through tracing paper.'[137] 14's rough, 18's (to quote Richards) looking better.

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[135] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.
[136] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.
[137] A Blondie is a 2k tungsten portable light. Malcolm Richards, See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.

Image 2:29: backlighting

Image 2.30: window lighting

Perhaps the strongest moment which allows us to contrast between the visual strategies in the first and second film comes with a cut from Diana washing dishes in the first film, to a similar though very different shot of her performing the same action four years later. Image 2.31 shows a harsh shadow thrown by a floor mounted Redhead light onto the wall, while Image 2.32 is replete with all of Richards' aestheticising techniques, positioning Diana beside a window to accentuate the warmer and more naturalistic contre-jour lighting.

Image 2.31: Tom Cowan

Image 2.32: Malcolm Richards

Positioning the women against windows becomes a visual motif that is repeated with greater amounts of elaboration as the film progresses. A sequence in which Diana makes the bed shows off the possibilities of this kind of staging of the characters and the prominent aesthetic effects that can be derived from it. The establishing wide shot (Image 2.33) picks up Diana almost silhouetted against a large picture window. The frame is dominated by the heavy blue tint of the daylight coming through the uncorrected windows and registering on the tungsten-balanced film stock. While the making of the bed has no major thematic or motivic import, there are a series of cuts to reverse angles to provide a contrast in colour within the room as well as foregrounding the shadows cast by the curtains (Image 2.34). As Diana moves around the room, these shadows play

over her figure in a very beautiful fashion. She moves between areas of light and shadow, which the stock is equally able to capture. As Richards would have it, this is an attempt to make people look better using the potentials of shadow and colour variation.

Image 2:33: Blue daylight

Image 2.34: The same room with mixed light sources

Another scene which is repeated with subtle variations involves Josie's family gathered around the dinner table (Images 2.35-38). Rather than using a more distant camera position, which can provide a wide field of view capturing all of the action in one frame (*Smokes and Lollies*), Richards places the camera in a closer, central position in the room, from which all the action can be covered through panning, tilting and re-framing (Images 2.35-37). Using a longer lens and panning around the room allows Richards to cover more of the background detail in the kitchen, incorporate ng the kitchen window and sink. Pans are used to either follow movement or to reveal detail within the scene and in this kitchen example, the camera is doing both. The final shot (Image 2.38) shows the camera has moved to a new position framing Kerry in profile. The light source is much softer with daylight through the window and a fill source inside the room. (According to Richards, this was probably a photo chroscenta globe in the light fitting above the table.[138]) This detail provides an example of the way in which a cinematographer has brought his own style and technique to create footage which seems homogenous due to the similar content but is visually quite different. These differences are immensely important to those who aspire to be cinematographers, as they reflect different aesthetic systems drawing on different technologies and techniques.

[138] Photo chroscentas are higher wattage light globes that cinematographers could use to replace domestic light bulbs. Author's conversation with cinematographer Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.




Image 2.35 Image 2.36 Image 2.37 Image 2.38

14's Good, 18's Better – Kerry's family kitchen

Differences *internal to the film* can also be significant. There is one scene in *14's Good, 18's Better* which stands out for being covered quite differently from other similar scenes in this film. Diana and Keith stand outside a courthouse (Image 2.39), discussing with their lawyer the legal proceedings Keith is about to face. Unusually, it is shot from a tripod, with a hard sunlight source. Diana's face is in heavy shadow. As they walk off into the courthouse, the camera zooms and tilts up to the coat of arms above the main entrance, betraying the rehearsed and pre-planned camera movement. Having watched this sequence several times, I was not prepared for the explanation provided by Richards when I asked him why this was shot so differently. Apparently, this was not filmed by Richards who was sick at the time, but by Kerry Brown, another Film Australia cinematographer. The use of light, the tripod and the positioning of the main character in shadow are all at odds with the composition and lighting style in the rest of this film. This not only indicates the distinctiveness of Richards' style but suggests that Armstrong was open to working differently with different cinematographers.

Image 2.39: Diana and Keith outside the court *14's Good, 18's Better.*

Another example of lighting at odds with the rest of the film is a series of interviews with close-ups of the girls that are intercut into a sequence. Diana and Kerry are framed in a very similar way, positioned in front of windows, looking right to left, in a close-up that slightly crops the top of the head and reaches to their shoulders. Diana's face (Image 2.40) appears as it does in the rest of the film, with a blown-out window behind, soft lighting and the shadow side of the face slightly filled. The window source provides a rim light (or kicker) defining the far edge of her face. The shadow side of the face is towards camera. In contrast, Kerry (Image 2.41) is positioned with a hard light source, an uncharacteristic eye-light and the side of her face towards camera is fully lit. There is a hard nose and chin shadow. Once again, Richards did not light or shoot this image (Kerry Brown also shot this). Despite common directorial choices relating to shot size, mise-en-scène, locations and characters, differences are apparent between the work of different cinematographers, demonstrated by the divergent approaches to lighting these two shots.

Image 2.40: Diana, DOP: Richards

Image 2.41: Kerry, DOP: Brown

Richards also employs a different approach from that used by Cowan when filming with 7247 filmstock at night. Both *Smokes and Lollies* and *14's Good, 18's Better* conclude with an exterior scene where there is little possibility of lighting the whole space. Cowan's approach is to film people opportunistically as they move through areas of light before disappearing into darkness (Images 2.23 and 2.24) whereas Richards (Image 2.42) films earlier in the day while there is still evening light in the sky and combines this with a small amount of lighting in the garden. Richards explains, 'You could get away with super-speeds even in those days and a 100 ASA film, it wasn't hard to get exposure.'[139] The 7247 filmstock is able to capture some colour and detail in the lighter areas of the frame while the under-exposed areas fall into black. The lightness of the sky and the lit area in the lower foreground provide balance to the frame. This is a further example of Richard's prior knowledge of the 7247 filmstock being used to advantage in the capture of observational

[139] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.

footage. Also worth noting in this shot is the Hills Hoist clothesline, silhouetted against the sky, a production design feature that is seen in later Armstrong-directed films such as *Bop Girl, High Tide* and *Women He's Undressed.*

Image 2.42: Evening backyard shoot with detail in the sky.

Richards summarises his lighting style quite simply. 'I just preferred the soft light. Mixed lighting type. And if you looked at any other films I shot, you'd probably see something similar.'[140] On careful viewing the style of Richards' cinematography, influenced heavily by his work filming television commercials and features, becomes more obvious.

Functional digital style - *Love, Lust & Lies* (2009) Paul Costello

Cinematographers' styles are inevitably influenced by the institutional backgrounds from which they emerge. I have situated Cowan in the stylistic debates within Film Australia, and Richards within his advertising experience. Whereas cinematographer Paul Costello works predominantly filming documentaries for broadcast on the ABC.[141] Stylistically, the cinematography of *Love, Lust & Lies* sits somewhere in between that of *Smokes and Lollies* and *14's Good, 18's Better.* It lacks

[140] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.
[141] For over 25 years Paul Costello has worked as a leading documentary cinematographer on award winning documentaries and television series both internationally and in Australia. Paul Costello, ACS, "Paul Costello ACS," *LinkedIn*.

the roughness of the former and the self-conscious aestheticising of the latter. Some critics have interpreted Costello's more self-effacing, functional style as a lack of style. In Craig Mathieson's review of the film he writes that: 'The shooting style is virtually deliberately bereft of style, but the nourishment comes from the ever growing band of participants.'[142] The statement reveals the critic's lack of understanding of the cinematographer's role and discounts their contribution to the film. The strength of this cinematography style is to capture busy-ness and multiple characters, across a range of activities and circumstances, using natural lighting and available locations. Richard Kuipers, writing in *Variety,* is more appreciative of the difficulties entailed by this functional style of cinematography, noting, 'Intuitive camera work by Paul Costello doesn't miss a thing.'[143] Armstrong describes the complexity of the role and the importance of having a suitable cinematographer for the project: 'The person who's got a visual head and the person who's sensing who's going to talk next and move the camera and get them in focus is very different from the person who's thinking, 'where's this going?'[144]

Almost three decades separate this film from the two previously discussed. There is an obvious difference in the use of digital video capture rather than 16mm film, and consequently a greater capacity for relying on available light for exposure. The earlier films were intended for analogue projection or television broadcast with the requirement for broadcast-safe blacks and whites, meaning the luminance (measured by IRE value and waveform monitor) could not be below 0% nor exceed 100%.[145] As Cowan explains, 'In 16mm days you had to take into account what range of brightness television could handle then. You had to conform to that limited range. With digital cameras you can see if the sensor is accommodating the exposure range and if the image is suitable and matches the scene.'[146] Richards expresses his preference for shooting with film as it was more suited to his preference for back lighting and filming in front of windows: 'I had to shoot with video cameras occasionally and you knew how horrible they were and unforgiving. So you had to light things to fill the shadows out, otherwise the pictures are awful.'[147]

At the outset of the series, the documentaries had a short running length, geared primarily to cinema or educational screenings. By 2009 the documentary production landscape had shifted so that television had become a primary funding source. Documentaries now typically enjoyed a short theatrical window followed relatively quickly by television screening. *Love, Lust & Lies* was shot for the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) using High Definition (HD) digital video cameras such as

[142] Craig Mathieson, "Love, Lust & Lies Review: Armstrong calls on old friends," *SBS,* 10 May 2010.
[143] Richard Kuipers "Love, Lust & Lies," *Variety,* 17 May 2010.
[144] Rochelle Siemienowicz, "Love, Lust & Lies: An interview with Gillian Armstrong," *AFI: Australian Film Institute,* May 2010, accessed through Internet Archive on 10 October 2021.
[145] IRE is the scale used by the Institute of Radio Engineers to measure and match cameras and television displays of black and white values.
[146] Tom Cowan, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 54.
[147] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.

the Panasonic P2, and including some use of a second camera, typically a Go Pro, a small, portable, digital camera that could be surface mounted. The second camera becomes obvious in the edit as shot-reverse shot and match cutting predominates in this later film. This film is also the first in the series to be shot in widescreen 16x9 and the older 16mm footage has been cropped to fit this aspect ratio. *Love, Lust & Lies*, was shot with a larger crew (Image 2.43), more handheld footage and mostly relying on available light as the digital sensor is sufficiently sensitive so that it often does not require lighting to obtain an exposure. For example, the Eastman Kodak stock used in the first two films is rated at 100ASA while the Panasonic camera has adjustable gain functions as well as high sensitivity modes with super gain.[148] This gain capacity could easily increase the working ASA to 2000 with an increase of 4 T-stops. Although the footage may be somewhat noisy (from excessive gain), the digital camera can film in almost any low-level lighting situation. Interviews are deliberately positioned in order to make use of the best angle for the available light. Rather than having to change magazines when the film runs out after 12 minutes, the cameras could roll for an hour or more. This makes it easier for the director to run interviews longer or record whole events from multiple angles. Composing for television typically requires a tighter frame size and includes fewer wide, establishing shots.

Image 2.43: crew shot, Costello and camera centre

Image 2.44: Costello operating the Panasonic P2 camera

Filming with the Panasonic P2 High Definition video camera (Image 2.44) required more careful attention to detail of the highlights of the image than when shooting with film. The video latitude is less, requiring the DOP to frame out skies and to screen or curtain windows when filming faces. This may be achieved by raising the camera height relative to the subject or adding a graduated filter for the sky. Altering the white balance is more quickly achieved by turning a dial rather than having to change filters or film stock. The Panasonic camera is lighter than the ARRI 16 BL and more easily handheld, can film in lower light situations and is suited to following spontaneous action in an observational style. According to author Christopher Lucas, the benefits and technical limitations of the early digital cameras, 'may seem examples of low-resolution realism' although the cinematographer also needs to show a 'thoughtful shooting plan and careful avoidance of certain

[148] Panasonic Corporation, "Products – Broadcast & ProAV: AJ-PX380: P2HD Shoulder-Mount Camcorder," *Panasonic.*

lighting situations' in order to emulate a more film-based style of cinematography.[149] Lucas refers here to the requirement to expose in order to retain detail in the black and white areas of the frame. The cinematographer is constantly assessing and correcting all of these variables, capturing the best image possible given the frequently compromised circumstances. Costello has captured the activity of the women, their partners, children and grandchildren, at home, work, school, performing and travelling, in sequences of shots which can be brought together in the edit in a logical and meaningful way, hence my use of the term functional in relation to his work.

The types of shots used in *Love, Lust & Lies* are very different from the other films. There are more characters and complex activity, with increased coverage or B-roll, more or longer night-time scenes, and low-light footage. Interviews and conversations are predominantly lit by available light sources in which people are positioned for three quarter lighting on their faces (Image 2:45). This provides modelling without strong highlights or heavy shadow. Sometimes a second camera is used which is noticeable in edited sequences such as the Bus Terminal scene. Oz Movies website makes claims for a technical improvement of image and sound quality in this film, resulting from the digital capture: 'The image for the film is the best of the lot, as is the sound - though the later footage does draw attention to the inadequacies of the early low budget efforts.'[150] This comment ignores the way that cinematographers make the most of what is available to them. It is advantageous to each film to contain a mix of cinematography styles to underline the temporal progression of the group of films.

Costello's functional style incorporates a variety of staging and framing techniques. Despite the availability of a second camera, in interview sequences the camera is more likely to be situated at a distance from the characters and pan between them (Image 2.45). The zoom is frequently used to get closer without the need to change the camera position (Image 2.46). Some elements of the rough style remain with the edit containing lots of jump cuts, zooms and lens re-positions. The camera moves less and the style is more conservative, with less handheld footage and more staged interviews, despite the increased ability to move afforded by newer, lighter and more versatile equipment. (The ARRI 16 BL with a zoom lens and magazine weighs about 7.5kg while the Panasonic P2 and lens weighs around 3.7 kg) The camera is often positioned slightly below the eye-level for interviews (Image 2:45). This is counter to Armstrong's previously established preference for the camera being slightly above eye-level for women.

[149] Christopher Lucas, "The modern entertainment marketplace, 2000-present," in *Cinematography,* edited by Patrick Keating (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014), 144.
[150] "Love, Lust & Lies," *Oz Movies,* accessed 30 November 2021 from the 'Key details: Availability' section. (no author)

Image 2.45: Three shot of the women, with Josie nearer to camera and Kerry receding slightly. The couch is pulled out from the wall to create depth and separation.

Image 2.46: closer shot from the same camera position

Three-shots are usually staged on couches/seats with the camera positioned at a gently oblique angle, rather than directly front-on. George Turner, cinematographer on the *Seven Up!* series, explains the importance of filming these types of tableaux against background with depth. 'I like to film into corners -- not against a flat wall, which isn't interesting.'[151] Image 2.45 places Josie who is the key character in that scene nearer camera and Kerry further away, emphasising the nearest person while containing a fuller shot of the furthest person. The positioning of the women in front of a window is also a visual motif that I have identified throughout the series and throughout the body of Armstrong-directed films. The use of backlight from the window as the key light source and is similar to the style prominent in Richards' cinematography for *14's Good, 18's Better*. The staging of the characters makes use of the combination of backlight, providing depth cues, and side light providing modelling on the faces.

[151] George Jesse Turner, "Behind the Lens: From '7 to 56 UP,'" *CreativeCOW,* 2012, accessed 30 January 2019. Please note: Site no longer accessible.

Variety, rather than a commitment to a single set of techniques, is at the heart of the functional style. Costello is not committed to a single camera position or lighting style. *Love Lust and Lies* also introduces an L-shape for two shots which allows for shot/reverse-shot cutting between close-ups (Images 2.47 and 2.48). One person is sitting facing camera speaking to the other person who appears in profile. There is then a cut to the other L position. Rather than panning between faces, as Richards did in *14's Good 18's Better*, the camera moves to a different position and the editor cuts between the two. This is the only film in the series to employ this technique. In the example below, the primary shot (image 2.47) positions Josie in profile, with flat lighting, looking across the frame to Armstrong, while her husband is facing the camera and lit from side on. The camera is in close with a wide lens. With plenty of available light and an aperture small enough for depth, the frame and focus are deep enough to show detail of the kitchen behind them. The camera is then moved to the second position (image 2.48) where the main character now faces the camera (and the light source). The window behind Josie is blown out with detail lost (clipping) in the whites. Both perspectives have space behind the subjects, creating depth in the frame and communicating detail about the family home. Although this sequence appears to be filmed with two cameras, the shots only inter cut once, leaving me to believe it was actually the one camera moved to a second position.

Image 2.47: The first camera position with Josie in profile

Image 2.48: The second L camera position with Josie facing camera

Throughout the series, the camera is generally precisely placed at the subject's eye level or just below with eye-lines directed across the frame. There are many examples of tight close-ups with the chin breaching the bottom of frame, a compositional choice typically avoided by cinematographers, although also seen later in *Oscar and Lucinda* (DOP Simpson). Because the film includes footage spanning many years, the faces change over time and appear almost as new characters with the audience having to re-learn who they are. As time passes, there are more faces (old and new versions). There are tight close-ups, typical of all Armstrong-directed films, held for longer than in previous episodes and assisting the viewer to recognise the face. A close-up of Diana speaking with Armstrong (Image 2.49), is filmed using a long lens with a large aperture for shallow depth of field, creating a soft background. Diana has been cleverly positioned for a soft eye-light, with a single key-light source which seems to come from the kitchen window to the off-screen side of her. In this scene the foreground is lit with an artificial fill source in order to bring the interior exposure up to match the brightness level of the window source. The colour temperature of the window daylight and the artificial light source are matched and balanced to read as white. This is a very different approach from that used by Richards, shooting on film with greater exposure latitude and a decision to combine different colour temperatures (see image 2.28).

Image 2.49: Diana speaks to Armstrong.

As with the other films, movement is included through the use of travelling shots. However, smaller cameras, a higher budget and more available data storage allows for the higher shooting ratio that Richards identified in Armstrong's work. A sequence following Josie and her grandchildren travelling with their caravan is filmed from multiple angles and positions including inside and outside the car and from several roadside locations. This suggests the use of a second camera filming at locations further along the journey. Filming from cars creates problems for

cinematographers to solve, with a dark interior and very bright exterior that need to be balanced. A car mount is used to film from the bonnet into the car, possibly a Go Pro (Image 2.52), whereas in *14's Good, 18's Better* the camera filmed from a high-hat in the back of another vehicle. Richards has chosen to expose in favour of the exterior retaining detail in the sky (Image 2.50) while Costello, framing the characters more tightly (Image 2.52), has chosen to expose for the interior retaining detail on the faces.

Image 2:50 *14's Good, 18's Better* car exterior

Image 2:51 car interior - Josie

Images 2.52: Exterior car with camera mount

Image 2.53: Interior car - Josie

The on-screen presence of Armstrong in the Adelaide Girls series becomes more prevalent over time. In previous films, Armstrong's voice can be heard, both asking questions and in conversation with the girls. In this film, Armstrong is included visually, in conversation with the women. In the example below (Images 2:54 and 2:55), the camera starts wider, handheld, and then tracks (walks) in towards the subject as they speak, the camera angle favouring Diana and settling in an almost over-shoulder position. They are positioned in shade while backlit by the sun with some reflected light on their faces. The action is staged with the family home in the background. The complex tasks the cinematographer is combining here include: keeping the camera steady while walking, holding the camera at eye level, minimising over-exposed highlights in the background, maintaining the framing of the house, avoiding reflections in the windows, adjusting focus while moving closer and ending in the right place for the over-shoulder frame. And don't stuff it up

because it is documentary and probably can't be repeated. As the director is included in the frame, she is unable to watch the scene unfold, placing the trust and responsibility for getting the shot in the hands of the cinematographer. Film reviewers should be in awe of this complex cinematography. Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton reviewed the film for the ABC, giving it four stars each appreciating that it 'is beautifully shot and assembled.'[152]

Image 2.54: Diana and Gillian speaking

Image 2.55: Handheld, the camera moves in closer

The drive-by family portraits are filmed differently in *Love, Lust & Lies* (Images 2.8, 2.9 and 2.56). The camera is positioned low, looking up to the characters and their houses. The sky behind them is blown out due to the lack of detail in the over-exposed highlights that the HD video format cannot record. As well as capturing larger family groups, the images have increased depth, colour and saturation and the camera comes to a halt in front of the group. The movement which has carried through the whole series, ends with these portraits.

Image 2.56: Drive-by portrait, Diana's family.

[152] Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton, "At the Movies with Margaret and David - Love, Lust & Lies," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC),* 2010, accessed 10 October 2021. Please note: The ABC have archived sections of their website as a result, this content is no longer accessible.

Night shooting features prominently, allowing for a comparison to be made between the different approaches Cowan, Richards and Costello. The capacity for filming in low light differs greatly depending on the type of camera used. Although I'm unsure which Panasonic P2 model was used to shoot this film, the PsHD AJ-PX380G was available at that time and the specifications listed include a High Sensitivity mode with several gain options for filming in low light situations.[153] A night scene showing Josie at work driving buses (Images 2.57 and 2.58) was filmed using lighting provided by the bus itself. Costello makes use of the white buses in the background to frame Josie with separation between the front and rear of the shot. In the second shot (Image 2.58) Josie is lit by the existing cabin light as can be seen from another shot from the rear of the bus. There is a mix of light sources and colour temperatures and, as with the 7247 stock, the digital camera is able to cope with the disparity.

Image 2.57: Filming at night

Image 2.58: Bus interior

Along the way, Josie stops to make a phone call and is seen standing beneath a streetlight, motivating the use of a key light on her face, with a telephone box and streetlights providing a background. Although the sky appears black, there is a lot more detail and depth to the shots than those by Cowan in *Smokes and Lollies.* There are three different approaches used by the different cinematographers to film at night. Cowan's solution is using small shards of light to break up the severely underexposed darkness. Richards uses film stock latitude, super-speed lenses and detail in the sky for an aesthetically pleasing silhouettes and background highlights. Costello uses enough gain on the camera to show detail in the character as well as a foreground light source with bokeh as the visual highlight.

Love, Lust & Lies is the most recent, and possibly final, iteration in the series. The latter three projects are feature length while the earlier two are short form documentaries. *Love, Lust & Lies* is a hybrid of all the films, combing footage acquired over four decades, copying, combining and transforming the styles of all the cinematographers who worked on them. The change in

[153] Panasonic Corporation, "Products – Broadcast & ProAV: AJ-PX380: P2HD Shoulder-Mount Camcorder," *Panasonic.*

technology (itself influenced by changing industrial structures) between the first and last films also heavily influences the final outcomes but of course, the job of the cinematographer involves coming to terms with available and emerging technologies. The first film *Smokes and Lollies* was shot using a single 16mm ARRI BL camera with separate sound recorded on a Nagra. The final film was shot on a Panasonic P2 HD video camera, with a second camera used in some sequences. Digital cameras make it possible to work very quickly using mainly available light. Older footage is represented at the start and end of the film through a wide screen television with the 4:3 images cropped to fit. Armstrong said that this was in part due to the older rushes being lost and the only available footage was the edited versions of the film, which are of a lower resolution. By screening it on a television, this was less noticeable.[154] The style of cinematography in *Love, Lust & Lies* represents a hybrid version that is flexible enough to incorporate all the characters and locations previously established, that can be edited alongside material shot by a variety of cinematographers and yet fulfils the requirements of the director. These different styles assist the audience in discerning the different ages of the women and time periods of filming. This technique of combining different types of footage, evident in *Love, Lust & Lies*, is seen in a flamboyantly exaggerated fashion in later Armstrong documentaries *Unfolding Florence* and *Women He's Undressed*.

Conclusion

Although the films are tied together as a unified series, with similar characters, locations and content, the skills and visual style of each cinematographer result in a subtly different mode of practice expressed in different methods of lighting and composing images. Philip Cowan writes, 'The relationship between the director and the director of photography (DOP) is a difficult one to define, and the balance of creativity and collaboration between these roles varies from partnership to partnership, film to film.'[155] The differences within and between each version of the Adelaide Girls films represent the unique contribution and cinematographic practice that the different cinematographers contribute to the collaboration with Armstrong the director.

Erika Addis recently wrote to me describing the difficulty of teaching documentary camera skills to students at Griffith Film School, partly due to their lack of interest in learning about observational documentary. She writes, 'Most students believe you just need to shoot some interviews and some B-roll, and presto, you're done, it's in the bag. I think that's a YouTube virus.'[156] Addis in part refers to the complex systems and knowledge required to film something that on the surface seems very simple to do but on closer look is actually much more complicated.

[154] From authors notes (in attendance): Keynote address by Gillian Armstrong at 2010 *Australian International Documentary Conference (AIDC)*, held at Hilton Hotel, Adelaide, March 2010.
[155] Phillip Cowan, "Underexposed: The neglected art of the cinematographer," *Journal of Media Practice* 13, no. 1 (2012): 75-96.
[156] Helen Carter, email to Erika Addis, "Adelaide woman OBDoc shooter," 12 August 2021.

I have worked on documentaries where the script is written at the outset and my task as cinematographer is to create a shot list and set of visual strategies. All funding bodies require a script before they will contribute money to a project. Armstrong articulates the value that the different cinematographers have brought to the series: 'I'm a complete control freak. And you're in the hands of a cinematographer who has to grab stuff as it's happening.'[157] Working spontaneously to cover the action and capture detail as it unfolds forces the cinematographer to think on their feet, drawing on prior experience and knowledge and using many camera operating and lighting techniques.

This case study of three Armstrong-directed documentaries is useful because it incorporates multiple cinematographic contributors who are each tasked with capturing recurring characters and themes and comparisons can be made about the different approaches cinematographers may use when filming in similar circumstances. This film-series provides unique and solid evidence of the cinematographer's unique contribution.

[157] Bilge Ebiri, "Gillian Armstrong: One of our great directors, on the genius of costumers," *The Village Voice,* 17 August 2016.

Chapter Three

Prominent cinematography (or conspicuously artistic): Russell Boyd ACS, ASC

> We had to set up such a powerful mood that the audience would not want a conventional 'the butler did it' ending. And to do that I needed Russell and his bag of tricks.
>
> Peter Weir[158]

The previous chapter uses the controls of director and genre (Armstrong and the observational documentary) to demonstrate that films which might be otherwise taken as similar, though with different cinematographers, can look very different—and thus to isolate and prioritise the aesthetic contribution of the cinematographer. We have seen Armstrong indicate that observational documentary necessitated a greater reliance on the camera operator, given the decreased ability to plan the action in advance. This Chapter shifts emphasis to narrative fiction features, primarily drawing comparisons between Armstrong's collaborations with cinematographers Russell Boyd and Geoffrey Simpson. Armstrong's accession to feature film direction came with 1979's *My Brilliant Career*, but before embarking on an analysis of this film, it is useful to step away from Armstrong as my auteurial control and replace her briefly with genre, or more precisely film cycle.

Dermody and Jacka famously identified a cycle of tastefully made period films, which they labelled the 'Australian Film Commission (AFC) genre' made in the period approximately from 1973 to 1987. The cycle had its first major success with *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) which established Russell Boyd as the pre-eminent cinematographer of the Australian film renaissance and goes on to include *My Brilliant Career* (the 'jewel in the crown of the worthy period-film cycle'[159]) and *The Getting of Wisdom* (1977) both of which featured Don McAlpine as cinematographer. The self-consciously artistic style of these movies reflects an attitude attributed by Darmody and Jacka to the AFC at the time, that government-subsidised Australian cinema should move away from ocker comedies to more respectable and internationally-acceptable genres.[160] The period film genre is important to Australian cinematography because an emphasis on visual style was one way of elevating the prestige of Australian films.

Picnic at Hanging Rock was vital in both defining this genre and establishing Boyd as a leading cinematographer of the Australian film renaissance. Dermody and Jacka identify *Picnic* as 'full-

[158] Jean Oppenheimer, "Russell Boyd, ASC, ACS: Vision Accomplished," *American Cinematographer* 99, no. 2 (February 2018): 54-61.
[159] Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a national cinema, vol. 2* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 135.
[160] Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a national cinema vol. 2* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 131.

blown art-movie, lingering over the effects of sunlight, flesh-tones and lace.' The artistic considerations encompassed in this film are identified not by narrative or theme, but by a sumptuous visual style. Boyd's depiction of landscape and light in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* established a cinema of quality with visual merit that has remained an important component of Australian cinematography. Critic Susan Tavernetti noted that Boyd 'earned lavish praise for his conspicuously artistic photography in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, a 'cameraman's picture' with a lyrical style.'[161] Australian cinematographers in the 70s and 80s were celebrated for their work filming both exteriors and landscapes and praised for their painterly style. One typical overview notes that 'Great Aussie cinematographers like Dean Semler and Russell Boyd made glorious paintings with available light.'[162] Geoff Burton ACS writes of his Australian peers, 'it is our skills in photographing the natural environment, the landscape, that are the most regularly and consistently commented upon and written about in overseas festivals, conferences and publications.'[163] Boyd, more than any other Australian cinematographer brought prestige to whatever film he worked on in the early years of the feature film renaissance. He was more likely than any other cinematographer to be referenced by critics and the most likely to be linked to painters.

Given the importance of Boyd to Armstrong's career, it is important to take a short detour through this work before examining his subsequent collaborations with Armstrong. Boyd was seen as being at the forefront of creating a distinctively Australian cinematographic aesthetic, and he encouraged the comparison of his work to Australian Impressionist painting: 'I was conscious of the period and the setting and therefore attempted to emulate an impressionistic look to the visuals.'[164] Dermody and Jacka write about the AFC genre films in the following terms: 'The cinematography is dedicated to the glories of Australian light, landform and vegetation, often with clear traces of a romantic, even charm-school, Australian post-impressionism. The approach of the camera is functional rather than expressive.'[165] There is a tension in this description between the aesthetic and functional role of cinematography in these films. On one hand they point to the need to draw attention to the aestheticism of the location, and the images as being self-consciously painterly. At the same time these images should be 'functional,' that is, they should not intrude on the primacy of narrative. Roger Deakins comments on this dichotomy when he writes that 'people confuse pretty with good cinematography.'[166] Martha Ansara in *Shadowcatchers* also emphasises functionality in reference to *Picnic*: 'his cinematography never calls attention to itself, never

[161] Susan Tavernetti, "Russell Boyd – Writer," *Film Reference,* updated 2018, accessed 24 May 2022.
[162] Phil De Semlyen, Ian Freer and Ally Wybrew, "Movie moments that defined cinema: The Australian new wave," *Empire Online,* 8 August 2016.
[163] Geoff Burton, ACS, ASC, OAM, "Filming the country of lost children by Geoff Burton ACS," *Australian Cinematographer* 60 (December 2013): 21.
[164] Russell Boyd, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 10.
[165] Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a national cinema, vol 2* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 34.
[166] Altercine, "Roger Deakins and his philosophy on cinematography (and why it shouldn't stand out)," *No Film School,* 29 January 2021.

imposes, and he is capable of visual restraint and functionality.'[167] However Ansara also points out, that through *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Boyd becomes associated with 'quality' Australian filmmaking.[168] The fact that these writers feel it necessary to make this point indicates the prominence of the cinematography, though it does little to help with an analysis of the specific techniques employed by Boyd.

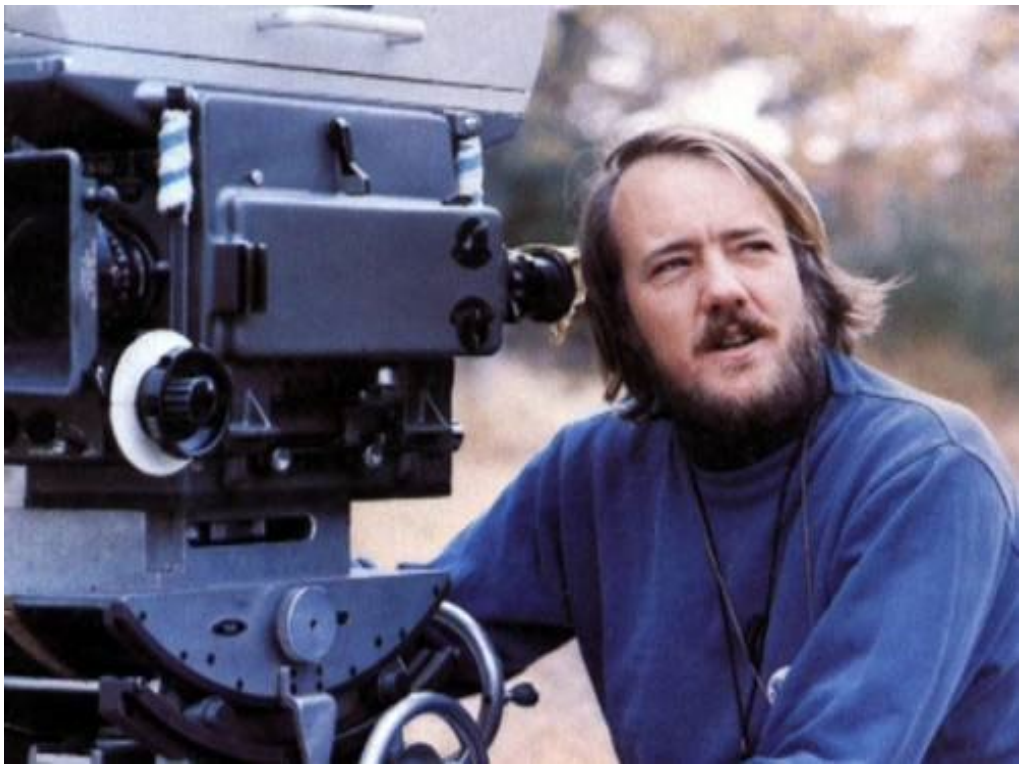

Image 3.1: Russell Boyd operating the camera *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) [169]

Russell Boyd, AO, ACS, ASC is a veteran of Australian cinema, shooting numerous feature and television productions and winning many significant awards including an Academy Award for Best Cinematography, three AFI awards and three major ACS awards. Boyd's body of work includes many commercials, the *Crocodile Dundee* films and cinema advertising campaigns, and Hollywood films including *White Men Can't Jump, Liar Liar, Dr. Dolittle* and *Master and Commander.* In 2021 he became an Officer in the Order of Australia, 'for distinguished service to the visual arts as a cinematographer of Australian feature films and television productions.'[170] His most longstanding collaborations are with Gillian Armstrong and Peter Weir. Boyd demonstrates both a technical and aesthetic interest in cinematography. Throughout his career he has shown a preference for working with Panavision cameras as his primary artistic tool. The camera photographed in Image

[167] Martha Ansara, *The Shadowcatchers: A history of cinematography in Australia* (NSW: Austcine Publishing, 2012), 154.
[168] Martha Ansara, *The Shadowcatchers: A history of cinematography in Australia* (NSW: Austcine Publishing, 2012), 154.
[169] When I asked Boyd about the origin of this photo he replied, 'I hadn't seen this photo before. What a dashing young hippie looking bloke that Boyd was!' "Star Struck: Galleries," *Oz Movies,* accessed 30 June 2020.
[170] "Queen's Birthday 2021 Honours List," *Government House, Canberra,* 14 June 2021.

3.1 is a Panavision Silent Reflex (PVSR), a Mitchell studio camera, converted for reflex (viewing through the lens via a mirror) and blimped (put in a sound-proof housing) to make it silent so that dialogue could be cleanly recorded. Boyd comments that the camera was large and heavy, 'weighing as much as a battleship.'[171] On the camera is a wide-angle prime lens, primarily used for filming landscapes. A smaller ARRIflex 35 BL was carried up to the summit of Hanging Rock for exterior scenes.[172] The Panavision camera is supported by an equally heavy Worrall Head, operated by gears, so that the camera operator rotates the wheels for pan and tilt. Moving this equipment around a film set requires a team of grips and camera assistants. Producer Tim Sanders (*Lord of the Rings*) comments on Boyd's insistence on working with these cameras: 'Russell is a Panavision man and Panavision Gold back when that was the camera of the day and Platinum later on when it was the day. He was very keen for the best of the best. And that certainly came at a cost.'[173] For Boyd, the Panavision camera is an essential artistic tool, a necessary item in his bag of tricks that Weir and others valued so highly.

A Painterly Picnic

The cinematography in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is the star of the film. From the opening scenes the audience is made aware of artistic choices and cinematography techniques including lighting, use of colour and connection to landscape, rather than character-centred and dialogue-driven drama. Geoff Burton observes that Australian landscape cinematographers are able to 'represent the landscape as an active participant, even a character, within the story-telling on the film.'[174] Russell Boyd has a distinctive set of concerns and visual cues, that are based upon luminance (quantity and quality of light and the way in which light falls upon objects) and his understanding of Australian impressionism. In filming *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Boyd composes images not subordinated to character or narrative functionality but ascribed to the landscape in its own right. Roger Ebert describes the film as 'free of plot, lacking any final explanation, it exists as an experience.'[175] The cinematography is at the forefront of the film, where foregrounding the play of light is frequently more important than framing objects or people. Shallow depth of field, long lenses, filming through nets and soft foregrounds, striking compositions and a variety of frame rates characterise the cinematography, all of which create shots with glowing highlights, over-exposure and lens flare. This is in keeping with Boyd's interest in painterly image making, referencing a variety of visual art movements, applied in different ways to different scenes.

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[171] Russell Boyd, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 10.
[172] Russell Boyd, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 10.
[173] Author's interview with Producer Tim Sanders, recorded 26 February 2020. See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 106.
[174] Geoff Burton, ACS, "Filming the country of lost children by Geoff Burton ACS," *Australian Cinematographer* 60 (December 2013).
[175] Roger Ebert, "'Picnic at Hanging Rock,'" *Roger Ebert,* 2 August 1998.

Interviews with Boyd contain many references to visual artists, especially painters and photographers and Boyd specifically relates his own practice of filming and lighting exteriors to that of the Heidelberg painting camps of the late 1880s to early 1890s. Working outdoors, *en plein air*, Impressionist painters from Melbourne (such as Streeton, Condor, Roberts, McCubbin) sought to capture the colour of light and shadow. The details were created by brush strokes of different textures and hues, to resemble the reflected and moving light in the landscape. These artists were interested in creating an evanescent impression rather than a sharply-defined photographic replica of their subjects. *Picnic*, set in 1900, around the same time as the Impressionist period, is filmed with a similar emphasis on the way in which light falls on objects and it employs several similar techniques.

Image 3.2: *Lost* (1907) Fredrick McCubbin.

Fredrick McCubbin's *Lost* (Image 3.2) illustrates techniques that Boyd is claiming as his inspiration. Relying on particular areas of natural light within the frame, *Lost* provides an example of the painterly technique being more prominent than the human subject. The composition is mostly trees and bushland, where the human figure is seen as a small compositional element in the landscape, used or positioned to collect light. The subject's face is turned away from the viewer, directing our attention towards the surrounding bushland. Darker tones around the perimeter create a natural vignette, with smoke used to brighten the centre. Standing very close to this work, the brush strokes obfuscate the detail and create an impression of leaves and branches. The hues are predominantly browns and greens while the white shirt reflects a golden shaft of light across it. The sky is obscured by trees and bushland and there is no obvious horizon. Similarly, the composition

in *Picnic* (Image 3.3) exemplifies the emphasis on positioning actors as compositional elements in the perfect time-of-day for light, with a balance of foreground, mid-ground and background. The characters are highlighted by a shaft of golden sunlight framed by the darker, brown and green tones of the forest. Light is subtly flaring off the umbrella in the centre of frame to create the look of mist or dust, resembling the white shirt, which is the focus of McCubbin's *Lost*. The sky is just visible in the back of the frame, but the horizon is hidden by trees and mountain. Weir explains, 'Russell is very specific about the best time to shoot a scene.'[176] The filming schedule was meticulously planned to capture this moment of light and shadow, and the image is a striking example of the adaptation of Australian impressionism. The use of sunlight as a backlight source requires the correct scheduling of this shot, mirroring the practice of Impressionists who restricted their painting to certain hours of the day, returning over several days to complete their work. Best Boy Trevor Toune reflects they were only able to film exteriors for 2-3 hours per day in order to maximise the specific lighting conditions to achieve the soft, warm look.[177]

Image 3.3: *Picnic at Hanging Rock* digitally restored

In a practice similar to the Heidelberg School painters, Boyd makes prominent his perception of sunlight. Aurthur Streeton wrote in a letter to Tom Roberts, 'I fancy large canvasses all glowing and moving in the happy light, and others bright decorative and chalky and expressive.'[178] The use of white costumes and dresses, with characters positioned in areas of sunlight is a device also used by Roberts (Image 3.4) to maximise the capture of natural light. Examples of this use of emphasised light on white dresses can be seen in many works by Streeton, McCubbin and Roberts and is what Weir and Boyd are particularly interested in. Image 3.5 from *Picnic at Hanging*

[176] Jean Oppenheimer, "Russell Boyd, ASC, ACS: Vision Accomplished," *American Cinematographer* 99, no. 2 (2018): 54-61.
[177] Trevor Toune, *Beyond the Lights: The true and fascinating journey of a technician's life in the Australian film and television industry* (South Australia: Araluen Books, 2006), 131.
[178] "Not-so-lasting impressions of Heidelberg School," *The Age,* 4 January 2004.

Rock, particularly exemplifies this glowing light with white, chalky highlights on dresses flaring through the netting on the lens. ('For front light, I would just use a big white sheet that created virtually no shadows and had a soft, rounded effect on people's faces.' [179]) Characters are obscured in the same way the Impressionist painters obscure detail with brush strokes. Colour is used to draw attention to itself. The whites of the dresses have a golden hue and faces are softened, similar in style to white dresses seen in Impressionist paintings. The stylisation of colour is a practice seen later in the collaborations with Armstrong.

Image 3.4: *Summer Morning Tiff*, Tom Roberts, 1886

Image 3.5: Boyd, *Picnic at Hanging Rock,* canvasses all glowing

Although there are some interior night scenes in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, it is largely filmed during the day, comprising mostly exterior shots lit, by necessity, using sunlight off reflector boards. Sail cloths, scrims and large white sheets were also used to soften and diffuse light sources and shadows, as none of these solutions required an external power source. Boyd describes the difficulty of filming exterior scenes with intermittent sunshine and cloud, where the lighting must match.[180]

To achieve what Streeton called happy light, the film was shot with a gold net (wedding veil fabric) over the lens to soften the light being reflected back from the subject and passing through to the film. The net has the effect of warming and breaking up the image drawing attention to its surface. It also softens the image, breaks up the harsh natural sunlight and enhances the highlights or image peaks to create this happy light. Boyd says, 'it was the perfect picture to use that sort of look

[179] Jean Oppenheimer, "Russell Boyd, ASC, ACS: Vision Accomplished," *American Cinematographer* 99, no. 2 (2018): 54-61.
[180] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 79.

on.'[181] The net itself physically diffracts the usual path of photons onto film, reducing the contrast by refracting light into the darker areas of the frame and adding an overall warmth to the image. Boyd describes the added complexity of filming with the netting which required him to 'open the lens right up' in order to avoid photographing the cross-hatching caused by the gauze net, consequently reducing the depth of field and making the focus pulling more critical.[182] This was achieved using heavy Neutral Density (ND) filtration to counter the bright sunlight.

Boyd references the photography of David Hamilton (Image 3.6), for the early opening shots of girls in their dormitories.[183] In his emails to me Boyd writes, 'Hamilton's work was my influence a little, but the style was often used by cinematographers.'[184] Hamilton's soft-focus technique was known as the Hamilton Blur, a style also influenced by impressionism. Hamilton's photography has obvious links to the content of *Picnic*, both in its application to images of young women and in its creation of images that appear more as memories or dreams. Rather than using a net to break up the image, Hamilton uses lens flare (internal reflections in the lens) and film grain to break up and change the surface of image, thereby emphasising the light on the subject, as demonstrated in images 3.6 and 3.7. Hamilton takes an established convention (or cliché) of diffused images of women to extremes. As with *Picnic*, these photographs emphasise a golden hue and warm colour palette.

Image 3.6 and 3.7, David Hamilton photographs (unknown titles) included as references in Boyd's emails to me.[185]

[181] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 79.
[182] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 80.
[183] Russell Boyd, ACS, ASC, OAM, "Director of photography Russell Boyd discusses 'Picnic at Hanging Rock – Interview by Martha Ansara,'" NFSA ID: 227563, 1978, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia.*
[184] Russell Boyd, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 10.
[185] David Hamilton, untitled photographs, date unknown, courtesy of David Hamilton via email with author. David Hamilton and Alain Robbe-Grillet, "*Dreams of a Young Girl* (New York City: William Morrow & Company, 1971).

Both Hamilton and Boyd use soft lighting techniques such as reflected, flared and diffused light sources, as well as golden light, in an obvious and prominent way. Artistically, Boyd sits between photographers such as Hamilton and painters such as McCubbin, where light is the hero, often more prominent than narrative or realistic detail. This a key way to read *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Image 3.8: *Crocodile Dundee*, foreground foliage

Boyd's cinematography is particularly concerned with backlit subjects, another technique that he attributes to the Impressionists. He explains, 'I started to lean toward backlighting… which, incidentally, was the way Impressionist artists lit their paintings.'[186] Boyd's preference for backlight is consistent throughout his career although the use of colour and shadow varies across films, reflecting other art genres, particularly the Baroque style of Rembrandt. Backlighting provides three-dimensional modelling of shapes and faces, separation of the subject from the background and depth cues within the frame. Images 3.9 and 3.10 from *Picnic* demonstrate the use of backlighting in both wide and closer framings, a use of light that is consistent throughout the entire film. Boyd shows a preference for soft foreground layers, also seen in *Crocodile Dundee* (Image 3.8), where branches and leaves, blurry in the foreground, partially obstruct the view of characters. Susan Tavernetti notes that to achieve this look Boyd used 'longer focal-length lenses to capture them in the middle-ground, surrounded by wildflowers and grass rendered out of focus in the foreground and background planes'.[187] This soft foreground is an example of bokeh where out-of-focus highlights form tiny circles of light fragments that move and change as the lens and subject move.

[186] Jean Oppenheimer, "Russell Boyd, ASC, ACS: Vision Accomplished," *American Cinematographer* 99, no. 2 (2018): 54-61.
[187] Susan Tavernetti, "Biographies: Russell Boyd," *International Dictionary of Filmmakers,* last updated 23 May 2018, accessed 23 May 2022.

Image 3.9: Out of focus foreground ferns in *Picnic*

Image 3.10: *Picnic*, soft foreground

Another striking example of the use of backlight for separation between the character and the background can be seen in Image 3:11. Direct sunlight provides a rim or outline around Miranda's hair and shoulders, making her stand out from the darker background. Light falls on the side of her nose, mouth and chin, giving prominence to facial features. The shadows and highlights are very soft as the sunlight is filtered through a sail cloth. The foreground rocks are in heavy shadow, out of focus, and frame the character within the landscape. This is an example of very soft lighting on the face with exterior lighting techniques, backlit against a dark, rocky backdrop. The choice to position the actor two-thirds across the frame introduces large areas of negative space that further isolate the character. The viewer's eye is directed quickly across the frame, toward the brightly-lit subject, as a means to draw attention to the subject, without the need for a close-up. The cinematographer is using the position of the sun, at the particular time of day, to create this effect. The high contrast film frame contains shadow area, with under-exposed areas in the rock and over-exposed whites in the costumes. The rocks around the edge of frame are contrasted with the white dresses near the centre of frame, creating the appearance of a vignette.

Image 3.11: *Picnic* example of negative space, backlight and deep shadows.

The cinematography makes prominent and isolates the character against the landscape. This use of shadow and darkness is a very different look from the glowing white impressionist influence. This image is unconventional and draws attention to itself due to the large areas of darkness. Rather than choosing a close-up, use of light and shadow is an alternative way to isolate a character within a scene or landscape. In *Picnic*, Boyd employs a variety of unconventional means to draw attention to and away from characters and to signal a thematic change in the story. This is part of the Boyd's 'bag of tricks' on which Weir was so reliant.

Best Boy Trevor Toune's memoir *Beyond the Lights* describes the method used for lighting close-ups of faces, where he would 'scrim the sun and bounce light from my white poly reflector to softly illuminate their eyes and to eliminate any nose and unwanted shadows.'[188] This technique was used to light Image 3.11 which shows very soft shadows on Miranda's face with a gentle three quarter back light on the side of her chin. Toune's description suggests his feeling of ownership of the method and the chapter in his memoir devoted to *Picnic* details his personal contribution to the lighting and cinematography as well as his close working relationship with Boyd to achieve the various looks they were after.

Image 3.12: *Picnic* interior lighting of faces

The self-consciously prominent cinematography of *Picnic* can also be seen in the interior scenes, which follow Boyd's preference for backlighting with gentle fill added to the shadow areas. An example of this is a 2-shot with characters positioned beside an interior window, (Image 3.12) with the use of soft, side lighting on the girls' faces. There is a very soft, subtle eye light, achieved

[188] Trevor Toune, *Beyond the Lights: The true and fascinating journey of a technician's life in the Australian film and television industry* (South Australia: Araluen Books, 2006), 131.

through a mix of daylight and artificial light, illustrating Boyd's continued preference for backlighting. The face on the left is defined by the line of light extending from her forehead to the base of her neck, separating her from the dark wall behind. According to Boyd, 'The lighting technique is known as 'window light' and was sometimes natural or enhanced by lighting from outside.'[189] There is a soft fill light adjacent to the camera with daylight supplementing the exposure. This style of lighting and filming faces can be seen in many other films shot by Boyd particularly in *High Tide* and *Mrs Soffel*. The use of window light here is similar in style to that of Vermeer (for example *The Milkmaid* c 1660) who relied mostly on a single source of window light, at right angles (side on) to the subject, creating large highlights in the eyes and softly illuminating the face turned towards the window. For Boyd (as with Malcolm Richards in Chapter Two) the shadow side of the face is towards the camera to emphasise modelling. The drama in this shot is derived from the play of light across faces as much from the characters. Boyd claimed that:

> If I have a style at all it is not in the selection of camera but in the lighting; you would have to call it naturalistic. I hate seeing anything on film where there is an obvious light being used to light the scene. I like to keep it as natural and as part of the environment as possible.[190]

This comment may seem to contradict the previous discussion but here Boyd refers to the use of natural light in combination with artificial light which is integrated in such a way that they are indistinguishable from each other so that the light source appears naturalistic. However, the shot itself still stands out because of the way in which the lighting emphasises modelling of the face and separation from the background, in addition to the combination of areas of deep shadow. The challenge is to be both naturalistic and aesthetically prominent at the same time. Boyd wants to use lighting and staging to achieve striking effects, but these must be naturalistically motivated through devices such as staging characters beside windows.


Images 3.13 and 3.14: Insects and lizard

[189] Russell Boyd, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 10.
[190] Trevor Hogg, "Picture Perfect: A conversation with cinematographer Russell Boyd," *Flickering Myth*, 12 January 2011.

Another device that prioritised image over narrative is the insertion of close-ups of insects, plants and decay into montages. These shots are radically unconventional compositions, shot from an objective camera position and not from any character's point of view. They are filmed this way for added texture, variety of content and to indicate thematic change. This type of coverage is not typical of the period drama and is more aligned with abstract or surrealist visual style employed by Dali or Buñuel. This particular technique is a de-centring of the actor/character, focussing more on the image and landscape in its own right rather than as a background to drama. Another earlier example would be *Walkabout* (dir and DOP Nicholas Roeg, 1971) where insects and reptiles are framed next to hands and feet. The unconventionality of the composition means that when there is a close-up, it is often of ants, rather than of characters' faces.

Boyd employs a diverse array of devices to foreground the cinematography. While he usually prefers to use shallow focus, there are examples of deeper focus and deep space staging. In some scenes the images are fragmented by the use of mirrors and foreground objects (Image 3.15). The rich layering of elements within the frame, with multiple frames-within-frames show the central character's face repeated by the use of mirrors. Deep space staging is a technique to avoid cutting and this composition is a primary example of showiness, drawing attention to the aesthetic technique of the construction. The staging provides the effect of shot-reverse-shot all contained within the one frame and obviating the need to cut. It was such a visual coup that half a century later, Boyd was keen to explain the mechanics of it to me (Image 3.16). In a similar technique to that used by Gregg Toland in *Citizen Kane* (1941) and again in *Best Years of our Lives* (1946), the character deeper in frame moves from small to large as her importance to the scene increases. Once again, this avoids the need, or denies the opportunity, to cut between characters. With the clever arrangement of mirrors, Anne's face is seen twice in this frame, simultaneously in a wide and close-up shot.

Image 3.15: *Picnic at Hanging Rock* – reflections and mirrors

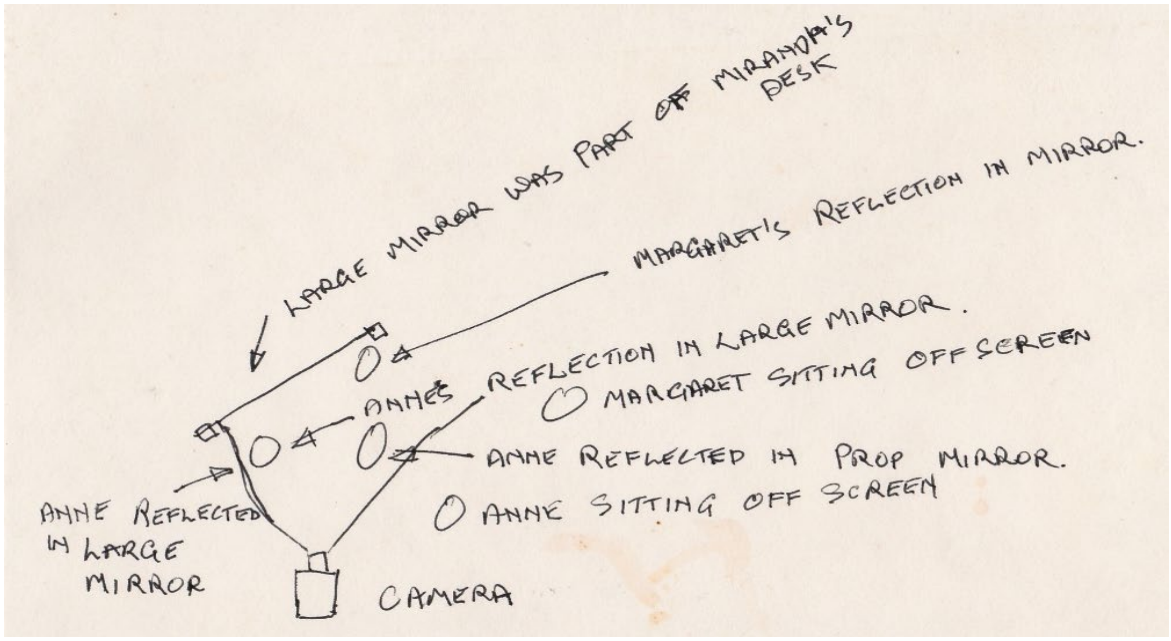

Image 3.16: Boyd's drawing of the set-up for the mirror shot. [191]

The construction of this particular frame required a complex understanding of the lens parameters, depth-of-field, the angle of reflection versus incident light and where a light could be positioned to illuminate the characters without appearing in shot. Miranda's face reflected in the mirror is slightly more frontal, due to the placement of the second smaller prop mirror. There was certainly room for experimentation with the cinematography on this shoot. Boyd explained to me, 'the shot evolved through John Seale (camera operator) moving positions of the actors and the mirror prop and it

[191] Russell Boyd, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 10.

was pretty much made up bit by bit to see what worked', demonstrating the unique contribution of the experienced camera crew to create this framing. Director Peter Weir describes another technique used by Boyd to give the images a slightly different look: 'We also experimented with the frame rate, shooting many close-ups at 32 fps, where the actors were asked not to blink or make sudden movements — and we cut that together with 24-fps dialogue shots.'[192] It is important to distinguish between devices and functions here. One important unifying feature of the film is that it represents a catalogue of different devices which function to give the cinematography prominence. Given the industrial contexts Boyd later worked in, he would never again have the opportunity to focus this intently on making his work so conspicuously artistic.

My Brilliant Career

Although *My Brilliant Career (1979)* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) were made by different director/cinematographer combinations (Armstrong and McAlpine, Weir and Boyd respectively) both films self-consciously invoke the Heidelberg School painters and reside within the AFC genre, and therefore comparisons can easily be drawn. On the large screen the most obvious example of 'Heidelberg quotation' is the use of Sybylla's red parasol, carefully positioned as an element of complementary colour in a lush, green landscape at Caddagat Homestead, resembling Tom Roberts' *Lady with a Parasol* (Image 3.17). Red parasols also feature in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, (Image 3.10), but more in the style of McCubbin with soft brush stokes, greater attention to the bushland and muted colours. With Boyd's treatment of parasols, their muted tones glow from the diffusion and flared highlights. The focal depth is shallow with foreground ferns and background detail is out of focus. In contrast, McAlpine's umbrella is bright and stands out against the lush green landscape, drawing attention the character deeper in the frame. In this section I will invoke the work of McAlpine mainly as a counterpoint to that of Boyd, who remains the focus of my discussion.

Russell Boyd was originally slated to shoot *My Brilliant Career* but he was no longer available as his wife was about to have twins. So the producer, Margaret Fink, chose Don McAlpine who had just shot the *Getting of Wisdom.* McAlpine won the AFI award for Best Cinematography and also the ACS award for Cinematographer of the Year (Millie Award) for *My Brilliant Career*. It was his 11th feature film and achieved sufficient attention that led to offers of work in Hollywood. McAlpine was considerably more experienced than Armstrong when they began working together on this film. This was their only feature film collaboration. Armstrong says, 'after *My Brilliant Career*, I could never get him again. He went on to shoot *Romeo and Juliet*. He was just too busy.'[193]

[192] Jean Oppenheimer, "Russell Boyd, ACS, ASC, OAM: Vision Accomplished," *American Cinematographer* 99, no. 2 (2018): 54-61.
[193] Gillian Armstrong in Q&A at 2018 *Sydney Film Festival* screening of 'My Brilliant Career.'

Malcolm Richards reflects on the decision-making process by producers and directors to choose their cinematographer in the following way:

> It's not just necessarily the director of photography whose style it is, but it's a style that the director likes and the cameraman is chosen because of that style. But he might also contribute a lot by having a lot more experience. And that's one of the things that possibly happened on *My Brilliant Career* was that Don McAlpine had a reasonable amount of experience at the time. He was probably a good mentor for somebody like Gill… and so he probably was quite able to work with the script as well, whereas some cameramen aren't so great with scripts. [194]

Armstrong notes that the international audience for Australian films at this time was a middle-class audience interested in ' "beautiful" films like *My Brilliant Career* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.'[195] There was an expectation that, in the absence of established star actors, the films would attain prestige by being literary and/or painterly. Both films are based on well-known novels in the literary canon, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Joan Lindsay, 1967) is more towards the visual art end of this spectrum whereas *My Brilliant Career* (Miles Franklin, 1901) is more literary in being more character- and drama-driven.

The films contain many visual similarities, especially in relation to production design, with a restricted colour palette of greens, reds and browns. Both were shot using similar Kodak film stocks and camera crews using Panavision cameras, and were resourced with similarly low feature film budgets.[196] The sets in *My Brilliant Career* are rich with lace, wallpaper, paintings and attention to historical detail, all no doubt influenced by Armstrong's own experience in art departments.[197] Despite the obvious connections between the contexts and influences on these films, the approach to cinematography by McAlpine and Boyd is subtly different. While *My Brilliant Career* has a strong design sense, supporting the visual telling of the story, the coverage is more focussed on capturing performance and dialogue. The greater use of close-ups and shot/reverse shot are examples. Boyd goes out of his way to include soft ferns in the foreground, where in *My Brilliant Career* McAlpine is more likely to use geometrical shapes such as fences and pillars. This can be seen in Image 3.18, where although the figure is small, the use of the horizontal fence line, and the colour of the parasol, draw attention to the tiny subject. Focus is held through the depth of the shot with

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[194] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* , 66.
[195] Brian McFarlane, "Her brilliant career: Gillian Armstrong on four decades of film making," *Metro Magazine* 156 (2008): 16-21.
[196] The budget for *Picnic* was $440,000, while the budget four years later for *My Brilliant Career* was $890,000. David Stratton, *The Last New Wave: The Australian Film Revival* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1980).
[197] Helen Carter, "Great Directors: Armstrong, Gillian," *Senses of Cinema,* 22 (October 2002), accessed 27 November 2023.

deep staging, drawing attention to something small in the frame. With the foreground character facing away from the camera, this shot is still using the impressionist technique of decentring character.

Image 3.17: Tom Roberts 1889 *Lady with a Parasol*

Image 3.18: *My Brilliant Career* (1979) with a different use of the red parasol

Creating visual contrast between locations such as the wealthy homesteads and the poorer Possum Gully farm in *My Brilliant Career* provides the cinematographer with a basis for constructing variation in lighting design and colour palette. The production design is carefully controlled with muted, dusty tones used in the poorer, farming homes in contrast to colour saturated, warm tones and lush garden settings used in the wealthy homestead locations. National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) curator Paul Byrnes' notes on *My Brilliant Career* describe the cinematography as having 'great contrast – the flat, barren landscapes of the Melvyn family's farm in the midst of drought gives way to green and verdant homesteads of the landed gentry.'[198]

The narrative structure in the two films is significantly different, requiring a different cinematographic approach. In *Picnic*, Boyd explicitly demonstrates his virtuosic camera techniques. Shots of insects and plants, along with flowing costumes and hair are juxtaposed against the dreamy light and mountain. *Picnic* is poetic, with an ensemble cast and an ambiguous ending, while *My Brilliant Career* has a character-centred narrative driven by dialogue scenes, mostly between the two lead actors. Coverage in *My Brilliant Career* is more centrally derived from capturing performance, dialogue and interactions between characters, described by Dermody and Jacka as having an 'economical' relationship between 'camera, actor and physical space.'[199] This is a much more conservative or dramatically functional approach to cinematography. The main

[198] Paul Byrnes, "My brilliant career: Before and after restoration trailer," NFSA ID: 6989 (1979), *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia*
[199] Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a national cinema, vol. 2* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 136.

character, Sybylla, stands out from the mise-en-scène through the greater use of close-ups. The portrayal of landscape is also different. In *Picnic,* Boyd gives the location its own significance by the use of lighting and painterly techniques whereas *My Brilliant Career* more often uses the landscape as a backdrop in which the dramatic action takes place.

Coverage in *My Brilliant Career* is largely structured around the conventional use of wide shots to establish scenes and locations, followed by close-ups to cover the drama and narrative. There is a marked preference for covering dialogue scenes in close-up. An example of this is a formal dinner scene where the characters are shown only in tight close-up, with not even a wide establishing shot of the table (Image 3.19-22). The camera is positioned just below eye level allowing for the inclusion of foreground dinner table elements in the bottom of frame. As Bordwell explains of contemporary Hollywood decoupage, 'Mouths, brows, and eyes become the principal sources of information and emotion.'[200] Depth of field is shallow so that the foreground and background are mostly out of focus, with only the face sharp, creating separation of the subject from the surroundings. Foreground objects are a point of spatial overlap and emphasise movement. This single tracking shot is built around close-ups of faces, creating subtle tension. These shots are containers for drama rather than image prominence.




Images 3.19-3.22: shots from the dinner table

While intimate dramatic conversation is generally covered in shot/reverse shot, the coverage in this scene is devised to highlight the social and performative aspects of the dinner party through unmotivated camera movement such as tracking and panning, (something seen frequently in films

[200] David Bordwell, "Intensified continuity visual style in contemporary American film," *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002): 16-28.

where Armstrong collaborates with Boyd). An advantage of longer takes and camera moves is that time can be saved by not having to film other coverage and cutaways. The long take also sets up the single close-up of Sybylla (Image 3.22), emphasising her emotional and physical separation from the family. The device is replicated in Armstrong's third feature, *Mrs Soffel* (DOP Boyd) in a scene set in the prison, between the visitor and prisoner. In both cases, the lengthy camera move is not motivated by character movement. Bordwell notes that within a system that he labels intensified continuity, extravagant camera movement such as these commonly 'enliven montage sequences and expository moments.'[201] The lighting in this dinner table scene style might broadly be described as flat (despite the abundance of small lamps located around the set and below the characters' faces) and conventional and does not draw attention to itself. It is not Streeton's happy, glowing light seen in *Picnic at Hanging Rock,* although McAlpine is also careful to avoid harsh shadows. There is very little modelling on the faces, with a key light close to camera, and practical lamps used to create highlights and for background separation rather than character illumination.

Working with a restricted Australian budget on a first feature, Armstrong and McAlpine worked creatively to solve problems where locations and equipment may be insufficient for the requirements of the script. One such example is the opening scene of *My Brilliant Career* which develops into a moment of crisis when a dust storm envelops the family farm (Images 3.23 and 3.24). Faced with a low production budget, the cinematography challenge was to create the impression of a large, threatening storm without really showing it. The solution was to film the exterior storm from Sybylla's point of view within the house. Fragments of the exterior wind and dust are seen through windows and doorways, with interior characters silhouetted against the red dust. Under-exposed curtains and interior furnishings obfuscate and break up the view the outside. Further away from the lens, more brightly exposed washing flaps about on a clothesline and dust is thrown in front of the lens. According to Armstrong, McAlpine added to the effect by driving a car, 'doing wheelies off-screen' to help stir up the dust.[202] Camera movement within the house tracks between windows to reveal exterior action and add to the ensuing chaos.

[201] David Bordwell, "Intensified continuity visual style in contemporary American film," *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002): 16-28.
[202] "Gillian Armstrong - Interview with the director," DVD Special Features, 'My Brilliant Career,' 1980.

Image 3.23 and 3.24: a low-budget dust storm

Foreground features such as window frames and architectural structures are an important element of the composition in both films. The opening storm scene in *My Brilliant Career* is an example of the foreground window frames being used to link interior and exterior locations and characters with the focal length of lens and exposure set to incorporate both layers. Foreground elements emphasise camera movement and draw the viewer's eye towards important details within the frame. *My Brilliant Career* features strong horizontal lines (Image 3.25) that are used to divide characters such as the veranda scene with Sybylla, Harry and Aunt Gussie. By contrast, the foreground elements in *Picnic* (Image 3.26) are very soft, mostly out of focus and undefined. The way in which different cinematographers have approached the use of windows in the front and rear of frames, seen in all of the Armstrong-directed films, is a way to differentiate the compositions.

Image 3.25: *My Brilliant Career* with more defined foreground.

Image 3.26: *Picnic*, with soft foreground elements.

An obvious difference between the two films is the use of diffusion, as seen in *Picnic*, which may take the form of filters (or netting) on the lens, use of fog or smoke or white fabric or gels placed in front of light sources. With these techniques, the contrast is reduced, with particles of light dispersed into shadows making these low light areas of the frame less dark and colours less saturated. The line or edge between areas of shadow and light (the penumbra) is broader with a softer source, while hard lighting shows a finer line between light and dark. *My Brilliant Career* on the other hand, shows very little use of this type of lens filtration, with a stronger range of contrast within frames, vibrant colours and sharp, clear lines. However, as I have shown in the dinner scenes at Cadagatt, the lighting on faces is softened, and more frontal with little shadow or sculpting of facial features.

Comparisons can be made between the open and closed nature of the composition particularly in relation to landscapes. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* features closed landscapes, with characters framed in by foreground rock and foliage. Hanging Rock is rarely fully revealed, being more commonly seen in close-ups of detail or in the background of action. Ferns and tree trunks frame the image. Conversely, *My Brilliant Career* features more expansive and open landscapes with broad skies and horizons. Foregrounds are set back further and more likely to be in sharper focus. This impacts on lighting with Image 3.28 lit by the golden light of the setting sun, directly on the face, while Image 3.27 from *Picnic* shows softer shadow areas devoid of direct light, and the horizon is rarely seen.

Image 3.27: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*

Image 3.28: *My Brilliant Career*

High angle and overhead shots are a repeated feature of the cinematography in *My Brilliant Career,* another tool available when designing coverage. This angle is advantageous when the set-design or location cannot be seen from all angles as the view is restricted to the ground. Armstrong and McAlpine frequently use this angle to get into scenes, beginning with the high angle, followed by close-ups of faces. These shots are sometimes motivated by narrative action such as when Sybylla is in a tree (Image 3.31) looking down to another character. Other times the angle is unmotivated (Images 3.30 and 3.32) and it is not entirely clear why the high perspective has been chosen other than to exclude background or for the sake of an alternative angle. Actor performances help sell this angle, by looking up towards the camera and then downwards, to motivate the change of camera position as is the case in Image 3.30. The high angle emphasises the surface and foreground of the shot, while condensing or compressing the background of the shot where it is limited by the ground, paving or grass. When the camera position changes to an eye-level or actor height, the location and background are revealed.

Image 3.29: *My Brilliant Career,* high-angle.

Image 3.30: *My Brilliant Career,* high-angle.

Image 3.31:

Image 3.32:

Images 3.29-3.32, various high angle or overhead shots from *My Brilliant Career*

This tendency for incorporating high angles and unmotivated camera movement are stylistic motifs that will be seen in many future Armstrong films, especially those shot by Boyd. Both Boyd and McAlpine are renowned for providing directors with creative and technical solutions. McAlpine summarises the duties and attitude of a cinematographer in the following way: 'Every film is a creative experiment and sometimes an experiment is really getting on with people and other times it's about learning new technology. But most of the time it's an experiment of finding a new way of visually stating something.'[203]

Boyd and Armstrong

My Brilliant Career was the first in a sequence of Armstrong-directed features which alternated between period films (*My Brilliant Career* (1979)*, Mrs Soffel* (1984)*, Little Women* (1994)*, Oscar and Lucinda* (1998)*, Charlotte Gray* (2001)*,* and contemporary dramas *Starstruck* (1982)*, High Tide* (1987)*, Fires Within* (1991)*, Last Days of Chez Nous* (1993). Having looked at the cinematography in two period genre films where Boyd and Armstrong worked separately, the framework is set to see how they would go about working together. Boyd and Armstrong collaborated on three of these films: *Starstruck, Mrs Soffel* and finally *High Tide.* Boyd was also cinematographer on Armstrong's first long-form drama *The Singer and The Dancer* (52 minutes), shot on 16mm with camera operator Malcolm Richards. Boyd noted that 'When shooting with the same director on a number of films the working relationship grows so that the collaboration becomes more instinctive and often the understanding between the two develops as the trust grows.'[204] The so-called Australian New Wave cinema, roughly spanning the mid 70's to the mid 80's, saw cinematography styles and practice move away from the AFC genre towards a broader range of contemporary filmmaking styles. Boyd and Armstrong were both significant contributors to this decade of film production. Cinematographers were afforded the challenges and opportunities to work on a variety of films, enhancing their skills.

[203] Oliver Pfeiffer, "The secret of my success: My brilliant career, Don McAlpine," *Career Management Services,* 2016.
[204] Russell Boyd, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 10.

As he had previously done with *Picnic*, Boyd brings to *Starstruck* a 'bag of tricks' which one reviewer describes as a 'grab-bag of visuals and ideas'.[205] No doubt this attribute was something that impressed Armstrong about Boyd's style of cinematography. (It also impressed reviewers who continued to single out Boyd's contribution in a way not matched by the work of any other Australian cinematographer to a point where Boyd is sometimes cited as a co-auteur.) In both *Picnic* and *Starstruck* genre licenses a more prominent style of cinematography. In *Picnic* this stems from the need for an art cinema aesthetic, while in *Starstruck* the influence of music videos leads to a style that can be described as flashy. Either way, the cinematography is made prominent by using quite different stylistic devices. *Starstruck* is a concerted effort by Armstrong and Boyd to make something as different as possible from their previous period films, with a fresh and energetic style. The colour palette is sunny, bright and rich with saturation which Armstrong says suits musicals and comedy.[206] Exterior shots are constructed to show glimpses of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which becomes a visually recurring motif.[207] The central narrative is interspersed by musical interludes shot in the style of both Hollywood musicals and '80s music videos, with live-audience sequences emulating the popular music television show *Countdown*. The Oz Movies website notes that 'This vision chimed with the vision shared by DOP Boyd and director Armstrong, who had wanted to take the film in the direction of the burgeoning rock video industry, trying to give the film life, energy, and a fresh, unusual theatrical look, while shooting the songs in a contemporary way.'[208] As seen previously in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the cinematography in *Starstruck* uses a diversity of techniques to achieve this function. These include colourful lighting, flashy musical scenes and the positioning of foreground layers such as netting and fabric.

[205] Katie Duggan, "Film Daze recommends: Gillian Armstong's 80's musical 'Starstruck' is a fever dream," *Film Daze,* 18 October 2020, accessed 31 July 2022.
[206] "'The Look': Russell Boyd and Gillian Armstrong speaking in 'Additional Features,'" DVD Special Features, *Starstruck,* 1982.
[207] Helen Carter, "Great Directors: Armstrong, Gillian," *Senses of Cinema,* 22 (October 2002), accessed 27 November 2023.
[208] "Star Struck: About the Movie: (iii) Art department and costumes," *Oz Movies,* accessed 27 August 2022. (no author)

Image 3.33, *Starstruck* live audience scene set at the Opera House

The tone in *Starstruck* is tongue-in-cheek and the rock-musical sequences are shot in two styles: the flamboyant eclecticism of music video and rock concert coverage on a stage with an audience present. According to Armstrong, 'When Russell Boyd saw the dancing, he said straight away, 'we need two cameras.'[209] Filming with multiple cameras is more expensive due to increased camera and crew hire costs and the additional costs of film stock and processing. According to producer Brennan, 'films at the time tended to have a shooting ratio around 11 or 12 to 1, and the budget originally allowed for around 15:1. But eventually the film came out at about 20:1, and the song with ATYP [Australian Theatre for Young People used as extras] crowd had a ratio of 25:1.' [210] Filming a staged performance with multiple cameras creates more coverage and reduces the number of times cast are required to repeat songs and dances. This entails the use of longer lenses, with a general lighting design for the whole stage rather than for specific shots. Armstrong says, 'Russ was so smart about where to hide the cameras.' [211] The framing of the staged shot in Image 3.33 foregrounds the difference from the period film aesthetic, but it also contains significant similarities to Boyd's style established in *Picnic*, with dark surroundings and a key character, brightly lit in the centre of the frame. The main character, Jackie Mullens, has big hair that Boyd chooses to backlight to emphasise her shape or form and for separation from the background.

[209] Graham Shirley, "Gillian Armstrong Interviewed by Graham Shirley: Oral History," NFSA ID: 1050278, Reel 8, Film, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,* 22 November 2011 – 11 January 2012.
[210] "Star Struck: About the movie: (vii) Musical set pieces," *Oz Movies,* accessed 27 August 2022. (no author)
[211] Jean Oppenheimer, "Russell Boyd, ASC, ACS: Vision Accomplished," *American Cinematographer* 99, no. 2 (2018): 54-61.

Image 3.34 from *Starstruck* netting

Image 3.35 *Starstruck* reveal of the face

Positioning actors behind foreground layers is, as previously discussed, an established and defining element of Boyd's style. In Image 3.34, Boyd has the actors' faces partially obscured by light mosquito netting, with the softened image providing a caricature of *Picnic* filmed through netting on the lens. The reveal of faces from behind the netting (Image 3.35) may be read as a deliberate reference to, and break with, the AFC genre. The further the netting is from the lens, the more in focus it is and the more obvious or defined, although it has the similar effect of drawing attention to the surface of the image. This technique can also be seen in other Armstrong-directed films, suggesting that it is a motif common to both Armstrong and Boyd (Images 3.36-39 are examples). A partnership between director and cinematographer might be built around such motifs. A director might like a particular technique or aesthetic feature and a cinematographer then becomes skilled at accomplishing it. To complete the cycle, the cinematographer acquires a reputation for being skilled in this desired technique.

Image 3.36: *My Brilliant Career*

Image 3.37: *High Tide*

Image 3.38: *Mrs Soffel*

Image 3.39: *The Singer and the Dancer*

Another prominent cinematic style in *Starstruck* is seen in the music video sequences, shot in the style of music clips. The production design incorporates neon lights providing motivation for the use of theatrical, colourful lighting gels. The approach is very formal with bright colours, symmetrical composition and frequent use of overhead camera angles. These sequences are often a hybrid of Hollywood references with distinctive Australian inflections, for example Jackie's performance in the kangaroo costume clearly references *Blonde Venus* (DP Bert Glennon,1932) while adapting it to 1980s Australia. Another example of this is the musical scene set in a swimming pool (Images 3.41 to 3.44) featuring actors dressed as lifesavers, performing in the water, in the style of (or homage to) Busby Berkeley movies. Screenwriter Stephen MacLean describes *Starstruck* as 'an odd form of Americana syphoned through the caustic Australian eye.'[212] Internationally this was read as a Hollywood reference with an American critic noting: 'The movie's piece de resistance - a water ballet with 20 gay men paddling in Busby Berkeley formations while a school of inflatable sharks encircles them - was inspired by that even campier extravaganza, *Can't Stop the Music'*.[213] Another reference is an Esther Williams' water ballet or aqua musical with similar circular dance patterns filmed from overhead cameras. The choice in *Starstruck* to use red costumes creates a strong visual contrast against the blue/green hues of the water background and is similar to those worn by surf life savers. A more contemporaneous water dance scene filmed five years before *Starstruck* can be found in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* with both films sharing the same production designer Brian Thompson. The musical scenes in *Starstruck* are a nod to Hollywood production values and production techniques.

Image 3.40: Esther Williams in *Million Dollar Mermaid* 1952

[212] Murray Scott, "Starstruck – Interview with Stephen Maclean," *Cinema Papers* 37 (1982): 113.
[213] "Reviews: Alan Stern - A star is stillborn - The Boston Phoenix - 8 March 1983," *Weebly*.

Image 3.41-3.44: *Starstruck* water ballet

Once again, there is simultaneously an Australian reference that might be drawn, and as we might expect with Boyd it is a painterly reference. The swimming pool sequence clearly references the Sidney Nolan 1943 series *The Bathers* (Image 3.45) using a similar red and blue colour palette and framed from above. The style is simultaneously playful and geometric. The *Starstruck* swimming pool scene was shot over two sunny afternoons, maximising the warm side-lighting on actors and emphasising the contrast between saturated red of their swimming costumes and the blue sky and bathing pool.

Image 3.45: *The Bathers* 1943, Sidney Nolan

Boyd and Armstrong go to Hollywood.

The use of Hollywood references in *Starstruck* might be read as a preparation by Armstrong and Boyd for an international move. This is the period when directors (Weir, Beresford, Schepisi and Armstrong) and cinematographers (McAlpine, Boyd, Semler, James, Seale) who were made famous during the Australian feature film renaissance, clearly had an eye on moving into higher-budget Hollywood production. Boyd had already moved to shooting in the US with Bruce Beresford on *Tender Mercies* (1983). *Mrs Soffel* marked Armstrong's transition the following year. It is significant that not only is Boyd the cinematographer on that film, but that Armstrong and Boyd bring with them their Australian collaborators including first assistant director Mark Edgerton, production designer Luciana Arrighi and film editor Nicholas Beauman. The $11 million USD budget of *Mrs Soffel* is around five times that of *Starstruck*.[214] For Armstrong, it was an 'eye-opener coming from independent low-budget Australian films' and dealing with the big studio (MGM/United Artists) where she claimed the 'committee approach was a lot more difficult.'[215] In this environment Armstrong values Australian cinematographers because they have a sense of humour and are 'good leaders without being precious.'[216]

Hollywood studio films are generally more reliant on stars who need to be foregrounded to a greater extent, by lighting and lens choices. This implies more character-driven narrative, along with cinematography centred around actors, featuring well-lit close-ups. In the same way that the cinematography in *Picnic* is very prominent, *Mrs Soffel* frequently brings the framing, composition and lighting to the fore, though in a way that attempts to synthesise the demands of narrative primacy. *Mrs Soffel*, another period drama, was filmed in Toronto and Pittsburgh. It is a dark love story, set in a prison during the cold of winter. *Mrs Soffel* is a version of the past that is thematically dark in that it ends unhappily, and hence uses low-key lighting, generally an appropriate choice for unhappy stories. It is not happy light. Roger Ebert again stressed Boyd's style taking precedence over narrative, calling it:

> a movie about how emotions look, not about how they feel. It does a great job of showing us the clothing of the people who have the emotions, and the rooms they live in, and the way light falls on their faces.[217]

[214] "AFI Catalog of Feature Fims: The First 100 years – Mrs Soffel (1984), PG 13, 117 minutes, Drama, 26 December 1984," *Catalog AFI;* and "Star Struck," *Oz Movies,* accessed 22 August 2022. (no author)
[215] Brian McFarlane, "Her brilliant career: Gillian Armstrong on four decades of film making," *Metro Magazine* 156 (2008): 16-21.
[216] Helen Carter "Interview with Gillian Armstrong @ AFTRS," DVD accession number, AFTRS: 46692, 76 minutes, 2002, *Australian Film, Television and Radio School*.
[217] Roger Ebert, "Mrs. Soffel," *Roger Ebert,* 1 January 1984.

Boyd describes the Pittsburgh Prison as an industrial landscape with a style of lighting to emphasise this: 'I agreed with Gill's strong ideas about keeping it dark and dirty.'[218] Whereas *Picnic* was lit with a happy, glowing version of period light, the cinematography this time has been characterised as 'bleak, monochrome and powerfully atmospheric.'[219] While the two films look very different, they are alike in placing demands on the cinematographer to ensure a dominating lighting scheme. Interior hues are predominantly browns and reds, with warm whites and heavy blacks contrasting with the cold, blue-grey of exterior scenes. Boyd was once again singled out for praise, with film critic Joe Brown commenting, 'Russell Boyd's brilliant cinematography sets the bleak and blue tones of the prison and beyond against the warm, wan glow of the Soffels' home.'[220] However, this low-key lighting approach was controversial. *The New York Times* published a review highly critical of the cinematography: 'The photography by Russell Boyd, the accomplished Australian cinematographer (*The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Tender Mercies*, among others) favours interior lighting so dim that one doesn't get an impression of the electric lighting of the period, but the feeling that the characters, like bats, can see in the dark.'[221] Boyd noted that 'in retrospect, maybe I went too far for which I copped a lot of criticism.'[222]

The excessive darkness of the film was established early on in pre-production and carried right through to the final stages of post-production. After a film has been edited, the DOP usually returns to oversee the grading process, but in this case, Boyd was working on another film and unavailable for the grade. According to Armstrong she 'took over the colour grading because Russell was off on another job.' [223] As there was no editor or DOP present to check the grade Armstrong recalls, 'The colour grader and I had a lovely time making the blacks as black as anything. I felt sorry for Russell Boyd because the *New York Times* were critical.' The shadows and blacks in this film, both interior and exterior, are uncharacteristically heavy. According to Boyd, after complaints about the darkness of prints, 'we immediately made the rest of the prints a few points lighter.'[224] This story highlights the importance of the cinematographer's contribution to the look, both technical and creative, of the film. The cinematographer has an ongoing role after principal photography is finished and it is very important they remain connected to the project, in order to oversee the completion of the visual style and aesthetic of the film. Boyd reflects on criticism of the film being so dark, 'that was the way I saw the picture and I still see it that way.'[225]

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[218] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 90.
[219] Leslie Felperin, "Gillian Armstrong – Director," *Film Reference,* updated by Rob Edelman, accessed 30 July 2023.
[220] Joe Brown, "A Simmering 'Mrs.Soffel,'" *The Washington Post*, February 8, 1985.
[221] Vincent Canby, "Diane Keaton portrays 'Mrs Soffel,'" *The New York Times,* 26 December 1984, 15.
[222] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 90.
[223] Graham Shirley, "Gillian Armstrong Interviewed by Graham Shirley: Oral History," NFSA ID: 1050278, Reel 8, Film, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,* 22 November 2011 – 11 January 2012.
[224] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 90.
[225] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 91.

Image 3.46: The movie barcode for *Mrs Soffel* illustrates the predominantly dark scenes with a snowy, lighter section in the last third.

Motivation for the lighting in shots and scenes within the family home comes largely from exterior window light and practical lamps such as wall sconces and desk lamps (Images 3.48 and 3.50). The use of mirrors seen in *Picnic* again features here (Image 3.47) as well as the recurring placement of the female figure against the window (Image 3.47 and 3.49). In this case, the window light is uncorrected blue daylight (as in *14's Good, 18's Better*) contrasting with warmer interior lighting. Overhead lighting with little use of fill light creates dark eye sockets in shots such as Image 3.48, which is an unusual approach for Hollywood lighting where stars typically require eye-lights.

Images 3.47-3.50: Interior scenes from *Mrs Soffel* with window and practical light sources.

Another visual motif associated with Armstrong is that characters in *Mrs Soffel* (Image 3.51) are often seen from a high angle through foreground elements, in this case prison bars. Hard light sources cast shadows on faces. Tracking shots reveal and obscure faces through the bars creating

layers of foreground, mid-ground and background, with any movement behind the bars emphasised. The bars also provide an opportunity for geometric patterns of light in the background of shots.

Image 3.51: *Mrs Soffel,* seen through foreground ceiling bars.

Whereas previous examples show Boyd featuring soft foreground layers, in this high-angle example greater depth of field is achieved by a smaller aperture with focus held through the range of the shot, from the bars through to Mrs Soffel's face. This overhead perspective which we saw so frequently in *My Brilliant Career* is rarely used in this film with this particular view through the prison bars being the one exception. The tight filming space in this location necessitated a wide-angle lens because there is no room to get back on a longer lens.

In a seeming contradiction, when the camera is moved outside, where one would expect stopped down apertures and therefore greater depth of field, the depth of field actually decreases. Shots filmed in snow country are similar in style to *Picnic* with soft focus plants in the foreground (Images 3.52 and 3.53) creating a very different look from the previous scenes shot through geometric prison bars. The style brings to mind paintings of Winslow Homer, for example the *Bridle Path, White Mountains* (1868). The daylight is very soft with muted tones, with faces beneath hats lit by a warm artificial light source. Although Boyd has stated a preference for 'natural lighting' the warm face-lights stand out.[226]

[226] Trevor Hogg, "Picture Perfect: A conversation with cinematographer Russell Boyd," *Flickering Myth*, 12 January 2011.

Image 3.52: soft focus branches

Image 3.53: foreground bokeh

Cinematography in *Mrs Soffel* synthesises Boyd's use of foreground elements with Armstrong's prominent use of close-ups. The penultimate image in the film is a close-up on Soffel, in her prison cell, looking at a photo of Biddle (Image 3.54). Her eyes are in shadow and facing away from camera giving her a heavy look. Following a focus pull from the photo to her eyes, the camera slowly tracks toward her into a tight close-up. The film is grainy, the light is warm and soft and it has the appearance of a portrait painting. This shot demonstrates that although *Mrs Soffel* is a very different film from *Picnic*, Boyd's artistic approach to the cinematography remains prominent.

Image 3.54: Mrs Soffel

Another defining visual motif of the cinematography is the use of sweeping camera movement to cover drama. Long, slow pans and tracks that are unmotivated (not simply following character movement) are used throughout. These are not just small movements, they are complex, long sweeping moves that Bordwell has described as a component of intensified continuity.[227] A 360-degree panning shot near the end of the film, running for 58 seconds, shows in continuous close-

[227] David Bordwell, "Intensified continuity visual style in contemporary American film," *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002): 20.

ups the faces of the sheriff and bystanders as the Biddles lie dying on ground. The shot concludes on a close-up of a boy witness to the events. The design of the shot where 360 degrees of space are visible, necessitates the crew and lighting equipment being hidden out of frame. This type of cinematography requires people with specialised experience with the knowledge to plan, rig and support a heavy camera while coordinating and choreographing the dolly movement that is synchronised with performance, focus pulls and lighting.

Images 3.55 to 3.58: 180-degree panning shot

Another similar example is the shot (Image 3.55 to 3.58) built around a conversation between Kate Soffel and the Biddle brothers, in the corridor adjoining their prison cell. While Soffel speaks, the camera is panned around 180 degrees and for 30 seconds duration, beginning with her medium close-up, and ending with a similar shot size on Ed Biddle. The move is slow and considered, emphasising the space between characters. Cool light appears to come from windows and warmer light from above the corridor. Light falling on the prison bars create shadows on the walls and Biddle's face. An auteurist critic might identify that this as something occurring in other Armstrong films. It is no contradiction, however, to observe that we are more likely to see big unmotivated camera moves when Armstrong collaborates with Boyd because it is something he and his crew are skilled at accomplishing. Boyd is able to provide solutions to a style that Armstrong wants to use. We will see this again in my analysis of *High Tide*.

Return to Australia

High Tide (1987) was Armstrong's third and last feature with cinematographer Russell Boyd. Moving away from period drama and back to Australia, Armstrong directed *High Tide* set in the sea-side town of Eden and starring Judy Davis (Lilli), Colin Friels (Mick) and a young Claudia Karvan (Ally).[228] *High Tide* revisits Armstrong's interest in rock music but this time the protagonist star is on the slide-down of her career. Having shot *Mrs Soffel* with a Hollywood-sized budget, *High Tide* was a return to lower-budget ($3.75 million AUD[229]), Australian-style filmmaking, without the restrictions of unions and studio approvals. This film was produced after the initial New Wave period and under the 10BA tax incentives.

[228] Helen Carter, "Great Directors: Armstrong, Gillian," *Senses of Cinema,* 22 (October 2002), accessed 27 November 2023.
[229] "'Hightide,' aka 'High Tide,'" *Oz Movies,* accessed 28 August 2022. (no author)

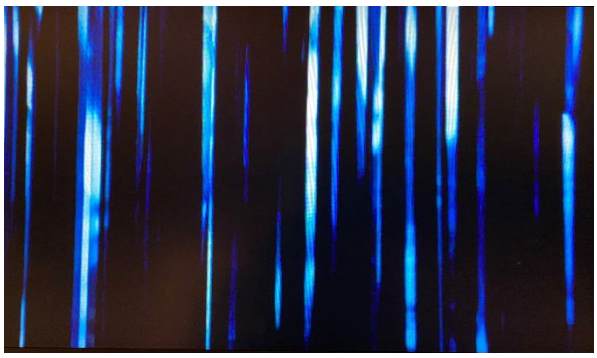

Image 3.59: *High Tide* opening shot

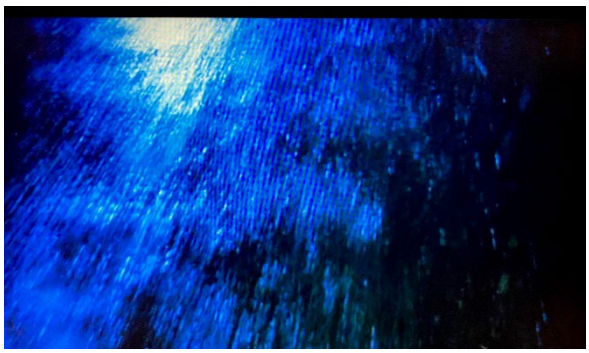

Image 3.60: *High Tide* ending shot

Cinematography in *High Tide* draws on two distinct aesthetic motifs: prominence of the colour blue and, as characterised by Bordwell, a free-ranging style of camera movement. As I have demonstrated, Boyd is well-placed to accomplish these visual strategies and his availability for this film would, at the very least, have encouraged Armstrong down this path. From the opening titles and the very first image of the film (Image 3.59), the colour and tone of *High Tide* is highly restricted and strongly defined. A blue, metallic curtain wraps around three quarters of the set, a stage, giving the appearance of dappled water highlights. It is a glimpsed pattern of abstract movement of light and colour. The use of colour motif here, particularly the blue, is pushed to the point where if it has a painterly look, it is one of outright abstraction. Boyd recalls, 'I even printed it in such a way that it was slightly cooler, or more towards the blue end.'[230] The use of blue recurs throughout the film and influences the lighting, set design and colour grading. The final frame of the film is a tracking shot along a wet-down road, with blue streaks of blurred light similar to the opening frame and bookending the film. The camera movement in this film motived one critic to call it Armstrong's 'most restless film, utilizing nervous zip pans, fast tracking, and boomshots, and then resting for quiet, intense close-ups on surfboards, legs being shaved, and shower nozzles, all highly motivated by the characters' perspectives.'[231]

Viewing the first and final frames side-by-side, emphasises the shot construction in an abstract impressionist style (such as Images 3.60 and 3.61) with fragments of light emulating blue brush strokes of a painting and used in an abstract rather than figurative way. Armstrong's intention is to set up what she describes as 'key themes, the sense of movement. And a blue theme running through it to represent water.'[232] This representation, pushed to a non-figurative extreme, links back to the impressionist desire to capture reflected light, including water, rather than show the water or light itself.

[230] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 83.
[231] Leslie Felperin, "Gillian Armstrong – Director," *Film Reference,* updated by Rob Edelman, accessed 1 September 2022.
[232] "Commentary by the director and producer," DVD Special Features, *High Tide*, 1987.

Image 3.61: Tony Tuckson *White lines on ultramarine*[233]

In a 1987 *Cinema Papers* interview, Anna Grieve asks Armstrong about the use of abstract shots (out of focus glitter, water, sparkle) in the film. Armstrong replies, 'I hope in the end it doesn't come out looking phony but because we had written something that was a very intimate drama, I felt I wanted to try another element too so the audience had a physical sensation of a lot of the themes in the film'[234]. In saying this, Armstrong takes responsibility for the cinematic style but as Richards suggests, she purposely chose Boyd to accomplish this. By referring to the shots as having a physical element, Armstrong suggests the prominence of the cinematographic technique.

Picnic, My Brilliant Career and *High Tide* all set up a visual dichotomy of contrasting aesthetics that underlie the thematic oppositions of the drama. In *Picnic* and *My Brilliant Career*, it is the overpowering landscape exteriors versus the constricting European architecture and interiors while *High Tide* sets up a contrasting blue versus pink colour palette to suggest the coldness of Lilli's isolation as opposed to the warmth of family belonging. In both films, Boyd's skill is to marshal these colours as needed. *Picnic* bathes exteriors in golden sunlight while *High Tide*'s winter beachsides transform nature into blue light sources. Ally (Karvan) and her Nan live in a blue caravan. Ally is seen in her annexe cleaning her surfboard, surrounded by blue seaside objects. In contrast to this, Nan's part of the van is pink, soft and womb-like. The scenes were shot in a

[233] Tony Tuckson, *White Lines on Ultramarine,* 1970-1973. Diptych: Styrene-based house paint, polyvinyl acetate and pigment on hardboard. Held by: Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney. Image source: Tony Tuckson, "AGNSW Collection: White lines (vertical) on ultramarine, 1970-1973," *Art Gallery of NSW*.
[234] Anna Greive, "Gillian Armstrong returns to Eden: Anna Grieve interviews Gillian Armstrong about her latest film 'High Tide,'" *Cinema Papers* 63 (1987): 30-33.

purpose-built caravan and annexe with pull away sides to allow access for cameras and lights, facilitating this juxtaposition of warm and cool tones.

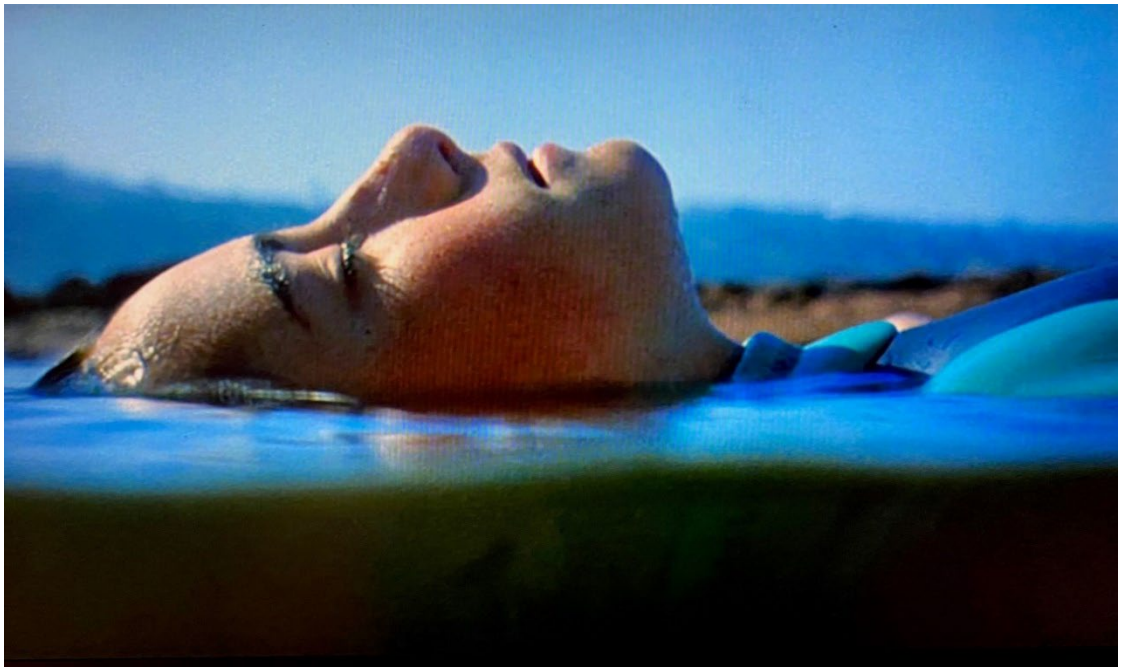

Image 3.62: The camera partially submerged in water.

The second scene in *High Tide* begins with the camera moving quickly over wet ground, settling on a mid-shot of Karvan floating in a rock pool. This is followed by a profile close-up of her head partiality submerged in water where the camera shows the line of the water in front of the lens (Image 3.62). It is yet another combination of soft foreground and close-up that is so familiar in Armstrong's collaborations with Boyd. The inclusion of the water line in these shots is a perspective unique to filming through glass, and not something we could see with our own eyes. It draws attention to the front of the image and the position of the camera itself in water. Where our eyes would adjust to the difference in brightness above and below the water, the filmstock is unable to do this and the portion of the frame below water is therefore underexposed. Following this short sequence, the camera tracks off Ally and resumes moving quickly along the ground to a road, with the same energy as the first scene. Unlike other Armstrong films which begin by establishing the location and time (*Little Women, Oscar and Lucinda*), at this point, we still don't really know when or where this film is set. A style of cinematography is evident in this analysis of Boyd's work, where we see him creating shots that draw attention to the foreground, surface or front of the image. Elements such as foreground glass, windows, netting and plants are used to draw attention to the front of the image, either to the actual surface or to a plane very close to the lens.

Image 3.63: *High Tide* contrasting colour temperatures and bokeh, foreground detail.

An example of incorporating foreground set-dressing can be seen in Image 3.63 showing Ally's face partially obscured through a blue fishing net, reminiscent of the lens netting used in *Picnic* or the mosquito net in *Starstruck*. The face is highlighted by a strong low-key side lighting, contrasting with the blue netting and background corrugated wall which echoes the abstracted first shot of the film. With a mixture of colour temperatures, the lighter and warmer part of the frame is used to focus attention on the face whilst the blue background recedes. Behind Ally are out of focus orange highlights, bokeh, that provide some motivation for the highlight on her hair. Foreground elements such as the fishing net, emphasise movement behind it. The audience must look past the netting to see the face, momentarily taking the viewer out of the drama and bringing to prominence the cinematographic technique. Though it is a visual motif found throughout Armstrong directed films, it is worth emphasising that we are more likely to see this technique in her films with Boyd than those shot by, for example, Geoffrey Simpson.

Image 3.64: mirror and reflection

Image 3.65: facial fragments

Fragmenting the face through the use of mirrors and reflection is another method in which Boyd specialises, to break up the image. In Images 3.64 and 3.65 Ally's face is seen twice, firstly as a straight image and then repeated as small fragments in the mirrored tiles. Here it is not so much the surface that is altered but the midground of the frame. The face is exposed more brightly than the rest of shot for prominence and attention is drawn to the eyes through the subtle use of an eyelight. The graphical lines of the mirror, turquoise in colour, cross the warmly lit face resembling those of the fishing net (Image 3.64).

Image 3.66 and 3.67: beach landscapes

Set at a seaside location, landscape is also an important part of the coverage in *High Tide.* Despite filming in late spring, Armstrong wanted to caravan park to look as 'bleak as possible.'[235] It is Boyd's task to establish that bleakness = blueness. Juxtaposed against small interior locations such as caravans and toilets, long shots are filmed by the beach and from vantages points of the caravan park (Image 3.66). These shots provide motivation for the blue colour tones seen elsewhere. NFSA curator Richard Kuipers attributes the transformation from a popular seaside resort to a sad and run-down caravan park to Boyd's gritty cinematography. [236] A wide shot in Image 3.67 shows Lilli (played by Davis) walking along the coast, with a deep blue ocean and sky behind her. The sky is made darker and more blue by the use of a graduated blue with ND (neutral density) filter, keeping the foreground sand lighter while reducing exposure on the background sky, thereby increasing the saturation of blue. This shot brings to mind Arthur Streeton's impressionist NSW coastal works such as *The Blue Pacific* (1890) or *An Impression from the Deep* (1889) which have been described as having the 'Streeton Blue' and have a similar contrast between deep blue water and lighter foreground sand (Images 3.68 and 3.69).[237]

[235] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 82.
[236] Richard Kuipers, "'High Tide' (1987)," *Australian Screen: An NFSA Website*, accessed 3 July 2022.
[237] Helen Pitt, "Now and then: What's changed since Arthur Streeton painted Sydney 130 years ago?" *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 30 October 2020, accessed 4 July 2022.

Image 3.68: Streeton, *An Impression from the Deep*, 1867.

Image 3.69: Streeton, *Coogee Bay, 1907.*

Armstrong and Boyd continue to use the high angle shot as a means to enter a scene. An example of this technique can be found at a beachside shower (Images 3.70 and 3.71) where the shot begins through the foreground shower head down to the grass below with a broad focal range that holds focus through all these elements. The high angle is unmotivated by character. When the camera is craned down to an eye-level height, the background location is revealed and the actors are seen full length. The tonal value of the shot changes from dark and brooding to a lighter, sandy background. The result of this move is that the perspective changes from closed and compressed to expansive, deep and open. The opening high angle perspective offers a different or novel way of viewing the characters, in this case through the shower head, and then resolves when the camera is moved to a more usual position at the characters' eye level.

Image 3.70: High angle beginning of the shot

Image 3.71: crane down to eye level

Another variation on the high angle opening shot is a scene set around a Hills Hoist clothesline (Images 3.72 and 3.73). In this version, Lilli is seen through clothesline wire from above and as the camera cranes down, Ally is revealed and they are both seen through washing on the line. The high camera position is motivated by the character looking up to the washing and the camera move by the entrance into the frame of the second character.

Image 3.72: shot opens with a high angle…

Image 3.73: and cranes down to eye level

There are numerous examples of filming faces through clotheslines, throughout Armstrong directed films, first seen in the close-up of Josie in *14's Good, 18's Better* and repeated in almost every subsequent film. Washing on a clothesline provides foreground for both high angle shots as well as for close-ups of faces. Faces can be hidden or revealed during a conversation providing energy and movement within a shot.

3.74: *The Singer and the Dancer*

3.75: *High Tide*

3.76: *Satdee Night*

3.77: *My Brilliant Career*

Another conspicuous example of prominent camera movement in *High Tide* is in the service station scene at the end of the film. The camera movement is similar to the 180-degree pan in *Mrs Soffel* but elevates the continuous moving shot to include a crane. The final shots (Images 3.78-80) of *High Tide* comprise two long takes, following Ally as she walks into a roadside restaurant, where Lilli waits for her. Initially the camera position is read as Ally's POV (same height, movement) but

as she sees Lilli, the camera perspective changes to watching them objectively, as mother and daughter, in a two-shot, with shallow depth of field. The camera mounted on a crane, circles around them, cranes and tracks through a window in a sweepingly virtuosic movement and continues on a tracking vehicle alongside the moving car and out onto the open road. The final shot (Image 3.60) tracks along the centre lines of the wet road at night creating blue highlights of blurred light, book-ending the film. This whole sequence is highly constructed in such a way that the audience consciously notices the camera, with obviously complicated moves and tracks which unites the visual motifs of blueness and extravagant camera movement.



Images 3.78, 3.79, 3.80: final tracking and craning sequence

Christopher Beach proposes that 'the cinematographer is responsible for discovering, inventing introducing and improving new visual technologies that the director can then apply in the creation of cinematic art.'[238] Armstrong wanted a Steadicam or moving camera for *High Tide* but could only afford it for two days, so cinematographer Boyd and grip Ray Brown invented the 'Russ cam' a technique of holding the camera, one on each side, and running with it. (Cinema Papers #63 refers to it as Budget Cam[239]) Keeping the rig low to the ground they ran together over rocky terrain, sometimes accidentally filming Boyd's own sneakers.[240] There was no video split and the resulting hand-held camera moves are serendipitous. This demonstrates a strong commitment from Boyd to carry a heavy camera himself in order to include camera movement, even when there is no money to pay for a rig. These travelling shots are eerie and add a rich and essential texture to the film and are reminiscent of the prison wall shots in *Mrs Soffel*. In this instance, the camera department have provided a solution to a story or aesthetic requirement. The film itself is an experiment, coming to terms with this tracking device in a practical and visual manner and the technique is another example of Boyd's highly valued bag of tricks.

[238] Christopher Beach, *A Hidden History of Film Style: Cinematographers, directors, and the collaborative process* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).
[239] Anna Greive, "Gillian Armstrong returns to Eden: Anna Grieve interviews Gillian Armstrong about her latest film 'High Tide,'" *Cinema Papers* 63 (1987): 30-33.
[240] John Shand and Terry Wellington, *Don't Shoot the Best Boy! The film crew at work* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1988), 87.

Conclusions

Having worked separately on very similar AFC genre films, Boyd and Armstrong prove to be a good fit when combining and synthesising their visual styles. Boyd reflects, 'there are many whose work I admire and have given me the inspiration to pick up a thread of their creative paths.'[241] The joint approach to planning coverage incorporating the prominent use of close-ups of faces along with big, unmotivated camera moves results in cinematography techniques that can be applied to a wide variety of genres and filmmaking styles. Why does Armstrong want to work with Boyd? Because he is an artist who is prepared to bring a prominent and showy look to the cinematography and because he has the skills and experience to accomplish those elements of visual style that she wants. During this review of the films, I have identified some of the visual tropes than run through Boyd's work, and particularly his work with Armstrong. These include a view through netting, mesh and frames that draws attention to the surface or foreground frames, the organisation of colour pallettes to underline thematic oppositions, and the use of a range of devices to make the image come forward, and recede, in relation to the narrative.

Cinematographers are often loath to take credit for their own ideas, often seeing themselves as purely technicians. Expressing discomfort with the title of artist, Geoffrey Simpson (DOP *Little Women, Oscar and Lucinda*) says, 'Cinematographers are first and foremost technicians though there are varying degrees of artistry in our work. We work in the visual arts sure, but a ballet dancer would call herself a ballerina or dancer rather than an artist I imagine, same with us, I think.'[242] As the images in this Chapter demonstrate however, the work of Boyd on these films can often be equated to the brush strokes of a painter, and firmly positions his cinematography practice alongside many other prominent Australian artists. Roger Deakins is known for saying that the best cinematography is not noticed.[243] That may be the case for some films, but as these successful films have shown, when cinematographer Boyd is prepared to use all of the brushes and tools of lenses and lighting, to bring artistic input to the fore, the results are intrinsically connected to the value and storytelling of the film as a whole.

Armstrong eloquently reflects on cinematographers and the body of Boyd's work: 'all the rest of the world who think about Australian cinematographers, and when they say they're great, they're superb technicians, they're wonderful team players, they can do anything and they're artists, really you [Boyd] were the first and you set that up and many have followed'.[244] Their creative

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[241] "Russell Boyd: Work that shows maturity and a great track record count for a lot," *The Stable,* 17 July 2019, accessed 30 July 2023.
[242] Geoffrey Simpson, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[243] Evan Luzi, "25 pieces of juicy filmmaking knowledge from cinematographer Richard Deakins," *The Black and Blue,* accessed 20 September 2021.
[244] "Gillian Armstrong, "Gillian Armstrong re: Russell Boyd (VHS videorecording)," AFTRS Video Library, 2002, *Australian Film, Television and Radio School.*

partnership was an opportunity for Boyd to light and shoot in the prominent and artistic style he prefers. There is an array of different devices and choices that characterise Boyd's cinematography and are employed to achieve visual prominence. Four of these devices stand out in my analysis. First is a deliberate choice to light and frame in a style that is obviously influenced by paintings. This typically involves a bold use of colour temperatures and a willingness to experiment with techniques used to emphasise the surface of the image. Second is the specialisation in obvious, extravagant and often unmotivated camera movement. The third is the use of layered staging filming through the aggressive use of foreground objects such as ferns, netting, prison bars and other geometric shapes and objects. And fourth, is his preference for using Panavision cameras and lenses as his primary tools. All of these features define his contribution to the films on which he has collaborated. Boyd's bag of tricks contains a lot of things. And these things are significantly different from those of Armstrong's other major collaborator, Geoffrey Simpson.

Chapter Four

Geoffrey Simpson: Believable light

> I want to create believable light. I want it to be clear where the light is coming from whether it's from windows or practical lights in a room. Having said that, I like the idea of creating shadows in the frame and to play around with contrast that's maybe stronger than a totally naturalistic scene.
>
> Geoffrey Simpson[245]

Geoffrey Simpson is one of many Australian cinematographers working both internationally and in Australia. His distinguished and varied career includes the feature films *Green Card* (1990 dir Peter Weir), *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991 dir Jon Avnet), *Shine* (1996 dir Scott Hicks), *Monk Comes Down the Mountain* (2015 dir Chen Kaige) and most recently *Lone Wolf* (2021 dir Jonathan Ogilvie). Simpson collaborated with Armstrong on three features: *The Last Days of Chez Nous* (1993), *Little Women* (1994) and *Oscar and Lucinda* (1998). The first of these is a contemporary film set in Sydney while the last two are period dramas. The films are all single camera shoots, on 35mm film, and for cinema release. As with Boyd, Simpson's collaboration with Armstrong extends across Australian and international film industries, period and contemporary genres, and location and studio shooting. *Last Days of Chez Nous* was shot exclusively on location in New South Wales mostly in a small house in the suburb of Balmain. *Little Women* was shot in Vancouver and the US, largely in studio and location sets. *Oscar and Lucinda* began filming in the UK before the production moved to Sydney. *Last Days* was a relatively small-scale film with a budget of $A3 million, whereas *Little Women* and *Oscar and Lucinda* both had larger budgets of around $A20 million. [246] The budgets on these last two films are larger in scope than the films shot by Boyd, in part due to the increased filmmaking experience of Armstrong and her producers, and their capacity to draw on greater international support for feature length drama projects. Larger budgets result in greater resources for camera departments, as well as production design, reflected in higher production values on the screen.

Chris Cagle provides the initial impetus for this chapter, when he notes that a cinematographer's 'individual style may rest less on a strict coherence of approach than on a distinction from other cinematographers' work.'[247] Boyd and Simpson both adhere to common cinematography

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[245] Geoffrey Simpson, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[246] Budgets: *Last Days* $3m AUD DVD extras producer commentary, *Little Women*, $23m AUD source PowerGrid, *Oscar and Lucinda* $20m AUD. Lisa French, "Patterns of production and policy: The Australian film industry in the 1990s," in *Australian Cinema in the 1990s,* edited by Ian Craven (UK: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 16-36.
[247] Chris Cagle, "Classical Hollywood, 1928-1946," in *Cinematography,* edited by Patrick Keating (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014), 34-59.

conventions, in that they follow classical Hollywood conventions of coverage, such as shot/reverse-shot, looking room (space in front of the face), head room (space above the head) and lighting continuity. Both favour soft light sources with prominent eye lights, drawing attention to actors' faces and foregrounding the delivery of dialogue. However, there are important differences in their approaches. This chapter will provide analyses of Simpson's individual technique and show that although both these cinematographers have worked very closely with the same directors and within similar film industry structures, both in Australia and internationally, they also bring their own distinctive and identifiable style and techniques to the films on which they work. While Boyd is more prominently artistic, (akin perhaps to the work of Christopher Doyle [*Rabbit Proof Fence 2002*]) Simpson is nearer the functional narrative style of Don McAlpine (*My Brilliant Career* 1979 and *The Dressmaker* 2015) and John Seale (*Witness* 1985 and *Dead Poets Society* 1989*)*. This Chapter will demonstrate that Simpson's work is characterised by an emphasis on contrast, depth, precise camera movement and the accentuation of complex mise-en-scène.

A shared interest in visual art and design formed the basis for Armstrong and Simpson's working methods, as they communicated through artistic references, photos, and drawings in sketchbooks. Armstrong describes Simpson as 'an artist who constantly surprises you with his exquisite compositions.'[248] Armstrong and Simpson clearly situate their respective practices within the visual arts and begin their conversations around coverage and lighting by referencing their shared knowledge of artists. While attending art school in Adelaide, Simpson studied painting, printmaking and life drawing before discovering the darkroom where he began developing and printing photographs. Unusually for a cinematographer, Simpson is also comfortable writing about and describing his practice, and his emails to me are the primary research material in this Chapter. Like Boyd, Simpson references the Heidelberg school Impressionist painters as a direct inspiration for period filmmaking in Australia and when referring to *Oscar and Lucinda*, Simpson writes,

> I remember several Australian Impressionist painters, a group of artists I have loved for years…. Tom Roberts, Charles Condor, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin all giving a great feel for the bush seen from eyes of artists living during the period our film was set, more or less.[249]

The Impressionist painters are well known and appreciated by Australian audiences and funding agencies, so it makes sense that filmmakers like Boyd and Simpson would want to emulate their aesthetic values—or at least invoke their influence in public pronouncements. However, the visual qualities and compositional strategies of *Oscar and Lucinda* are quite different from those of Boyd in *Picnic*, who saw something different in the paintings of these same artists. Boyd seeks

[248] Mary Colbert, "'Little Women,'" *Film News* 25, no. 2 (April 1995): 5.
[249] Geoffrey Simpson, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

equivalents for the artistic technique of obvious brush strokes, accentuated patterns of light, soft foreground elements and use of colour, whereas Simpson shows an interest in wider compositions, and a high contrast look. Boyd is more interested in capturing the detail of image surface and texture while Simpson favours three-dimensional space across and within the shot.

In discussing his ideas with me, Simpson cited the work of a Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershoi which he discovered while at Art School (Image 4.1 and 4.2): 'His interiors were soft, moody and monochromatic, frames within frames, using doorways and window frames to break up the image and divert the eye. He is still in my head.'[250] Like the Australian Impressionists Hammershoi decentres the human figure in his painting, not simply to foreground the play of light, but to give a weight to rooms as having a materiality in their own right, rather than simply functioning as backgrounds to human action. There is a strong correspondence between Hammershoi's paintings and the use of depth framing by Simpson, with the inclusion of windows and doors in the background of compositions, the heightened contrast, and the prominence of props and furnishings. This is a key element of what Simpson brings to the collaborations with Armstrong. Rather than simply attributing this stylistic approach to Simpson, I would contend that if a director wants to highlight the importance of sets and settings as crucially important spaces, then Simpson is a good cinematographer with whom to work, and that he has distinctive ways of achieving these effects.

Image 4.1: *Interior: Strandgade 30* Vilhelm Hammershoi, 1902

Image 4.2: *Der Musikzimmer, Strandgade 30*, Vilhelm Hammershoi, 1907.

[250] Geoffrey Simpson, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

At the beginning of pre-production on *Oscar and Lucinda*, Simpson describes a meeting in a hotel room with Armstrong and production designer Luciana Arrighi where they sat around a large table looking at art books. There were also photographs including 'Late 1800's stills of buildings, horse and carts in Sydney and the bush, ships and boats'.[251] Simpson recalls there being books about several Australian Impressionist artists, some John Singer Sargent ('a big influence for period looks particularly for Wardrobe') alongside 'one book that really stood out for me at this meeting, the paintings of Vihelm Hammershoi.'[252]

Hammershoi's influence can also be seen in in *Little Women* (Images 4.3, 4.4) where a comparison may be drawn between the positioning of the dark piano in the foreground of the painting, with character and room architecture in the background. Shadows on the floor indicate the room is backlit by the window source. Similar staging and lighting are used by Simpson in Image 4.4, albeit with tighter framing, showing Beth at the piano with her sisters positioned behind her. Though slightly soft in focus, they are emphasised by the bright pool of light coming from an implied off-screen window.

Image 4.3*:* Hammershoi *interior-strandgade-30*,1901, reference with piano and woman at the window.

Image 4.4*: Little Women*, Beth in the foreground, with Meg and Amy positioned behind.

Background detail competes for attention with any near foreground elements. This emphasis illustrates the primary difference between the framing and staging techniques employed by

[251] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, "What is cinematography?" in email correspondence with the author, May 2021. See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 162.
[252] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, "What is cinematography?" *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

Simpson and Boyd. Where Boyd directs the viewer to the surface of the shot, Simpson uses lighting and composition to direct the viewer to the depth of the composition.

Simpson summarises his practice by saying, 'My style of cinematography would be the light and the look are based in naturalism.'[253] However, as the initial quote in this Chapter makes clear, while Simpson wants the shots to look believably realistic, he also wants to intervene to achieve a highly constructed look. A candle-lit close-up of Jo from *Little Women* (Image 4.5) exemplifies the tension in his style. The inclusion of the candle in the frame provides a broad justification for making believable the side lighting on Jo's face, though the softened shadows on her face, the key light reflecting in the eyeballs (a characteristic of Simpson's style), and the lack of candle flicker all suggest the subtle intervention of the cinematographer. The idea of candlelight rather than actual candlelight is where the believability comes from.

Image 4.5: Believable light in *Little Women*.

Simpson complicates his stated preference for naturalistic lighting by observing that 'Some cinematographers always seem to make nice pictures which is what we all strive for of course.'[254] In saying this, Simpson (like Malcolm Richards in Chapter Two) concedes a secondary desire to employ techniques with an aesthetic that exists independent from the narrative, for the sake of creating images that are beautiful in their own right. He has a strong interest in using his knowledge of lighting techniques, 35mm motion picture film stocks, and laboratory processing and printing to create a look that is higher in contrast. He incorporates solid features of the location

[253] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[254] Geoffrey Simpson, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

such as door frames and furniture to frame and contextualise people and to motivate lighting and depth. These features make him ideally suited for films in which locations, such as houses and rooms, are key features of the drama as we will see in his first two films with Armstrong.

The Last Days of Chez Nous (1993)

The Last Days of Chez Nous is the first collaboration between Simpson and Armstrong and usefully establishes their working relationship, as a distinctive set of visual concerns emerge here. Simpson describes their pre-production process of looking at art books and photographs along with exercise books of drawings created by Armstrong that 'contain key elements or compositions she wants in each scene. Some close-ups are not always drawn, sometimes just assumed.'[255] Some of these drawings were shared with the key crew in pre-production but often the discussion was on set. Simpson further explains, 'I would use the viewfinder to show possibilities based on what I thought she wanted. Often I was right, other times not.' This observation demonstrates the two-way street occurring on set, with the cinematographer expected to offer up suggestions and put forward specific solutions in response to concepts initiated by the director. Martha Ansara notes that Australian cinematographers were recognised internationally for their 'artistic excellence' and known for being 'fast, versatile, flexible and easy to work with.'[256] These attributes of creativity and resourcefulness on set are exhibited by both Boyd and Simpson.

Unlike Boyd, Simpson says he is willing to work with different camera systems, and despite having a larger budget than previous Armstrong films, *Last Days of Chez Nous* was shot with an ARRIFLEX 535 camera and Zeiss lenses ('also a great system that I have used a lot' [257]) employing an aspect ratio of 1.85:1. Simpson points to the inter-relation of film stock, exposure practices, and lab work when explaining that he used Kodak film stocks because they

> had good grain structure—much better than previous fast film from Eastman Kodak. Still I used to over-expose it by as much as one camera stop and have the lab raise the printer lights by eight points to bring the exposure down. This increased the contrast and reduced the grain quite a lot.[258]

[255] Geoffrey Simpson, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[256] Martha Ansara, *The Shadowcatchers: A history of cinematography in Australia* (NSW: Austcine Publishing, 2012), 185.
[257] Geoffrey Simpson, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[258] Geoffrey Simpson, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

It is important to stress that Simpson's aim here is increased contrast. The technique of over-exposing the film stock is a primary process used by Simpson, further enhanced by lower lighting contrast ratios through reduced use of fill sources. A feature of the cinematography in all three of these films is increased contrast with heavier blacks, creating a sharper image with well-defined background elements, whilst still using soft key light sources for faces. The crispness of these images is notably different from the softer style employed by Boyd. Simpson uses soft lighting of faces with a high contrast ratio spreading attention around the frame to incorporate more characters and more elements of art direction, colour motifs and locations. Boyd uses soft lighting on faces with a lower contrast ratio to accentuate the more impressionist style.

Image 4.6: The location house, a terrace with windows at the front and along one side.

The Last Days of Chez Nous is mostly set within a small terrace house in Balmain, Sydney. As the title of the film indicates, the house (Image 4.6) is an important character in its own right. The location threw up many problems for Simpson and Armstrong, including how to work with a mixture of available and artificial light sources and how best to cover an ensemble drama with very little room for lighting and dollies, or for reverse angle camera positions. In the DVD commentary, Simpson reflects that the location was 'the most difficult I've ever worked on because it was so small. Every shot has been a challenge.'[259] Similarly, Armstrong recalls the house being 'hell to shoot in because of the limited space, with lighting taking considerable time.'[260] Unlike studio sets where walls can be removed for lighting purposes, in this location the walls are fixed, the ceilings are low, and the doors and windows open on to potentially uncontrollable light.

[259] "Interview with Geoffrey Simpson Umbrella Entertainment," DVD Special Features, *Last Days of Chez Nous*, 1992.
[260] "Director's commentary Umbrella Entertainment," DVD Special Features, *Last Days of Chez Nous*, 1992.

However, the location, though complex to light, provided opportunities to film between rooms, from one space into another, and through foreground structures such as windows and door frames, creating visual and spatial depth. Shots and whole scenes are devised with views into other rooms and frequently to the outside suburbia in a style that suggests the influence of Hammershoi. On the DVD commentary Simpson explains the house was chosen because it is possible to see and film between rooms, as well as light between spaces.[261] The cinematography is typified by shots with characters and action staged across the width of the frame and very deep staging with views into other rooms and outdoor spaces (Image 4.7). This type of deep space staging, dictated (and enabled) by the location, is not previously seen in Armstrong films and thus gives an indication of the skill set Simpson brings to the collaboration. Lateral staging across the width of the frame is also employed (Image 4.8), not only including multiple characters within the frame, but also leaving room for the play of colour motifs, such as the blue of the sofa and cushion which matches the blue box on the rear bookshelf, the orange cushions, and even the red cushion which matches the headband.

Image 4.7: Deep staging, with characters layered from the foreground to the distant background of the shot.

[261] "Gillian Armstrong - Audio commentary," DVD Special Features, *Last Days of Chez Nous,* 1992.

Image 4.8: family groups and art-directed décor spread across the width of the frame.

The use of depth within the frame is a defining characteristic not only of this film, but also of Simpson's two other collaborations with Armstrong. The camera is repeatedly placed so that it can see through to other rooms and along the length of hallways to the other end of the house. As with Hammershoi's compositions, there are usually windows in the back of the scene and actors are frequently positioned deep in the frame, in front of the window so that they are seen in silhouette, a style seen earlier by Richards in *14's Good, 18's Better*. Foreground elements such as doorways and windows (Images 4.9 and 4.10) provide an outer frame and are designed to direct the eye to the rear of the composition. The amount of focal depth, carrying from the front to rear of frame, suggests the use of mid-range lenses with a stop of around T4.[262]

Image 4.9: doorway framing the kitchen.

Image 4.10: reverse angle with camera positioned within the room and rear layer activated.

[262] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, in email correspondence with the author, 2021. See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 162.

This use of depth is the most obvious feature of Simpson's work and although it varies across the films, it is always distinctive. Image 4.9 shows the two actors framed by the doorway and positioned in the kitchen for depth, with JP at the back of frame, and highlighted by a warmed light source positioned there. The commitment to production design in the film is apparent in this shot where the foreground branch with photos takes up the negative space in the doorway. A reverse angle composition (4.10) follows with the camera placed inside the kitchen, closer to the actors and with less aggressive foreground but enabling a crucial background layer with sister Vicki listening in on the conversation from outside the open window.

This layered technique has the potential to create disjunctions of light intensity and colour temperature. When JP finally leaves the house at the end of the film (Image 4.11), Beth is left standing in the foreground garden while her daughter is positioned in front of the doorway light at the other end of the house. The shot contains two areas of interest, Beth in the foreground and her daughter silhouetted in the background, so that the viewer's eye moves between the two. The kitchen is lit with small pools of light motivated by practical lamps that justify these small light sources. Examples of this can be seen in Image 4.10 with a low hanging ceiling light in the right corner of the set illuminating the teapot and toaster, as well as the sister's arm. Creating depth in this way requires that exposure control of light sources within the house are balanced with the daylight exterior. 'We had to find frames that worked for exposure so we would not blow windows too much.'[263] The foreground elements are in focus while the background elements are allowed to soften, with backlight providing the contrast required to see the actor in the depth of the frame. Sunlight in the foreground and artificial lighting in the house are aligned so that the characters are both backlit and shadows they produce fall at a similar angle emphasising them spatially. The scene is framed by the stone gateway through which the camera is pointed. Behind this wall is a fill source that ensures the actor's face is well lit against the strong sunlit backlight. This image brings together all the defining elements of Simpson's cinematographic technique and skill. He is at pains to combine practical light sources with film lights in a way that maintains a believable and motivated lighting design.

[263] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, in email correspondence with the author, 2021. See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 162.

Image 4.11: JP leaves, with Beth in the foreground and daughter Annie as a silhouette in the house.

Filming through windows is a device used by many cinematographers, to create a frame within a frame for the purpose of isolating or emphasising a character within the location. We have seen in the Adelaide Girls documentaries that the triad of woman, window and camera with a mixture of light intensities and colour temperatures can be a distinctive component in the analysis of a cinematographer's style. The influence of Hammershoi on Simpson is again seen in the placement of window frames and use of window light to compose shots (Images 4.1 and 4.13). In *Last Days of Chez Nous*, this device is frequently used to view the inhabitants of the house from the front street (Image 4.12). Windows also provide the opportunity to combine natural and artificial light sources. As with the use of doorways, the colour temperature (5600K) of the lighting is matched for both interior and exterior and the exposure is sufficient for the focus to hold between the foreground window and the actors inside. This approach will also be seen in *Oscar and Lucinda*.

Image 4.12: window framing

Image 4.13: Vilhelm Hammershøi *Interior, Strandgade 30*, 1901.

Location shooting means a mixture of light types and intensities. Windows are used to motivate artificial light sources placed within the house, including the use of fill lights that bring up the overall ambience to match the exterior light levels. Working with a combination of daylight and available light through windows and doors alongside artificial interior light sources, requires colour correction of either the window light using colour correction gels or of the tungsten film stock using correction filters. Simpson also employed a mixture of film stocks: 'The day exteriors were shot on 5287 EXT 200T I think**,** so we used an 85 filter (Orange) to bring this stock to daylight, making the effective or working ASA 120.'[264] Working with a low ASA requires either the use of fast lenses and a wide aperture, resulting in shallow depth of field or a large amount of light inside to bring the level up to match the exterior daylight and facilitate a higher t-stop with a deeper depth of field. Kodak 5296 EXT 500T (Tungsten) Vision film stock was used for filming night scenes.

The requirement for deep focus combined with naturalism meant lighting the interiors to match the intensity of the incoming daylight. Simpson says, 'We did use quite a bit of light where we could. But we also cut the (window) light so we were not competing with total full sun exterior light.'[265] A wide shot in the front living room (Image 4.14) shows backlight coming from a window and doorway, with artificial light sources off screen, bringing the ambient interior levels up to match. The street view shows a cloudy day with no direct sunlight or over exposed highlights. The colour temperature of the lighting matches between both the interior and exterior views and the exposure holds as actors move freely through doorways. The reverse angle (Image 4.15) also shows only an exterior doorway with a strong light source positioned close to the camera. All light sources (primarily Kino Flo fluorescent tubes) are matched for daylight colour temperature and balanced through an 85 filter (orange) in front of the lens. Gaffer Reg Garside 'was very helpful in how to rig the (Kino Flo) tubes to keep out of shot and give the lighting output required.'[266] Shots with windows in the frame can have brightness reduced through the use of ND gels, curtains or netting that filter or correct colour temperature. Doorways are more complex, however, because of the need for actors and cameras to enter and exit through them. Scheduling the filming for specific times of day or weather is one approach that has been applied to Image 4.14 where the view to the street is cloudy and therefore more closely matching the interior light levels.

[264] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, in email correspondence with the author, 2020. See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 162.
[265] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, in email correspondence with the author, 2021. See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 162.
[266] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, "DOP – Gaffer relationship," in correspondence with the author, 2021. See appendix: Helen Carter, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 162.

Image 4.14: WS showing the window and front doorway sources.

Image 4.15: reverse angle with the back doorway and view to the courtyard.

In addition to lighting up the interiors, Simpson explains, 'we scrimmed the entire back courtyard so had total sun control to help the inside/outside balance.'[267] Here Simpson refers to the view through the backdoor (Image 4.15 and 4.16) and the use of a light silk fabric stretched over a 20x20 foot frame, rigged above the courtyard to control shadows as well as soften and/or reduce sunlight on the exterior of the set or location. The actors are able to cross the threshold while maintaining exposure. Backlighting can be introduced from an artificial source, controlling position, intensity and colour temperature as opposed to relying on daylight that can vary and move unpredictably.

Image 4.16: view from the house into the rear courtyard.

Another method of balancing light and dark mise-en-scène is the systematic use of silhouettes (Images 4.17-19) that position characters against windows, skies and exterior reflections, with

[267] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, "What is cinematography?" in email correspondence with the author, May 2021. See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 162.

increased contrast due to the over-exposure of the film stock as previously discussed. The silhouette includes the creation of patches of brightness against which the character is positioned. Image 4.17 shows the solitary figure of Beth walking the streets, her form emphasised by the highlight reflected off the road and by the use of sunlight for a backlight source. The road has been wet down to accentuate the reflected light. The foreground fence and garden are darker and provide a framing vignette for the composition.

Image 4.17: silhouette with wet-down road

Exposing for the background instead of the skin tones, emphasises the shape or form of the subject and draws attention to the surrounding location. The use of hats by the costume designer (Image 4.18) is particularly suited to this technique. Combining existing available light sources, evening sky light with interior film lights (Image 4.19) creates a rich look with a variety of colour temperatures that also remains believable. The compositions are arranged in thirds, with an area of brightness to balance out the frame. In the examples below, the characters are positioned on the left third with bright areas behind them for emphasis. A small area of light in the rear of the shot directs attention to the performers.

Image 4.18: Silhouettes and costume design.

Image 4.19: scheduled to retain detail in the sky.

Simpson uses film stock latitude to capture the foreground action, lit by artificial sources while also holding exposure in the evening sky (Image 4.19). 'On fast Kodak Vision 500 stock, which seemed to have a slight blue bias, I have been amazed how long it was possible to hold exposure in the sky after sunset.'[268] Simpson relies on small areas of brightness to balance the frame and emphasise characters. The way in which Simpson handles night-time exteriors will be a key aspect of his collaboration with Armstrong going forward. For cinematographers, lighting and exposing for night scenes is a fundamental problem to solve and is a central component of their style.

Not afraid to use darker compositions, Simpson is particular about the use of shadow areas in the frame and carefully controls the contrast to give an impression of darkness while maintaining exposure on faces. Armstrong has commented on this style of light in the bedroom (Images 4.20 and 4.21) remarking that, 'touches of light across both their faces' creates 'sensual lighting.'[269] A hard light source is positioned outside the window, through blinds and furniture to create areas of light and dark on the bed and wall behind. This use of light directs attention toward the faces and isolates the characters within the space.

Image 4.20: Touches of light

Image 4.21: Sensual light

Characters in this film are rarely seen alone in the house and scenes usually contain several actors and family groups and are therefore structured around wide-shots. There is almost no use of mid-shots so that cuts are between wide and close shots. A particular skill Simpson brings to the cinematography in this film is the ability to work with contrasts between shot scale, as well as with lighting contrast, whilst filming coverage that will work together in the edit. As the film progresses, the close-ups are tighter emphasising the difference between the wide and close-up, demonstrated here in Images 4.22 and 4.23. The camera in the wide shot is positioned at an oblique angle to the actors. In the close-up, the camera is moved around to achieve an L-shaped composition that combines profile and full face. In both shots, the actors are back lit by naturalistic light from the window behind them. The light is motivated by the window but then wrapped around the faces in a

[268] Geoff Burton, ACS, "Satellite Boy: Geoffrey Simpson ACS," *Australian Cinematographer* 60 (December 2013): 53.
[269] "Gillian Armstrong - Audio commentary," DVD Special Features, *Last Days of Chez Nous,* 1992.

believable rather than unmediated way. Seamlessly combining natural and artificial light sources disguises the film lighting and creates a look that is convincing for that location.

Image 4.22: wide-shot

Image 4.23: cut to the close-up

The prevalence of tight close-ups is generally less in this film than other Armstrong films although the final scenes feature the type of big close-ups used in *My Brilliant Career.* At times, these shots are so tight that the chin breaches the bottom of frame (also notable in *Oscar and Lucinda*). An example of this tight composition can be seen in one of the final scenes (Image 4.24), where faces overlap within the frame, a style reminiscent of Bergman and Nykvist (Images 4.26 and 4.27). A very tight two-shot (Image 4.25) combines both actors' close-ups into one shot and is another way to avoid cutting to a reverse angle in a tight location. In this case the subsequent shot reverts to the wide-angle seen previously.

Image 4.24: *Chez Nous*, tight, layered framing.

Image 4.25: tight two-shot

Image 4.26: *The Silence* (Bergman-Nykvist)

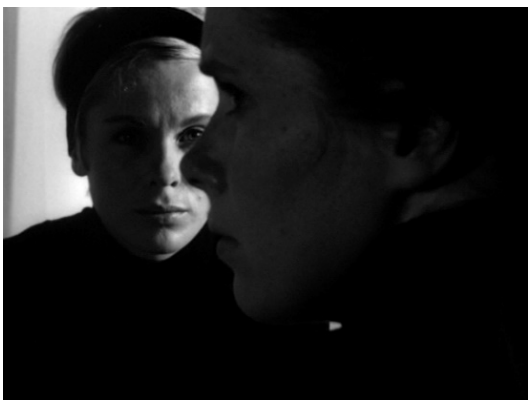


Image 4.27: *Persona* (Bergman-Nykvist)

Faces are lit for warm skin tones and stand out against a contrasting greener background set dressing. Whereas similar close-ups in *My Brilliant Career* include props in the foreground of the frame (Chapter Three, Images 3.19-21), that are usually out of focus, these faces are clean with no foreground elements. The out-of-focus foreground elements (which I have identified as a key element of Boyd's style) create a sense of three-dimensional space by enclosing characters *behind a foreground*. Simpson is more likely to create a sense of three-dimensional depth by including elements *behind the character*. Simpson's strength is incorporating production design elements into the background of shots such as the red accents from key props. The open framings and background depth work to accentuate colour design. The positioning of a red canister on the shelf behind the character (Image 4.28) shows the way that this style can be used to include colour motifs scattered throughout the set. Armstrong worked with designer Janet Patterson to provide the impetus for Simpson to work with depth: 'The inside was designed and the colours were chosen to really bring the people forward.'[270] Through the use of contrasting colours (Image 4.29), attention is also drawn from the red hair to the green lightshade and plants in the background. The production design is colourful, and compositions are carefully balanced to draw attention to this. The three main female characters are linked by their red hair, an element accentuated by the use of back or top lighting. According to Armstrong, Simpson emphasised their glowing hair and 'always slightly high-lighted the redheads.'[271]

Image 4.28: Beth close-up with red highlight

Image 4.29: Vicki, red hair against green

The open foreground also allows a lot of light to be directed into the eyes which makes them very prominent. This will be a recurring visual motif across these three films with what might be called the "Simpson eyeball." Image 4.28 illustrates the distinctive way Simpson highlights eyes—in this case by the use of a small kick light on Beth's face—but more often, by small lights to reflect off the eyeballs so that the eyes appear to glow.

[270] Raffaele Caputo, "'The Last Days of Chez Nous' – Film review," *Cinema Papers* 90 (1992): 4-8.
[271] "Gillian Armstrong - Audio commentary," DVD Special Features, *Last Days of Chez Nous,* 1992.

One final point of difference between Simpson and Boyd is the different styles of camera movement that are apparent in the films they have worked on with Armstrong. Unlike Boyd's camera movement which is often large and free ranging (for example the Russ-Cam employed in *High Tide*), Simpson's camera movement is more likely to be tightly controlled by grips operating dollies and cranes. Even with the cramped spaces afforded by the location of *Last Days* (Image 4.30) production stills show the camera mounted on a Panther dolly, including for static shots beside a dinner table. Within the house location, camera moves are used infrequently, mostly to follow actors moving between rooms and spaces. The cramped and inflexible house does not allow for cranes or the laying of tracks so the camera on a Panther dolly is likely moved around by grips on smooth boards laid especially for this purpose. Outside of the house, with greater freedom, more expansive moves are created including tracking with actors along the front veranda and nearby suburban streets. Armstrong describes a scene shot in the outback near Broken Hill, filmed at sunset. A conversation takes place between Beth and her father while they walk and talk. Filming at sunset is always under time pressure and in this case, a track was laid for efficiency so that the camera could dolly pointing at one actor on the left, the other on the right and then being used a third time for the final two-shot that incorporates the setting sun. This is a commonly used set-up for low budget drama, saving time laying tracks and maximising the use of the track length. More expansive moves, incorporating cranes are seen in *Oscar and Lucinda*, where the possibilities are increased with larger locations and greater budget. The use of long takes and more complex camera movement stands out as an evolution of the collaboration between Simpson and Armstrong in their next film together.

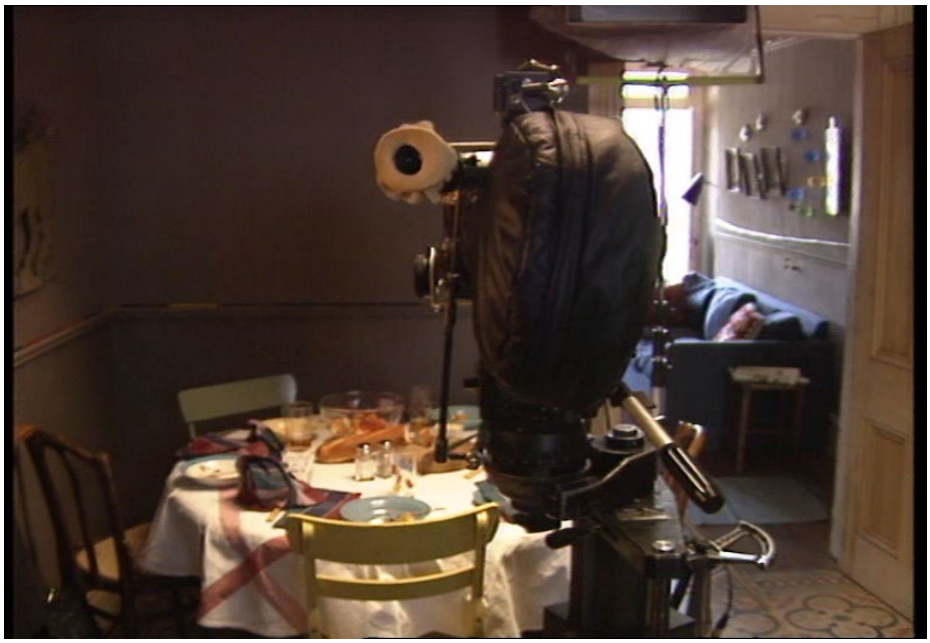


Image 4.30: Camera mounted on an off-set bowl, on a Panther dolly. A reflector board on a stand is also visible in the background.[272]

[272] "Interview with Simpson, screen capture," DVD Special Features, *Last Days of Chez Nous*, 1992.

***Little Women* (1994)**

Following their collaboration on *Last Days of Chez Nous,* Armstrong and Simpson headed to the northern hemisphere to film the period drama *Little Women* set in Massachusetts during the American Civil War. Like *Last Days*, the majority of the action involves a group of women interacting in a small house. There are many scenes with multiple characters and family vignettes (for example Images 4.31, 4.32 and 4.33). Armstrong again describes the complexity of filming 'eight people in a room coming in and out of doorways' as being 'quite difficult to shoot.'[273] This challenge is embraced and turned into a virtue through the use of intricate staging and framing. Once again, wide shots that spread the action across the frame as well as in depth, will be key to the compositional strategies. Off-centred compositions in these wide-shots are balanced by the production design that places significant elements of mise-en-scène both beside and behind the characters.

Image 4.31: lateral action with window sources

Image 4.32: alternative family group

Depth is frequently created by views into other rooms and spaces. Image 4.31 includes a Hammershoi-like rear room as well as wall decorations filling out the top of the frame. Focus is generally set to the front of the scene, with the background only gently out-of-focus, but sharp enough for décor and colour motifs to be used, such as the patches of red symmetrically framing the family group in Image 4.32. Simpson is working here with the complexities of a larger cast but at the same time has the benefit of being able to control the studio lighting and to move walls of the set to position actors and camera. Where depth-staging in *Last Days* was primarily influenced by the limitations imposed by the cramped house location, in *Little Women*, with wider studio sets, there is also more scope for arranging family groups across the frame. In these wide-shots there is often interplay between the foreground action and the background or lateral re-action. As with *Last Days*, the viewer is given choices about where to look, though this is constrained by areas of light positioned behind the actors to direct attention. Simpson uses a variety of light sources to achieve deeper focus in order to contain groups of people and colour motifs in the background of frame.

[273] "Gillian Armstrong - Director's commentary," DVD Special Features, 47 minutes, *Little Women*, 1994.

Image 4.33 includes a window source behind the actors, which draws the viewer's eye deeper into the frame. The control in the studio set affords Armstrong and Simpson freedom to be more creative, to try out more adventurous techniques with camera and lighting.

Image 4.33: *Little Women*, lateral staging of family groups.

Given the enhanced possibilities offered by studio shooting, Simpson and Armstrong design camera movements to maintain the long take, extending the complexities of changing compositions without needing to cut. Simpson's commitment to depth composition facilitates possibilities for longer takes and continuous performance. The camera is moved between rooms, following actors as a means to preserve continuity of time and space as well as performance between characters. This style of cinematography demonstrates a difference or progression from *My Brilliant Career* which relied on big close-ups and cutting over camera movement.

Image 4.34: wider composition

Image 4.35: small push in for a closer shot

The simplest camera move begins as a wider framing of a family grouping (Image 4.34), followed by a short push-in to the closer framing for emphasis and without the need to edit or zoom. In the

case of Image 4.35, this tighter composition also straightens up the angle to centre the family, concentrating attention on the faces as the scene builds. An alternative move out occurs in shots such as Image 4.31 where the camera starts in close and is tracked further back to reveal the whole family and contain Marmee's entrance into the room.

Image 4.36: beginning of the camera move

Image 4.37: final camera position

Longer moves between rooms provide a way of transitioning between compositions in a controlled and precise fashion. The technique is also used to transition actors from room A to B. An example of this can be found in a scene that begins with Beth at the piano and Jo more distant in the middle of the shot (Image 4.36 and 4.38). The two sisters and spaces are lit separately, and the frame is divided almost down the middle by the vertical line of the wall.

Image 4.38: three layers of lighting and action

Meg then enters the frame by the stairs in the back of shot (Image 4.38), introducing a third layer of lighting and depth. As the sisters converse, they move to the front of the shot near the piano motivating the camera to track back. The group then moves into the next room, with the camera tracked ahead of them and coming to rest for the final composition introducing the fourth sister,

Amy, who sits in the foreground. This final composition (4.37) has a deep view with lighting placed to draw attention to the layers of action and dialogue while also containing all four sisters. Beth eventually leaves through the back room while Jo and Meg exit by crossing the very front of the frame. This method of combining coverage into one shot creates challenges for the cinematographer such as where to hide lights so they won't be seen as the camera is moved through the set and how to position lights that will look good from a variety of different camera angles and positions. To provide some options for the edit, a close-up of Amy from Jo's point-of-view was also filmed and inserted into the tracking shot. As Armstrong points out, in a studio set where walls can be moved and lighting can come from any direction, the challenge is how to retain the sense of small spaces and rooms, such as the scenes shot in the attic.[274] In *Last Days* the challenge is to find as much space in a cramped location, where here the challenge is that although the studio has more space, the cinematography still needs to give the impression of it being cramped.

Another striking example of a long and complicated camera shot incorporating shorter and subtler movement is the candle shot, early in the film, designed to introduce each of the sisters to the audience (Images 4.39-4.42). The focus, lighting and camera movement in this shot are motivated by Marmee's candle as each sister lights their own candle from hers. The shot begins with a profile close-up of Amy on the right side of frame (Image 4.39), with another sister out-of-focus behind her.

Image 4.39: Initial composition

Image 4.40: Movement from off-screen

Image 4.41: Tilt and focus pull

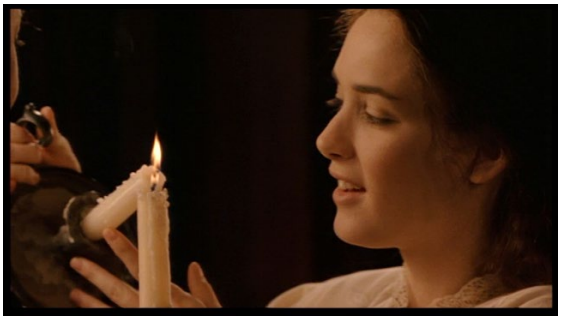


Image 4.42: Final composition

[274] "Gillian Armstrong - Director's commentary," DVD Special Features, *Little Women*, 1994.

This composition sets up Marmee's sudden entrance from the left of frame (Image 4.40). The lighting intensity is varied across the frame with Marmee almost in silhouette while Amy is side lit, as though from the candle while the background falls into darkness. The shot then tilts up and shifts focus to the next sister and continues in this way until finally resolving on the mother. The shot runs for 30 seconds and combines tight framing with precise character staging, manipulated focus and contrasting lighting that encompasses skin tones through to the black behind them. There is minimal margin for error in this complex shot-construction which requires precise rehearsal between actors, camera operator and focus puller. The camera movement here, cued to small movements of the candle, is subtle and difficult. This is the type of cinematography challenge that can be met when filming in a controlled studio environment. It represents a distinctive change in the context of previous Armstrong-directed films where cutting between large close-ups is much more prevalent than long takes incorporating complex camera movement to synthesise a range of close-ups.

These intricate camera movements are scattered liberally through this film. According to Armstrong the camera movement in the exterior ice-skating scene was conceived 'to have the camera give a feeling of a graceful, dance-like movement. The first shot was planned with the camera moving slowly and gently out, to then come down to see Jo and Laurie in medium shot (Image 4.43) and, from their point of view, to see little Amy coming down over the hill.'[275] As Jo and Laurie race along the path, the camera follows (Image 4.44) until they circle around each other, with the camera also rotating around them. The camera was mounted on a dolly and tracks, with action precisely choreographed and rehearsed to capture graceful movement. This is clearly very different from the more serendipitous approach used by Boyd in *High* Tide with broad sweeping (and often unmotivated) movements. The budget and resources available to the camera crew on *Little Women* afforded them the opportunity to practice and refine complicated spatial manoeuvres.

Image 4.43: mid-shot

Image 4.44: camera follows

While this film marks a progression in terms of composition and camera movement, there are also clear elements of continuity in terms of lighting and colour design. Armstrong refers to American

[275] Gillian Armstrong, "Little Women: Little by little," in *Second Take: Australian film-makers talk*, edited by Raffaele Caputo and Geoff Burton (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin (with *AFC* funding), 1999), 114.

painters Whistler, Sargent and Cassat as inspiration for 'key images to base the colours and lighting.'[276] Armstrong said she wanted to create a look that 'feels like a warm and beautiful place to live.'[277] The job of the cinematographer is to find the visual correlatives for this mood. The film opens with a narration by Jo March suggesting a link between tone and specific lighting cues for the film, including the detail that lamp oil is scarce: 'Somehow in that dark time, our family, the March family, seemed to create our own light.' Contained in this line of narration is an important reference to lighting, providing inspiration for the cinematography. A cinematographer will scour a script for these types of clues for the lighting style. Although the light was said to be scarce, in practice the lighting in the film is heavily augmented. On the one hand it is a dark time, both because of war-time scarcity and the general notion that the past is a darker place, but in this film, it is rarely the kind of blackness or low-key lighting that we saw in *Mrs. Soffel*. Dramatic tone and mood are still the key drivers of the lighting. Like *High Tide*, colour motifs underlie a narrative opposition and it is the task of the cinematographer to give emphasis to those colours. Differences of approach are still evident. Blue winter exteriors are not marked by the bleakness of *High Tide*, but rather set up a contrast with a warm, golden interior glow that shines through the windows of the March home, in keeping with the thematic idea that the family unit is the source of light. (Images 4.45 and 4.46) Unlike the use of windows as sources of external light with balanced colour temperatures in *Last Days*, this film deliberately seeks to accentuate the differences in colour temperature between interior and exterior lighting. The March family home, an exterior film set, is surrounded by blue snow, with a blue path leading up to the entrance. The driveway, covered in fake snow, is used for tracking shots, travelling shots with horse-drawn carriages and of children moving on sleds. Windows send out bright yellow-orange light, providing a visual means of reinforcing the inside/outside opposition.

Image 4.45: house exteriors, with warm studio lights positioned behind the windows

Image 4.46: warm and blue light sources

Unlike their previous film *Last Days of Chez Nous* which was filmed on location in a real house with sunlight coming through windows, most of the interior scenes in *Little Women* were filmed in studio

[276] "Director's commentary by Gillian Armstrong," DVD Special Features, *Little Women*, 1994.
[277] "Director's commentary by Gillian Armstrong," DVD Special Features, *Little Women*, 1994.

sets, with entirely artificial light sources. When lighting the real house location in *Last Days*, Simpson applied his technical knowledge to balance the exposure and colour temperature differences between day light through windows and artificial interior light sources. On *Little Women*, within the studio sets, it was completely the opposite, with different lighting gels and lamp heads used to create and emphasise difference between the colour temperatures used for outside and inside light sources. Working on studio sets required a radically different approach to film lighting, with complete control over time of day, colour temperature and quantity of lighting coming through windows. However, believability is once again the starting point for Simpson's construction of a lighting scheme. Armstrong says, 'all the lighting should feel like source lighting, so it comes from windows or at night from candles.'[278] The artificial studio light sources are motivated by the onscreen use of lanterns and practical lights of the period in which the film is set. Simpson explains, 'The look defined itself, in the sense that the film is set in the 1860s with a lot of light coming from candlelight and kerosene lantern sources. I wanted it to look warm and be very rich. We used various orange gels to add warmth. We had candlelight and lamp light being our source light at night so in testing we played around with large soft lights to create a single source look for a lot of the work.' [279] This last sentence neatly summarises the difference between the conception of believability and realism, with multiple, large sources called into service to suggest small, single sources.

Another defining feature of the cinematography in *Little Women* is the use of Armstrong's signature frame-within-frame device, where characters are frequently seen through windows and doors. This device is particularly prevalent here because the March family frequently communicate with their neighbours who are seen through the front window of their house. The windows viewed from outside contrast in colour temperature (images 4.47 and 4.48) with the exterior daylight blue compared with the tungsten interior. Speaking with *Cinema Papers*, Simpson says, 'I wanted a very warm, homely kind of feeling to come from the photography. To contrast that, I made the exteriors cold and slightly bleak.'[280] Image 4.47 shows the cold blue exterior light contrasted against warm window light coming from the house deeper in the shot. The Kodak 5296 film stock is able to correctly record the different colour temperatures and has sufficient latitude to capture the difference in exposure between light sources. Simpson also notes a slightly blue bias in the filmstock.[281]

[278] "Gillian Armstrong - Director's commentary," DVD Special Features, 24:30 minutes, *Little Women*, 1994.
[279] Margaret Smith and Emma Coller, "Little Women: Margaret Smith talks with director Gillian Armstrong and DOP Geoffrey Simpson, ACS," *Cinema Papers* 103 (March 1995): 52-54.
[280] Margaret Smith and Emma Coller, "Little Women: Margaret Smith talks with director Gillian Armstrong and DOP Geoffrey Simpson," *Cinema Papers* 103 (March 1995): 52-54.
[281] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

Image 4.47: Framing through the window on an interior studio set.

Image 4.48: The window next door, exterior filmed on location.

Filming through and against windows provides an opportunity to mix colour temperatures in order to achieve chromatic contrast in addition to mixtures of brightness or luminance. In these two examples (Image 4.47 and 4.48) the camera is on the outside looking in, to characters warmly lit (that is, with yellowish skin tones) on the inside. Where the location window shots in *Last Days* were matched for an even colour temperature between the interior and exterior of the shot, in *Little Women*, the difference in colour temperature is created by studio lighting to emphasise a warm interior contrasting with the cold exterior (Image 4.49). Simpson says, 'I was shooting Tungsten 500ASA with tungsten light (3200 degrees Kelvin colour temp) for the interiors, often with a 1/2 85 orange gel on the lamps, making them quite warm. This was mixed with the blue exterior lighting (5600 Kelvin) either night or day light. So yes, a lot of colour temperature differences, between warm light and cool light.'[282] Although the light sources are believably motivated by a window and a lamp, the use of colour and contrast are creative decisions to enhance or exaggerate these elements. The blue studio window source emphasises this orange lamp light. The shadow areas in the composition are deep with little detail in the hat or jacket. Simpson recalls production designer Jan Roelfs saying, 'I do not mind if you don't light everything, some things can go very dark.'[283] The side of Jo's face is lit by a hotter kicker motivated by a practical lamp source, providing separation from the blue window light behind her. This style has the appearance of using natural means of lighting (lamps and candles), without actually using the natural light source itself to achieve exposure.

[282] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[283] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, "What is cinematography?," See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

Image 4.49: warm interior lighting contrasted by the blue artificial window light.

Simpson is interested in higher contrast lighting ratios than are usually seen in period films and the areas of shadow, especially in night interiors are sometimes heavy. One reviewer noted that Simpson 'uses the same technique of underlighting — emphasizing shadow and density of space, creating a distinct mood and sense of place.'[284] Kodak 500T stock 5296 was used for interior and night scenes, and according to the Kodak data sheet, one can 'expose them with tungsten lamps that have slightly higher or lower colour temperatures without correction filters.'[285] This provided Simpson with the latitude to expose for practical lamps and candles alongside correctly balanced artificial film lights. Deep shadows in the warm and cool tones are a consistent stylistic feature of the lighting design that Simpson says was 'more influenced by modern films, with their richness and degree of contrast, which is now a contemporary look.'[286] In both *Little Women* and *Oscar and Lucinda*, through the use of high contrast exposure and lighting, Simpson creates a look that is simultaneously modern while also signifying the past. The light sources appear to come from candles and lamps, so faces are lit with a soft key light source, but the blacks are heavy giving the impression that focus appears to hold deep into the shot. The period look is redefined through the use of low grain, high sensitivity films stocks and sharper lenses to create a crisper look.

A common lighting trope in *Little Women* is Simpson's use of strong eye lights demonstrating a commitment to lighting the eyeballs of characters who are the chief locus of dramatic intensity. The source for these eye lights tends to be soft, though heavily directional, for example a small bounce

[284] Edward Guthmann, "Film Review: 'Little Women' draws you in with slow grace," *SF Gate,* 23 June 1995.
[285] "Eastman 550t 5296 exr – Kodak: MPTVI DATA SHEET, 1992," *Yumpu,* 22 July 2013.
[286] Margaret Smith and Emma Coller, "Director of Photography; Geoffry Simpson," *Cinema Papers* 103 (March 1995): 52-54.

board or heavily diffused kick light, positioned to reflect light into the eye. This reflection then appears as a bright circle or shape in the iris depending on the size and shape of the source as well as the proximity to the subject. Simpson often lights faces to accentuate one side, leaving the other dark with or without the use of fill lighting. In the two examples below variations in the use of fill can be seen, with a romantic look motivated by candlelight in Image 4.50 and partially filled on the near to camera side of the face, or an alternative dark look in Image 4.51 that has no use of fill, with all reflected light cut to signify the approaching death of a character. In both cases, there is a strong eye light in both eyes even though the near eye socket is left mostly dark in the second shot. The candle flame in Image 4.50 is positioned below the eyes, yet the eye light is still in the top of the iris, which is another example of believable yet unrealistic lighting.

Image 4.50: Nostalgic scenes: single, soft key source, motivated by the practical light source candle

Image 4.51: Darkness. Scenes when Beth is dying, no fill is used.

Finally, a word needs to be said about Simpson's handling of darkness in this *Little Women*. We have seen in *Last Days*, a preference for using the latitude of the Kodak Vision stock to capture lingering twilight. Darkness is handled by creating small pools of light that make the image legible, often in silhouette. In *Little Women*, with its enhanced control over studio sets, night-time's darkness is deflected into colour—it is not darkness but rather coloured light, blue rather than black (Image 4.45). As one writer recently pointed out in *American Cinematographer*, while moonlight actually has a higher colour temperature than daylight, "it is an accepted convention that moonlight is bluish in tone…it is a well-established component in the language of visual imagery."[287] The substitution of coloured light for darkness is an important step in the collaboration of Simpson and Armstrong, as it points the way forward for the day-for-night film capture in *Oscar and Lucinda*.

Oscar and Lucinda **(1998)**

Simpson's third collaboration with Armstrong was another period drama, which is often compared to Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), a reference to its climactic action with a mad hero sailing

[287] Jay Holben, "Shot craft: Halloween horrors," *American Cinematographer* 103, no. 10 (2022): 13.

down a river.[288] Among the great cinematographic challenges of this film are the hybrid of locations, including filming in two different countries, with different crews and the range of locations, especially exteriors, with difficult weather and lighting. *Oscar and Lucinda* was filmed in the UK and Australia, with a budget of $A20 million, which was high by the standards of Australian period cinema at that time. According to NFSA curator Richard Kuipers, *Oscar and Lucinda* was 'a prestige production made on a scale and budget few Australian period pieces other than *Australia* (2008) and *Phar Lap* (1983) can match.'[289] Aside from comparisons of budget, another measure of the scale of this production might be the size of the camera and lighting department, with IMDB listing 38 crew, more than double that of *Little Women* and triple the number of *Last Days*.[290] This includes camera crew working in either the UK or Australia, such as camera operators, focus pullers, clapper loaders, gaffers and 2nd Unit camera crews. Russell Boyd is credited with Additional Photography and Rob Hunter (*Turtle Beach* (1992), *The Piano* (1993)) for Underwater Photographer and 2nd Unit camera operator. Simpson used a Panaflex GIIs camera with E series lenses including two zooms: 50-500mm and 40-200mm. He used Kodak Vision 200T for daytime exteriors and the faster Vision 500T low-grain film stocks for interiors and night scenes.[291]

Oscar and Lucinda received mixed reviews and was not a commercial success. However, many reviewers highlighted the cinematography as the film's main attraction. Janet Maslin's review in the *New York Times* is typical in this regard:

> Gorgeously photographed by Geoffrey Simpson (*Shine*), it offers a steady supply of visual surprises within compositions quite suitable for framing. Making rhapsodic use of natural light and of carefully chosen objects, this is a film that can find something gorgeous even in a boatload of cauliflower.[292]

The film can be seen as something of a synthesis of the previous two films, not only because it combines Australian and international production, but also in its mixture of studio and location filming. Wide vistas and compositions are important for the portrayal of landscapes, which play an important narrative role. Paul Byrnes makes specific mention of 'the gorgeous cinematography of landscapes that are rich characters in themselves.'[293] Simpson's specialty is spatially complex mise-en-scène. In the first two films this has largely involved interiors, while here there is greater

[288] Adrian Martin, "'Oscar and Lucinda': Gillian Armstrong, 1997," *Film Critic,* January 1998.
[289] Richard Kuipers, "Oscar and Lucinda: Shall we play?", NFSA ID: 333705, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,* accessed 3 July 2022.
[290] "'Oscar and Lucinda' (1997): Full cast and crew," *IMDb,* accessed 21 November 2022.
[291] Ron Magid, "Religious passage," *American Cinematographer* 79, no. 2 (1998): 90-94.
[292] Janet Maslin, "Film review: A bashful Fiennes and a Vivid Heiress in a quirky tale," *The New York Times,* 31 December 1997.
[293] Paul Byrnes, "Too big for its book," *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 22 January 1988.

emphasis on exteriors. Anamorphic lenses with wide screen aspect ratio of 1: 2.35 were employed to capture Australian bushland and wide views of the Bellingen River down which the glass church sails at the climax of the film. Simpson attributes his understanding of landscape to his education at art school, and as usual, cites the Heidelberg School painters Charles Condor, Fredrick McCubbin and Tom Roberts as having a big impact. He adds that he had travelled on a painting trip up the Strezlecki Track with noted Australian environmental landscape painter Mandy Martin.[294]

Image 4.52: Mandy Martin, *Maryvale Pulp Paper Plant II* 1990

Martin's influence can be noted particularly in the scenes set in Sydney (Image 4.52) with the use of vibrant foreground colours, detail of smoke and clouds in the sky and compositional depth. Despite his obligatory reference to the Heidelberg aesthetic, for *Oscar and Lucinda*, Simpson's aim was to 'try for a bolder, more contemporary-looking film with a sort of industrial, gutsy edge.'[295] Where *Little Women*'s period look featured warm, soft lighting, *Oscar and Lucinda* is lit to reflect a more raw environment influenced by factories, dust and smoke such as in Image 4.53 with the busy and smoky harbour.[296] This is achieved through the use of deep focus and staging (used in conjunction with digitally composited background paintings), lighting that is both soft in the key and harder in the background, pushing the film stock to achieve greater contrast, and by mixing colour temperatures. A comparison between Martin's city landscapes and those in *Oscar and Lucinda* demonstrates Simpson's interest in capturing shadow and contrast.

[294] Geoff Burton, ACS, "Satellite Boy: Geoffrey Simpson ACS," *Australian Cinematographer* 60 (December 2013): 55.
[295] Ron Magid, "Religious passage," *American Cinematographer* 79, no. 2 (1998): 90-94.
[296] John Calhoun, "A study in contrasts: From faces to landscapes, DP Geoffrey Simpson runs the gamut in 'Oscar and Lucinda,'" *Live Design Online*, 1 January 1998, accessed 21 November 2022.

Image 4.53: *Oscar and Lucinda,* Sydney Harbour

The film combines exterior landscapes, existing locations, and studio sets. A gambling den (Image 4.54). was created by Luciana Arrighi on a finger wharf on Sydney harbour. A doorway was created for Lucinda's entry and to give depth to the shot. The set included screens of various sizes and designs to film through with lanterns on tables. The lighting is primarily red with white backlighting for definition. According to Simpson, 'The lighting I used was largely motivated by the lanterns,' once again suggesting that believability stems from designing the lighting around the *idea* of a single element of practical light. He writes further,

> Gill, Luciana and I discussed the look and thought we could easily let things fall off into darkness in the background. We had some references, early photographers and paintings and the big feature in all images were the Chinese faces. So we went for that and the contrast between the beautiful and elegant faces of our two actors and of the harsh, lined and tough faces of our extras.[297]

[297] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

Image 4.54: Chinese gambling den: red with white backlight.

Contrast, rich colour tones and deep, black shadows are again defining features of the cinematography. Smoke is used to diffuse lights and create depth. Against a darkly lit set, characters are separated or highlighted through the use of white backlight. Though small and deep in the shot, attention is drawn to Lucinda by positioning her in a small pool of overhead light.

Filming interiors was made more complex by the decision to shoot with anamorphic lenses, often with a 100mm lens, thereby having a greatly reduced depth of focus. To make things easier for focus puller Sally Ecclestone, Simpson 'worked at about T4 pretty much for all the interiors, sometimes even higher.'[298] The result is increased focal depth and greater definition on the backgrounds, despite the use of the longer lens. The decision to film in actual period houses exacerbated these difficulties. If the location in *Last Days* was cramped, the use of important historic houses in *Oscar and Lucinda* such as Elizabeth Farm, with low ceilings and walls that couldn't be touched presented a fresh set of challenges. This was also the case in the small Cornwall cottage where Simpson wanted enough lights to shoot at T4 but had little space to keep them out of frame.

The cinematography in *Oscar and Lucinda* demonstrates another variation on Simpson's lighting and filming through windows, with the mixture of colour temperatures being less exaggerated than in *Little Women* but more than in *Last Days*. Contrasting warm interior light and cooler exterior light can be seen in Images 4.55 and 4.56. Although the window frame is an obvious foreground element, the emphasis of the shot is inside the room, with background set dressing, props and lighting directing attention to the rear of the shot. Unlike the previous two films, where the wall colours were generally grey or muted tones, these sets and locations often feature stronger, more saturated wall colours. Simpson's strategy here aims to 'keep those stronger blues or reds

[298] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

working, I didn't use strong warm-colored light on the night stuff, because it doesn't work well with the wall colors.'[299]

Image 4.55: Oscar with lamp light

Image 4.56: Cool exterior light on curtains, warm interior.

Despite these window compositions, the camera positions used in *Oscar and Lucinda* are generally placed for open framing, without foreground elements obstructing the performers at the centre of the frame. In comparison to Boyd, the foregrounds are less aggressive and more likely to be in (or near) focus. These compositions are generally wider than Boyd's and comparisons between period dramas *Mrs Soffel*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Oscar and Lucinda* are worthwhile. In *Mrs Soffel and Picnic,* Boyd uses soft foreground ferns, prison bars and props in the front of the frame, frequently obscuring the actors. Simpson is more likely to place these elements at the sides of the frame, more as a border or edge to the image. The composition in Image 4.57 provides a good example of this technique. Actors are seen moving through this cluttered space, with wooden furniture and props at the sides and bottom corners of the frame but not obstructing our view.

[299] John Calhoun, "A study in contrasts: From faces to landscapes, DP Geoffrey Simpson runs the gamut in 'Oscar and Lucinda,'" *Live Design Online*, 1 January 1998, accessed 21 November 2022.

There is an emphasis on the rear of the shot, with the eye drawn to the bright window and then the set dressing, creating background depth. The production design is dense, providing many opportunities for Simpson to light through windows and curtains, as well as incorporate sets into the sides of images. One reviewer summarises the effects of the cinematography by noting that, 'there's lots of little touches to see in the background'.[300] Composition is structured this way in all three films where Simpson collaborates with Armstrong.

Image 4.57: *Oscar and Lucinda* – sharper foreground detail

There are of course close-up shots in all the films but, generally speaking, there is a difference in shot scale with Simpson tending towards wide angle and wide screen shots and Boyd working with closer shots and longer lenses. In *Picnic*, Boyd is working with a shallow depth to disguise the netting on the lens. By contrast, *Oscar and Lucinda* is shot with a wider aperture to increase the focal depth so the depth of field can carry between two actors. This difference is also in part due to Simpson working on productions with larger budgets and more production design and therefore more design to fill the frame. *Little Women* and *Oscar and Lucinda* generally employ wider, deeper framings to contain ensemble casts much larger than are seen in *High Tide* or *Mrs Soffel*.

Interior camera moves (tracking shots) are used in this film to shift and divert attention from the foreground to the background. Depth is used, even when there is no dramatic need for it. A scene set in the glass factory office, covers a heated conversation between Lucinda and her trustee beginning with a close-up on Lucinda followed by wide-shot of the office (Image 4.58). In the foreground left of frame, almost in silhouette, someone—who plays no further part in the scene—sits drafting while deeper in frame Lucinda argues a point. Large white papers on the desk are prominent as they are the brightest part of the frame. The camera is pushed in closer removing the foreground action and papers, thereby drawing attention to light and movement of the glassworks

[300] "Oscar and Lucinda: 'Key details: Availability,'" *Oz Movies, a*ccessed, 23 April 2024 (no author)

in the back of the frame (Image 4.59)—though again, there is no dramatic action staged there. During the camera track in, Lucinda moves from left to right of frame so that attention again shifts back to the narratively-significant dramatic action. Tracking the camera deeper into the shot subtly transitions the emphasis from the front to the rear of the shot, giving greater prominence to the glass objects with which the set is dressed, whilst also maintaining interest in the dialogue. This is a complex shift of attention, that takes place within a shot, rather than resorting to cutting. By positioning characters in front of light and space, three-dimensional depth is created within the shot and accentuated further by camera movement.

Image 4.58: attention drawn to the foreground action

Image 4.59: the camera is pushed in closer and attention shifts toward the back of frame.

The increased budget and exterior filming locations create a need for a more ‘epic’ style which requires bigger, more complicated camera moves than seen in previous Armstrong films. The last third of the film takes place in bushland around the Bellingen River. An example of a large sweeping, unmotivated camera move seen in *Oscar and Lucinda* (Images 4.60 – 4.62) combines both a track and crane, to move from a wide two-shot with the river behind, through to an overhead ‘god’ shot to reveal the pieces of the church laid out on the ground. This shot covers the dialogue while simultaneously the background ranges through the different aspects of the location including the river, trees and sky. Exposure-wise, Simpson contains a great deal of this detail within the latitude of the filmstock. With careful planning similar to that seen in *Picnic*, filming takes place at a

particular time of day, making use of late afternoon sun while avoiding shooting directly into it, and precisely highlights the actors.

Image 4.60: first camera position

Image 4.61: second position

Image 4.62: final camera position

Camera moves in Simpson's work are generally from a dolly or crane, well controlled, with formal framing and good control of focus and depth-of-field throughout the moves. Despite the use of anamorphic lenses for *Oscar and Lucinda*, which usually results in shallow depth-of-field, there is less likelihood of capturing serendipitous textures or out-of-focus details. Boyd's approach to exposure on *Picnic* was to use a large aperture size in order to soften the foreground and hide the use of netting on the lens. For filming landscapes on *Oscar and Lucinda*, Simpson uses a smaller aperture, allowing greater control of depth and focus.

Close-ups in *Oscar and Lucinda* consequently tend to be clean singles, rather than over a shoulder, thus maintaining this clear view of faces and again keeping the foreground movement smooth or clean. Due to the wide aspect ratio, and composing with the rule of thirds, the face occupies only half of the frame area leaving negative space in the other side of the frame. Even shot-reverse shot compositions are arranged with a deeper view, seeing into the back of the sets. An example of this is filmed on location in a historic house at Elizabeth Farm, with Oscar and Lucinda racing to scrub the stone floors (images 4.63 and 4.64). The camera is at floor level, with both characters at the front of their respective compositions. Behind them, highlights of exposure through windows and doors backlight the actors and lead the viewers' eyes towards the rear of the frame. This is very typical of Simpson's staging of actors and is completely unlike the composition of Boyd that brings the viewer's attention towards the very front of the image.

Image 4.63: Lucinda close-up

Image 4.64: Oscar reverse shot

The shot-scale in these close-ups is very tight and resembles the close-up framings by McAlpine in *My Brilliant Career.* Framing faces this tightly, seen earlier in *Last Days*, results in the chin touching the bottom of frame, something many cinematographers try to avoid. Containing Lucinda's hat within the frame contributes to the tight bottom of frame. These closer framings give Simpson a chance to accentuate eyes, which we have seen is a trademark of his lighting style. His use of eye lights differs from Boyd's with two highlights in the eye frequently visible – one from the key light and one from the fill source (images 4.65 and 4.66). Boyd is more likely to use single source lighting, often with a bounced or reflected light, to produce a single highlight in the eye while Simpson incorporates more fill sources and kick lights in the eyes, resulting in a more obvious second highlight. Simpson describes his general approach to lighting dramatic scenes using a large overhead scrim or sail cloth for the wide shots and then bringing in smaller lights to 'tidy up the close-ups.'[301]

Image 4.65: *Oscar and Lucinda* – eyelights

[301] "Blu-Ray disc commentary - Interview with Simpson," Blu-Ray DVD Special Features, *Playing Beattie Bow*, 2022.

Image 4.66: *Oscar and Lucinda* – eye-lights accentuate pale eyeballs and make the eyes prominent.

Experimentation with night shooting is another of the key factors in this trio of films. The climax of *Oscar and Lucinda* is a scene set at night, where the life-size glass church sinks into the Bellingen River with Oscar trapped inside. The church was mounted on a submerged rig that could lower and raise the church, facilitating multiple takes and different camera angles. Simpson filmed this using a day-for-night (DFN) technique where the film stock is underexposed by at least two stops and the daylight is uncorrected to read as blue. Day-for-night is now less-commonly used, and the *Oscar and Lucinda* sequence is unique in Simpson's work. He positions key lights and sky to achieve a convincing night-time exterior on a scale that would be impossible to light legibly by using key lights in an actual night shoot. In this scene the camera perspective is primarily from the riverbank and given that there is only one character there is little or no need or opportunity to show the reverse angle. The key light (in actuality the sun), positioned as a three-quarter backlight, picks out detail in the structure of the church and highlights water ripples.

Image 4.67: Oscar, in silhouette against the sky.

Historically, the DFN technique was mostly used with a film capture and photochemical finish and is rarely seen now that image sensors have the sensitivity to film at night. It is however still used for low budget scenes involving large sets or locations, lacking the budget to light for that scale. In this scene (Images 4.67-70) the location is a rural setting with no streetlighting sources to motivate the use of artificial lighting, and therefore has a reliance on simulating moonlight. Through the use of soft, graduated filters to control the sky, this sky exposure level is reduced, and it becomes believable as a bright, moonlight evening. According to Simpson, 'Arthur Cambridge Colourist/Grader then added a bit more blue and matched my light changes that needed smoothing out.'[302] This is a variation on the blue moonlight provided by studio lighting in *Little Women*. The shots are high contrast with deep blues and blacks and are generally backlit. Front light is avoided, and silhouettes are shot against the sky (the primary technique from *Last Days*) for separation and depth (Image 4.67). Simpson has created a look here that emphasises character movement by positioning the face in profile against a brighter sky.

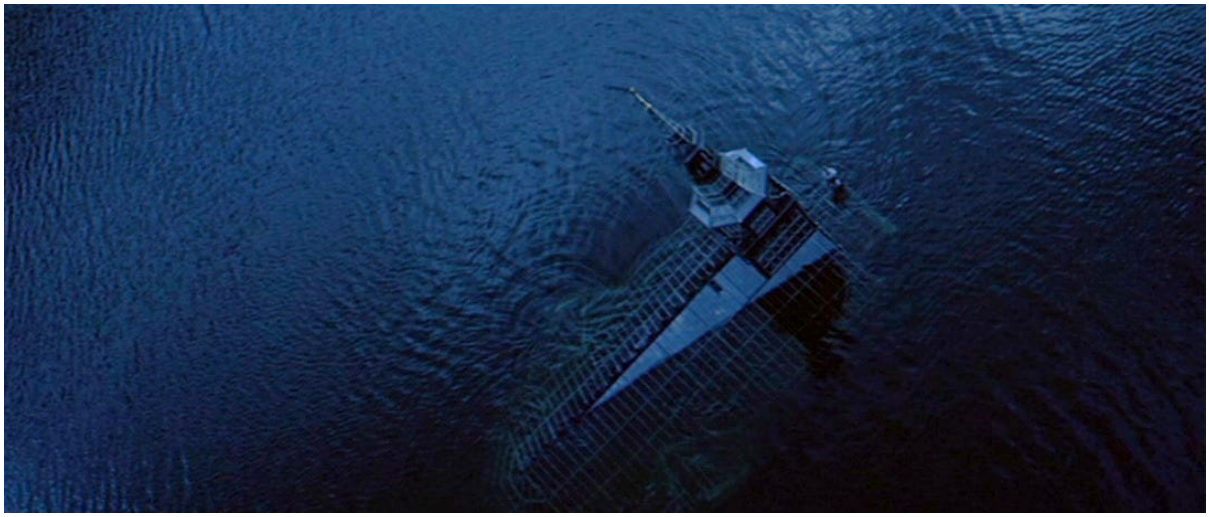


Image 4.68: Overhead camera position

DFN shooting provides another key difference in approach between Simpson and Boyd as Boyd insists 'I prefer to not shoot DFN in any way, shape or form. I've yet to be shown any great DFN. Sometimes you can luck it out.'[303] Boyd further points out, DFN requires a strong key light and that when the camera angle is reversed, it becomes an ugly, flat light source. DFN scenes in *My Brilliant Career* with a very low budget and film stock with lower latitude, are muddy and unclear. With the use of 500T filmstock in *Oscar and Lucinda*, the depth of field is increased by stopping down the lens, creating a sharper looking composition. There is a similarity between this scene and the final scene of *High Tide*, with both predominantly relying on backlighting and a blue key

[302] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, "What is cinematography?" *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[303] Sian Bates, 2008, interview with Rusell Boyd (student assignment, Bates was a student of mine at Flinders).

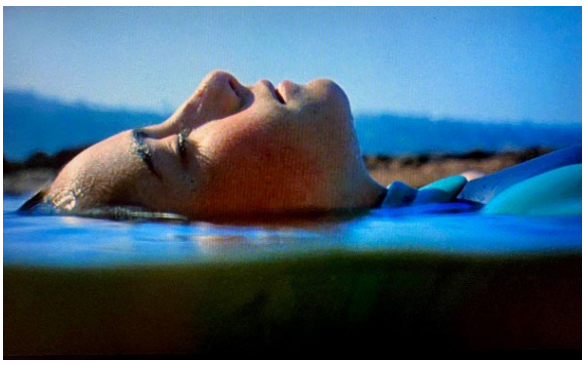
moonlight source, although the shots from *Oscar and Lucinda* have greater contrast with much deeper blacks.

Image 4.69: day-for-night sky line

Image 4.70: back lighting highlights the edges of the set.

A delight for director-focussed critics is that there are several instances in *Oscar and Lucinda* where situations and actions are repeated from previous Armstrong films. A prime example of this is a shot of Lucinda floating in water, a scene that is very similar to a scene of Lilli in *High Tide* (Images 4.71 to 4.74). This repetition affords the opportunity to differentiate the stylistic inputs of Simpson and Boyd. Simpson's compositions are much wider than Boyd's, with deeper focus, consequently conveying greater detail about the surrounding light and location. Simpson uses an unmotivated crane to move elegantly between the two angles. When the crane shot comes to rest, the camera is positioned for a depth composition, with detail and information in the background (for example, the horse). Boyd's version, on the other hand, uses longer lenses to get close to the subject and the final composition includes the foreground water line, emphasising the very front of the image, near to the lens. In Boyd's low angle shot, the camera is positioned partially below the water and the use of a long lens renders the foreground soft and the background amorphous. There is a cut between these two angles, where Simpson has used a crane.

Image 4.71 and 4.72: *High Tide* water shots



DOP Russell Boyd

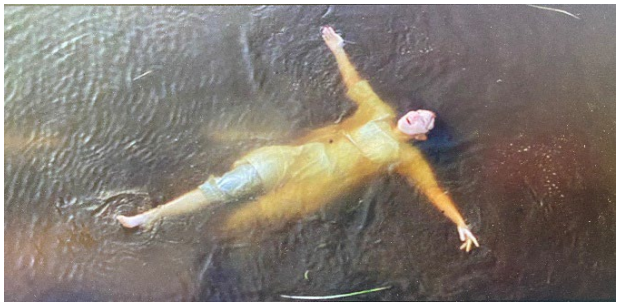


Image 4.73 and 4.74: *Oscar and Lucinda* water shot with crane down.

DOP Geoffrey Simpson

Conclusion

The use of eye lights for highlighting eyes and faces is also relevant to a comparison of the techniques used by Boyd and Simpson. The play of light and shade is an important part of what cinematographers do to faces. Boyd's approach tends to be soft and subtle as seen in the example of Ally in *High Tide* (Image 4.75). The highlight is positioned in the lit side of the face, towards camera and is small in size. An alternative is Simpson's use of a larger eyelight, created by a large soft source such as a bounce board and reflecting into the face from the side further away from camera. The colour of the iris also plays a part with the actors in *Little Women* featuring darker colours that contrast against the highlights. Simpson's style emphasises the brightness that can reflect from the eyeball enhancing the expression of the face. Even though they both use side lighting and low-key light sources, there is still a significant difference in the eye lights.

Image 4.75: Boyd lights Ally in *High Tide*

Image 4.76: Simpson lights the sisters in *Little Women*

Alluding to the time pressures of cinematography, Simpson observes, 'Being armed with the [visual art] references was a big help, but much of the lighting evolved under the influence of the location, the natural light and how to get things done in the time.'[304] The examples in this Chapter, such as netting the back veranda (*Last Days*), filming day-for-night (*Oscar and Lucinda*) and combining multiple actions within the one frame (*Little Women*), are ways in which Simpson is able to problem-solve and get through the call-sheet each day, while still maintaining a preference for certain types of solutions.

By looking closely at the cinematography in these three films shot by Simpson, there emerges a play of similarities and development. All three films are concerned with variations in deep space compositions. But there are changes and progressions between the films such as the way in which movement and night are integrated and accentuated. In *Last Days* darkness is handled through small patches of light and silhouettes, in *Little Women* it is through the contrast of artificial blue light against orange lamp-light and in *Oscar and Lucinda* it is through the use of day-for-night techniques. In the following Chapter Five I will demonstrate that digital cameras provide yet another approach to filming in low light.

[304] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

Chapter Five

Digital documentaries: an aesthetic of contrasts – Radel, Costello and Howard

> I've had fun doing these little art documentaries (laughs) it still took three years to make! And I love the creative freedom to do these crazy things like have a man in a red boat with projections on him and so on. So creative freedom and the relative ease of raising money is why I've done documentaries.
>
> Gillian Armstrong[305]

During a period of unprecedented change in cinematography technology and industrial practice Armstrong directed three documentary films: *Unfolding Florence* (DOP Radel, 2006), *Love Lust & Lies* (Costello, 2009) and *Women He's Undressed* (Howard, 2015*)*. These three films represent a return to both filmmaking in Australia and documentary feature films for Armstrong. This phase also takes place during a time of great change in the cinematographers' role as they transition from film to digital capture technologies. The focus of this chapter therefore is a shift away from the contribution of individual cinematographers towards a concentration on the technological and industrial context in which the three films were made. In order to contemporise the discussion, it is important to discuss the modern technical landscape of cinematography. It is critical to understand the new set of challenges and aesthetic possibilities that apply to digital and hybrid cinematography. Armstrong as a control is useful to me here as her career spans this transition from film to digital, and the cinematographers I interviewed had insightful comments to make about the impact of these changes on cinematography. Although Russell Boyd and Geoffrey Simpson both enthusiastically shoot with digital cameras, they have mixed responses regarding changes to their role. New post-production processes include many opportunities for correcting, re-framing or otherwise altering shots that can more radically alter the work done by the cinematographer during the shoot, and even produce films without the use of cameras. Simpson writes, 'The world is becoming very image conscious, very photographically informed. The respect for cinematography is diminishing.'[306] This Chapter will discuss some of the changes and challenges when we move from photo chemical to digital cinematography, with respect to three Armstrong-directed documentary films.

Armstrong works within this period of 2006- 2015 with a new generation of cinematographers and visual effects artists, and takes a team approach to creating the visual content. Having worked with

[305] Christopher Reed, "A conversation with Gillian Armstrong (The people he's undressed)," *Hammer on Nail*, 10 August 2016.
[306] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

McAlpine, Simpson and Boyd, Armstrong is now working with filmmakers who are lesser-known or recognised within the industry and generally less experienced in feature film production. Over the course of her career, Armstrong typically demonstrates a willingness to engage with changing industrial practices and with emerging cinematographers and visual effects artists. This chapter will first review the technological context for filming documentaries in Australia during the 2000's before looking in greater detail at the cinematography in the three Armstrong-directed documentaries. These documentaries are grouped together because of the use of digital capture technologies and their combination of hybrid footage that is generated both by film and digital video. *Love, Lust & Lies* was covered in detail in Chapter Two and is only included here in a more general discussion of digital cinematography. Finally, there will be a discussion about colour grading and distribution of feature documentaries with a digital workflow.

Unfolding Florence (DOP John Radel) and *Women He's Undressed* (DOP Anna Howard) obviously bear comparison because both synthesise archival and dramatised footage. *Love Lust & Lies* (Paul Costello) also combines diverse footage: digital observational documentary material alongside 16mm footage from previous films. These films combine archival film footage and 35mm footage with newly shot 16mm scenes and digitally captured images with a variety of aspect ratios. But more than this, they display an aesthetic of hybrid styles. Older film footage incorporated into these films has been scanned and digitised and then re-sized and re-framed for inclusion into a digital non-linear edit.

Technological changes such as these can never be considered in isolation from changes in industrial context. During this period of production broadcasters such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) increasingly invested in films made by independent production companies rather than producing them in-house. More diversified funding meant more diversified release patterns. These documentaries were made for a theatrical release before they were all subsequently broadcast on television. *Women He's Undressed* premiered on board the Sun Princess ship in Sydney Harbour, a first for Sydney Film Festival, and was chosen for the re-opening of art deco cinema The Astor in Melbourne.[307] While *Unfolding Florence* (2006) and *Love, Lust & Lies* (2009) were produced for a television distribution as well as a 35mm cinema release, by the time *Women He's Undressed* (2015) was released, Australian and worldwide cinemas had moved to digital projection with films released as a Digital Cinema Package (DCP) containing all the sound, image and data files. The 35mm and 16mm film elements in these films were digitally scanned at a high resolution and integrated into the digital edit. Working with high-quality digital files facilitates a high-end visual effects and compositing post-production pathway, providing Armstrong with the opportunity to work with animators, compositors and visual effects artists to layer and combine disparate image and sound elements in a creative

[307] The If Team, "World premiere for 'Women He's Undressed' afloat," *If,* 21 April 2015.

way. The synthesis of old, new, dramatised, moving, digital, still and colourful material results in a new mode of documentary, based around imaginative re-creations. Some of the images are created through the use of cameras, others through digital compositing techniques, added to and combined with existing, although rare, found photographs and footage.

The colour grades for *Unfolding Florence* (colourist Dwayne Hyde) and *Love, Lust & Lies* (colourist Keiran Bleakley) had a film output with 35mm answer prints (by Movielab) screened to review the grade. *Women He's Undressed* (colourist Billy Wychgel) was produced for DCP test screenings in a digital cinema. The Astor proudly boasted the installation of a then state-of-the-art Barco 4K projector installed for the screening of *Women He's Undressed*. Although the cinema retains the capacity to screen 35mm and 70mm prints, they are now difficult to find and 75% of films are projected from a DCP. [308]

The monumental transition from analogue to digital cinematography can be broadly categorised in the following three areas of technology: (1) production, including recording or image capture, (2) post-production, including editing, compositing and sound mixing, and (3) projection. The production phase will be the major area of interest for my study of cinematography, including its effect on camera bodies, lenses, lighting equipment and other capture media that occur completely within computers. Christopher Lucas attributes this new digital process to the earlier transition of editing systems to non-linear digital platforms enabling 'efficiencies in editing and digital effects integration.'[309] During this time, film stocks (with their superior resolution and latitude) and film cameras continued to be developed for shooting feature film and high-end television dramas. These changes in cinematography practice took place over several years but some developments brought about sudden and significant changes to the way documentaries and fiction films were filmed. However, it is misleading to suggest that cinematography was the first phase in the digital transition. Digital cameras, with full-frame sensors and compatible lenses, as well as remote-controlled LED lighting equipment developed slowly (and controversially) in response to digital conversions in the postproduction and exhibition phases of marketing. The earliest adoption of computers and digital processes was seen, not so much in image capture, as in the other two areas of post-production and projection.

The term Non-Linear Editing (NLE) was initially formalised in 1991. Digital sound was introduced into cinemas also in 1991 with the release of Dolby Digital AC-3 coding. Digital conversion was experienced first in sound departments rather than camera departments as digital sound recorders replaced the analogue Nagras which were used on sets to capture location sound and for simplified syncing with film rushes through the use of a digital timecode clapper board and film

[308] "The Astor Theatre: Our new 4K projector," *Astor Theatre,* accessed February 2021.
[309] Christopher Lucas, "The modern entertainment marketplace, 2000-present," in *Cinematography,* edited by Patrick Keating (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014), 132.

stock edge key codes. The final disruption to mainstream shooting on film was the introduction of digital cinema projection. In Australia, this took place around 2012 with cinemas around the country installing new projectors and distribution of film prints moving to the DCP. By the end of 2017, 98% of the world's cinema screens were digital.[310]

The ability to move between film, with its acknowledged superior visual qualities, and formats that were derived from, or deliverable through televisions has a long history. Telecine, an analogue process to transfer from film to videotape and other related technologies to electronically capture film images, dates to the 1940s experimentation with theatre television, but the resulting images were unsuitable for theatrical distribution.'[311] The telecine process was later replaced by film scanners such as Kodak Cineon in 1992 and ARRILaser in 1995, for frame-by-frame digital recording of film negatives and replacing the film intermediate with a digital version known now as the Digital Intermediate or DI. The ARRI website boasts that 'entire features could be affordably scanned as digital intermediates (DI), and highly talented, rock-star colorists worked with cinematographers on grading, power windows, secondary color correction, filter effects, smoothing selected areas and so on.'[312] It is important to note the reference to collaboration between colourists and cinematographers, which is still considered to be a significant partnership.

In the late 1990s, High Definition digital cinema cameras were developed for use on feature film production, most notably for George Lucas' new *Star Wars* films[313]. *Attack of the Clones* (2002 DOP David Tattersall BSC) which was shot entirely on digital 24 frame progressive HD using the 'Panavized' Sony HDW 900, and claims to be the first major feature film produced without traditional film photography. Lucas famously proclaimed that 'film is dead' and in the following decade, most filmmakers transitioned from film to digital acquisition of footage.[314] Panavision, Red, Sony and ARRI were leaders in developing new cameras for digital production with the ARRIflex D-20 released in 2005 and the Red One 4K camera released at the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) Show in 2006. During this time, high resolution film scanning was also progressing meaning film original footage, both old and new, could be incorporated into high resolution non-linear edits. Digital video and sound recording was originally to tape, but these new cameras began recording video as data files to cards and hard drives. The role of camera assistants changed from handling film, loading and unloading rushes and working with analogue video monitoring to managing hard drives and files, data wrangling, wireless video and sound monitoring and remote control of lenses and camera mounts. In 2006, ARRI produced their last

[310] "Theme Report, 2017: A comprehensive analysis and survey of the theatrical and home entertainment market environment (THEME) for 2017," *Motion Picture Association of America* (2017), 9.
[311] "Digital intermediate," *Wikipedia,* last edited 14 March 2023.
[312] Jon Fauer, ASC, "The history of ARRI in a century of cinema," *ARRI,* accessed 23 February 2021.
[313] Joe Foster, "How George Lucas pioneered the use of digital video in feature films with the Sony HDW F900," *Red Shark News,* 1 December 2019.
[314] Kevin Hilton, "Digits & Glass: Special report/cameras & lenses," *British Cinematographer,* 2013.

super16mm camera the, ARRIFLEX 416, with all of ARRI's current digital technology combined into a small and highly developed film camera. When the ARRI Alexa digital camera was produced in 2010 leading cinematographer Roger Deakins commented, 'This camera has brought us to a point where digital is simply better.' [315] ARRI boasts that the Alexa 'went on to become one of the most successful digital cine cameras of all time, capturing 80 percent of major motion picture productions by 2017.'[316]

Ironically, at the same time as film cameras were being made redundant, Kodak film stocks were at their very best, with exceptional fine grain, increased ISO or sensitivity and a greater capacity to record sharp images. Stocks were developed that were suitable for scanning to digital files and then for outputting back to release prints for cinema projection and distribution. As Simpson remarks, 'Kodak just kept getting better and better with their high-speed stocks then the digital world arrived!'[317] Sadly, in 2008, the last remaining film processing laboratory in Australia, Atlab, was bought out by Deluxe and they no longer process film. As a partial remedy to this situation, Neglab opened up in Sydney and is now the only 16mm and 35mm film processing laboratory in Australia, although they have no capacity to print or process positive film stocks.

Concurrent with the move from film to digital cameras, lighting technology has also improved and adapted. With older lights relying on heavy tungsten, halogen and fluorescent sources, requiring lots of power and often becoming very hot during use, there was a need for lighter, more portable and smaller light sources, especially for filming documentaries. Companies including ARRI developed LED lights, such as the Skypanel, that are cool to touch and controlled by digital interfaces to the point where a DOP can now adjust lighting intensity and colour by remote control, without leaving the camera.

While many of the techniques and the technical decisions required for film and digital cinematography are similar, modern digital cameras contain many more built-in options and functions. Lenses developed for use with 35mm film were designed for maximum sharpness, but the lenses required for digital capture need different attributes. The older lenses were very sharp and in combination with small digital camera sensors the resulting images had greater potential for deep focus or depth-of-field. Early films originating on digital cameras were defined by a saturated, very sharp and clear look that was almost hyper-real, lacking the textural warmth associated with film stocks. Cinematographers were not always content with this look resulting in a desire for a softer and warmer image with more natural colour, sometimes described as a film look. Tim Jordin, the National Rentals Manager at Lemac equipment rental house, observes that in the digital era,

[315] Jon Fauer, ASC, "The history of ARRI in a century of cinema," *ARRI,* accessed 23 February 2021.
[316] Jon Fauer, ASC, "The history of ARRI in a century of cinema," *ARRI,* accessed 23 February 2021.
[317] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

the choice of camera has less impact on the look than choice of lens, claiming lenses are 'the new filmstock.'[318] Vintage and anamorphic lenses have now been re-designed and recycled for use on digital cameras. Following the high uptake of digital cameras for principal photography, many 35mm lenses could no longer adequately cover the new larger camera sensors so digital prime and zoom lenses were developed. Newer lenses such as the ARRI Signature Primes and Zooms provide a softer edge to lines and detail as well as rolling off rear focus earlier.[319] Focus can be easily controlled to separate a sharp subject from an out-of-focus background. Currently lenses are developed to capture meta-data such as pan, tilt and tracking information for use in image stabilisation and motion tracking in post-production.

Many of these technological innovations have a special salience in documentary making. Dion Beebe ACS, ASC (DOP *Charlotte Gray,* 2001) reflects on this new cinematography for *American Cinematographer,* 'We have seen an emergence of what I think is a digital aesthetic. It's a beautiful aesthetic, and it plays to the strength of that medium, which is the very open bottom of the curve.'[320] Beebe is referring here to the ability of the digital camera and postproduction to work in more detail at the low end of the exposure curve without the introduction of excessive image noise. As with the introduction of lighter cameras and faster film stocks in the 1950s, there are many benefits for documentary filmmakers where there is less control over the filming environment. Digital file recording to cards and hard drives is inexpensive so directors and cinematographers can continue filming and following subjects to capture more spontaneous and significant moments. The down-time to replace a magazine is reduced and less frequent as the recording time per drive is longer. Rather than waiting 24 hours for a negative report or another day to view the rushes, shots can be reviewed and analysed immediately, either on set through camera play-back or later after the files have been copied and backed-up to a computer. Focus, exposure and lighting can be checked quickly. Working at lower light levels allows for more spontaneous filming at night and in dark or under-lit locations. Beebe recognises an advantage of shooting with digital cameras with the 'ability to work from a base of ambient light' where the cinematographer can expose a shot at that base level and any additional lighting is introduced at that low level.[321] Fewer and smaller lights are required to reach an acceptable exposure and therefore the crew can be smaller and less obtrusive (as well as reducing production costs). Less power is required to run lights and sometimes no additional lights are used, relying instead on available light sources such as practical lamps, phones and street lighting. The camera can be moved quickly, following action more spontaneously whether mounted on a small rig, handheld or attached to a vehicle. Rather than

[318] Tim Jordin, "Lenses: 'The new film stock," *If Magazine,* no. 212 (June-July 2023): 38.
[319] "ARRI Signature Prime: Modern lens. Timeless look," *ARRI.* Accessed April 2024
[320] David Heung, "Beebe on 'digital aesthetic' 10 years after 'Collateral,'" *The ASC,* 2 July 2014, accessed April 2023. Please note: At the time of thesis publication The ASC website was undergoing site maintenance, and as a result, several articles are no longer accessible via their hyperlink.
[321] David Heung, "Beebe on 'digital aesthetic' 10 years after 'Collateral,'" *The ASC,* 2 July 2014. Accessed April 2023. See also: "On the digital legacy of Michael Mann's 'Collateral' nearly 10 years later," *Up Roxx,* 2 July 2014, accessed April 2023.

having to change film stocks when moving between colour temperatures and exposures, the camera can be quickly switched from warm to cool settings through adjustment of white balance or from high to low sensitivities through the adjustment of gain and ISO settings.[322] Compared with the choice of film stock speed (eg 100T or 250D), there are many more options for ISO, for example 640 to 10,000 on the Sony Venice camera.[323]

It is in this context of new and rapidly evolving cinematography technology and industrial practice that Armstrong directed documentary films *Unfolding Florence* (2006), *Love Lust & Lies* (2009) and *Women He's Undressed (2015)*. *Unfolding Florence* and *Women He's Undressed* are biographical documentaries about designers, filmed after the deaths of each subject meaning that little or no footage exists of either character. New material such as dramatisations, recreations and additional interviews, were created to sustain a feature length edit. Florence Broadhurst was a Sydney designer working with fabric and wallpaper while Orry-Kelly was born in Australia but moved to the US where he worked as a costume designer on Hollywood films. There are obvious thematic connections between the content of both films, extending Armstrong's long-standing concerns with narratives about artists. *Unfolding Florence* and *Women He's Undressed* use diverse dramatic technique and structure to tell the personal stories. Both films intersperse dramatic sequences with documentary interviews, recreations, archival photographs and film footage, reprising techniques that were first used in the observational Adelaide Girls series (see Chapter Two). Where the observational series sought to hide or disguise the use of re-enactments, these later films employed techniques that would make them very obvious.

The films must be seen against the changing context of ideas about documentary current at that time. Grierson's famous definition of documentary as 'creative treatment of actuality' was now seen as emphasising creativity rather than actuality. [324] In both theory and practice the line between fiction and non-fiction is frequently blurred. Theoreticians such as Brian Winston and Michael Renov called the distinction into question, while documentarists such as Errol Morris (*The Thin Blue Line,* 1988) had popularised the idea of the unknowability of reality, and consequently the validity of using obviously fictionalised material. Mockumentaries such as *Forgotten Silver*, (Peter Jackson, 1995) made clear that formal techniques traditionally associated with documentary were no guarantee of truth. Many of these ideas were well advanced in Australian documentary. Kay Pavlov's 1994 film *Mary*, described as a docudrama, was shot by Jan Kenny ACS on super 16mm for 35mm cinema release combines interviews with dramatisations designed to re-create the life of Mary McKillop in an accessible way. More recently Sophia Turkiewicz' film *Once My Mother* (2013)

[322] ISO = International Organization for Standardization who set the standards for light sensitivity. Film stock is usually measured in ASA while digital cameras use ISO.
[323] "Venice: Full-frame digital cinema camera," *SONY.* Accessed April 2024
[324] Michael Renov (ed), *Theorizing Documentary: AFI Film Readers* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

uses similar documentary and drama techniques to create her personal and historical film about her Polish mother, using an actor to voice her narration.

Unfolding Florence and *Women He's Undressed* centrally involve an interplay between the real and imagined lives of the characters. The different material juxtaposed in each Armstrong-directed film produces a result that resembles a collage, with contrasting colours, shot scales and production values. The difference between the types of footage is exaggerated to create interest and energy. There is a tension between representing the facts while also acknowledging that history and imagination often go together. Armstrong reflects, 'As a documentary we wanted to make sure it was true and accurate, but from a creative side we wanted to be able to find a really imaginative way to tell the story.'[325] As both films are constructed around difference and contrast, the use of analogue and digital image origination is integral to the overall aesthetic. Filmmaker intervention is more obvious when different materials and techniques are married together and in these films the aesthetic distinction between the two recording formats, digital and analogue, is used as a creative device to differentiate the real digital interviews from the fictional film dramatisations. Paradoxically, the use of digital camera and editing technologies to produce and convert footage to the same file type, makes it easier to combine different visual and aural materials and styles.

Armstrong is working for the first time with different cinematographers for each project, in part due to lower production budgets and because Boyd, McAlpine and Simpson were by this time working internationally on high budget feature films and television commercials and were simply unavailable. Although the writer, production designers and editor remain the same across many of Armstrong films, the camera crews and visual effects teams on each of the documentaries vary. A feature of Armstrong's career has been a willingness to change and adapt to new technologies and crews. For example *Smokes and Lollies* (1976) was filmed on 16mm using an ARRI 16BL camera with separate analogue sound, a 4:3 frame size and a very small crew. *Love, Lust & Lies* (2009) was filmed with the same subjects but 30 years later, on a Panasonic P2 HD video camera (Images 5.1 and 5.2) with 4:2:2 sampling, 16x9 frame size, digital sound and image recording and the capacity to film in very low light situations.[326] This demonstrated versatility has allowed Armstrong to continue working over many decades.

[325] Greg King, "'Women He's Undressed': Interview with Gillian Armstrong," *Film Reviews,* 11 July 2015.
[326] Panasonic, "P2HD AJ-HPX3000 Memory Card Camera-Recorder," *Yumpu.*

Image 5.1: DOP Costello and Panasonic P2 [327]

Image 5.2: Panasonic P2 HD Brochure [328]

When cinematographer John Radel shot *Unfolding Florence* (2009) he had recently graduated from the AFTRS having shot the final year short film *Black Berries* (2004) which gained attention for the use of cinema style 35mm anamorphic lenses to capture a story about two young friends.[329] This film won Radel several ACS and Kodak awards as well as the emerging talent award from the Film Critics Circle of Australia. As *Black Berries* screened internationally it was no surprise to see that Radel came to the attention of Armstrong and the producers of *Florence*.[330] A scene of a young Broadhurst sitting in a tree is clearly influenced by the framing and low angle camera position used in *Blackberries* (Images 5.3 and 5.4) Gillian Armstrong is no stranger herself to putting characters in trees, for example in *My Brilliant Career*, where Sybylla's first meeting with Harry is from her vantage point in a tree (see Chapter Three). For Radel, *Florence* is a transitional film as his cinematography career moves from low budget student films towards international feature films and from film to digital processes. Radel is now Vice President of Production and Development at Infinite Studios in Singapore and in 2018 shot *Buffalo Boys,* Singapore's entry into the Academy Awards for Best Foreign Film.

Image 5.3: *Black Berries* anamorphic 35mm film

Image 5.4: *Unfolding Florence* super16mm

[327] Marguerite O'Hara, *The making of modern Australia: A study guide by Marguerite O'Hara* (Melbourne, VIC: ATOM - Australian Teachers of Media, 2010).
[328] Panasonic, "P2HD AJ-HPX3000 Memory Card Camera-Recorder," *Yumpu*.
[329] "Annual Report 2003-2004: Appendix 4," *Australian Film Television and Radio School* (NSW: AFTRS Publications, 2004), 71.
[330] John Radel, ACS, "John Radel ACS – Director of Photography: Portfolio," *Slide Share,* 26 January 2010.

Anna Howard is a cinematographer with a long history of filming commercials, TV series (*Rake 2011*), features (*Errors of the Human* Body, 2021) and documentaries (*Girls Can't Surf,* 2020, *Danielle Laidley: Two Tribes,* 2023).[331] Howard also filmed television comedy series *Aftertaste* (series 1, 2021) for Closer Productions in Adelaide using Panasonic VariCams with Leica Summilux C Cinema lenses.[332] She is one of only twenty Australian women accredited by the ACS (a status she attained in 2004) and Howard is the only female cinematographer to collaborate with Armstrong. Interviews shot by Howard for *Women He's Undressed* determine the visual style of the recreated footage. Howard says, 'I was brought up as a 'film DOP' so I tend to believe the best way to achieve a style is through the camera on set at the time of shooting. Not simply making the look during post-production.'[333] This may explain the decision to use projection of VFX images onto a live set, capturing the combined footage as an in-camera effect, rather than as a post-production composite.

Erhart categorises the form of both *Unfolding Florence* and *Women He's Undressed* as experimental, claiming that:

> As the first of what would be two experimental biographical documentaries by Armstrong, *Unfolding Florence* makes a radical departure from Armstrong's prior realist documentaries, motivated in part by finances and in part by the practical exigencies of the subject matter, that is by the fact that Broadhurst was no longer living and Armstrong possessed no live footage of her to work with.[334]

By contrast, although few photos or footage of Orry-Kelly remain, there are many hours of films showing his costume designs executed over several decades. Both films confidently position colourful scenes against black and white footage, flowing movement against static theatrical staging and digital against film imagery. Although the films appear on first viewing to employ a similar aesthetic, on closer look, the cinematography 170teadicam170es important differences, including a variation in the use of digital and analogue camera equipment. While Roger Deakins asserts that the best cinematography should go unnoticed, the strength of these films is the obvious primacy of composition, lighting, equipment and visual style in a highly noticeable fashion. A discussion of the application and benefits of digital cinematography in these films will be the basis of the research in this chapter.

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[331] Anna Howard, ACS, "Anna Howard, ACS: Features," *Anna Howard,* 2021, accessed 15 January 2021.
[332] Helen Carter, email message to Bryan Mason, "Camera used to film 'Aftertaste,'", 28 March 2021.
[333] James Cunningham, "Anna Howard ACS discusses turning her lens toward upcoming thriller 'Rabbit,'" *AC Mag,* 1 December 2016.
[334] Julia Erhart, *Gillian Armstrong: Popular, Sensual and Ethical Cinema* (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

***Unfolding Florence* (2006)**

Initially, Armstrong says, it was 'difficult to visualise her and tell her story', due to the lack of 'real footage' of Broadhurst.[335] Recreations of scenes in *Florence* employ actors (Hannah Garbo, Felicity Price and Judi Farr) while other sections of the film are constructed around interviews with designers, friends and family. Photographs are animated using stop motion, rotoscoping and motion graphics techniques. Armstrong says, 'It was like a collage and we were putting it together as we went along.'[336] Documentary and fictional drama cinematography sequences are intertwined to fill visual gaps in the story. The primary distinguishing feature of the cinematography in *Unfolding Florence* is that it employed a combination of film and digital cameras with an aspect ratio of 1:85 (cinema release) or 16x9 (television release). The material recorded using both different capture methods is immediately visually contrasting. The cinematography stands out as a device to differentiate diverse approaches to the life events of the central character. From the outset, Armstrong pushed for what the film's production notes identify as 'a brave style.'[337] Luke Buckmaster describes this as a 'concoction of dramatic recreations, newly recorded monologues, creative transitions, cut-out style animations and an energetic jazzy soundtrack.' [338]

At the time of the film's production the transition to digital cinematography was at a relatively early and contested phase and it was not uncommon for films to combine capture methods. Christopher Lucas refers to the mingling of film, video and digital footage at this time to 'create novelty and visual contrast.'[339] Armstrong and cinematographer Radel use a variety of mannerist techniques to create a documentary that would stand out. Dramatic re-enactments were shot on Super 16mm over six days. In the production notes, producer Sue Clothier says, 'Interviews were shot on high definition from March 9, 2005: four days in Queensland and three days in Film Australia's studios.'[340] The combination of film and digital footage creates an aesthetic of contrasts, variety and change: monochromatic and colourful, static and moving, archival and re-created footage is juxtaposed to create a cinematographic collage that strives for energy produced through difference.

Florence begins with a dance sequence shot on super 16mm with a moving camera, with actors in ball gowns of dark and muted tones. Florence Broadhurst is revealed in a contrasting red dress,

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[335] "Production notes: Unfolding Florence: The many lives of Florence Broadhurst," *Film Australia, the New South Wales Film and Television Office and SBS Independent*, 2006.
[336] Graham Shirley, "Gillian Armstrong Interviewed by Graham Shirley: Oral History," NFSA ID: 1050278, Film, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,* 22 November 2011 – 11 January 2012.
[337] "Production notes: Unfolding Florence: The many lives of Florence Broadhurst," *Film Australia, the New South Wales Film and Television Office and SBS Independent*, 2006.
[338] Luke Buckmaster, "'Women He's Undressed' review: Orry Kelly, an unsung Oscar-winning hero," *The Guardian*, 16 July 2015, accessed 12 April 2021.
[339] Christopher Lucas, "The modern entertainment marketplace, 2000-present," in *Cinematography,* edited by Patrick Keating (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014), 146.
[340] "Production notes: Unfolding Florence: The many lives of Florence Broadhurst," *Film Australia, the New South Wales Film and Television Office and SBS Independent*, 2006.

introducing early the prominence of colour design in the film to follow (Image 5.5). The cinematography consistently foregrounds colour through the use of costuming, lighting and the position of actors within the frame. The film ends with a similar but modern dance party, with the older Broadhurst in the same red dress (Image 5.6). Both sequences were filmed with a moving camera (a 172teadicam is mentioned in the credits), and in the latter sequence Broadhurst's wallpaper design is emphasised by brighter lighting in the background.

Image 5.5: beginning of the film

Image 5.6: end of the film mirrors the start

The second image in *Florence* is a mirror ball, with a focus pull becoming soft to reveal blue specular highlights in the same style as the blue curtain in the opening sequence of *High Tide*. The curtain in *High Tide* is used to connect visually with a blue water motif occurring throughout the film. The mirror ball in *Florence* provides a counterpoint to the red dress and places the film nostalgically in the past. Both are examples of a device frequently used by Armstrong, beginning a film with abstracted geometrical elements. The out-of-focus highlights of bokeh on the mirror ball suggest the fragments from which the film assembles a version of Broadhurst, indicating early that it is collated through abstract particles and layers.

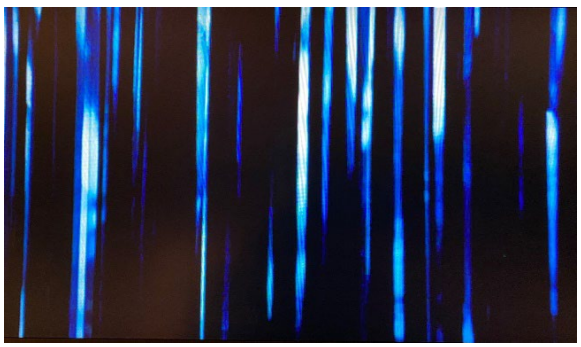


Image 5.7: *High Tide* opening sequence, curtain

Image 5.8: *Florence* opening sequence, Mirrorball

Dramatic re-enactments, shot on super 16mm film, show Broadhurst both as a young child and as an older woman who finally disappears. The use of film in this instance is to signify a temporal shift to the past or future. Filming in a studio set (Image 5.9) representing the past, employs formally posed, central framing with static action. Focus is held across both layers to contain detail in the

wallpaper and connect the two planes. There are no windows to motivate light, clearly locating the scene in a studio set. With the camera positioned square and parallel to the back wall, this shot is composed with two theatrically staged planes, the child (young Florence) at the table and the wallpaper behind her with similar muted colour tones and exposure levels at the centre of the shot. Lighting levels at the sides of the frame are darker to emphasise the centre.

Image 5.9: Florence as a child – flat, centered

Image 5.10: Florence as an adult

Exterior locations and dramatisations make use of a tracking or moving camera mounted on a Steadicam rig with vibrant use of colour derived from Broadhurst's wallpaper designs (Images 5.5,5.6, and 5.10). The camera tracks behind Broadhurst as she walks around the streets and when she speaks her back is to camera. Film grain is obvious in the dramatisations and the use of colour within the mise-en-scène is precise. Image 5.10 shows the matching of warm, yellow tones in costume and dressing of the doorway, positioned on either side to create a balanced frame.

Film reviewer Frank Hatherly comments, 'These scenes often contrast starkly with the many conventional interviews filmed on high definition video, although creative cutting to the archive collection diverts attention from their stolid staginess.'[341] Hatherly is highly critical of the stylised choices in a shot like Image 5.9 and sees the work of editing as a way of conjuring away stylistic variation. While he calls it stolid, he notes, that the cinematography is designed to emphasise visual difference rather than homogeneity. This is accentuated by the change from static to moving camera and by the use of different camera capture formats. The careful, formal approach to lighting and composing the interviews creates contrast and counterpoint to archival film footage.

Archival black and white or sepia tone photographs illustrate Florence throughout her life and in many instances aspects of the image are moved or layered using digital motion graphic techniques such as rotoscoping and 2D animation (Image 5.11). Animation supervisor Tim Richter from visual effects company SV2 describes mounting a digital stills camera above a backdrop and 'bits of paper were moved around and shot frame by frame.'[342] These animated sequences are two-

[341] Frank Hatherly, "'Unfolding Florence,'" *Screen Daily,* 26 January 2006.
[342] Julia Avenell, "'Unfolding Florence,'" *Metro Magazine* 150 (2006): 68-72.

dimensional collages and create content to fill a gap in historical footage and add movement to otherwise static images. They are flat, with little or no depth in the frame and function as a counterpoint to other live action and moving camera sequences. The use of digital technologies for animation sequences makes for ease in compositing the various materials, while reducing costs and scale of production necessary for low budget visual effects in documentary. These childlike images are an important visual component of the film, and the main unit cinematographer would take these into consideration when designing other shots and lighting. Although these images were all created in post-production and not by the principal cinematographer. Radel is tasked with creating images that maintain an antithetical relation to the animations.

Image 5.11: photograph animated using motion graphic techniques.

Interviews with designers and friends, shot using a digital cinema camera (Panavision), are mostly recorded in a studio setting against an art-directed backdrop of Broadhurst's wallpaper with props and practical lamps (Images 5.12 and 5.13). Use of a digital camera for interviews means the camera can roll for longer, at a higher shooting ratio, without incurring enormous expense and without the need to change magazines every 12 minutes. Armstrong is known for high ratios so this would be an advantage for her. Interviews are designed to look very different from the 16mm dramatic scenes and archival footage. These digital compositions are bright and colourful and feature a framed sample of contrasting wallpaper behind the face of each person. These images are filmed with a small enough aperture so that the depth-of-field contains both the foreground subject and the background wallpaper. To do this, the cinematographer uses a higher ISO and/or more light, and sets the lens to a T-stop with a smaller aperture (for example something around T8). With film, depth of field is increased by choosing a faster filmstock or by adding more light. With digital cinematography, the option exists to very quickly dial up the ISO in order to increase

focal depth. The wallpaper frames have a highlight that is more brightly exposed and provides separation of the subject from the background. There is a strong ratio of key to fill light that also adds to the contrast in these compositions. The framing typically positions the subject on the side third line making use of the 16x9 aspect ratio. Practical lamps are used to fill the space on the alternate side of the frame and to motivate the key light source. Photographs and interviews include lower-third titles and text, a technique usually avoided in observational documentaries. The wider shot size provides space for both the on-screen text and the background wallpapers, and these kinds of decisions are usually agreed upon by the director and cinematographer prior to filming.

Image 5.12: studio interview with wallpaper

Image 5.13: studio interview

Interviews were also filmed on location in Queensland and for these, framed wallpaper is positioned in the background of shots to provide an aesthetic link with other images in the film. These interviews make use of available light with subjects judiciously positioned so that the natural light falls on the side of the face. There appears to be fill reflected into the shadow side of the face. Image 5.14 illustrates the use of framed photographs at the side and background of shots, filling in areas of space and creating layers of interest in the foreground, midground and background of frames. The subject is positioned to make use of daylight coming through the off-screen window to the right of frame.

Image 5.14: Interior location interview

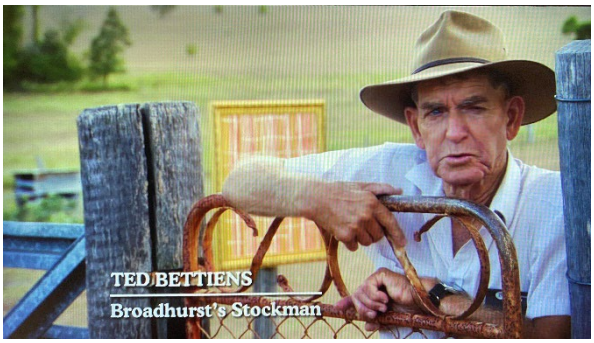


Image 5.15: Exterior location interview

Filming on location is always a less controlled shooting environment than in a studio and the position of the wallpaper frame is more variable in these location interviews. For example, in image 5.15 the wallpaper is partially obscured by both the gate and subject, and its prominence in the frame is reduced. Both of these interview framings are composed using foreground, mid-ground and back-ground elements and there is sufficient aperture and therefore focal depth to contain all of these elements. The idiosyncratic staging of this interview at the gate is a device familiar from earlier Armstrong-directed films *My Brilliant Career* (1979) and *Little Women* (1994), where the gate provides foreground and acts as barrier between the camera and subject (Images 5.16 and 5.17).

Image 5.16: *My Brilliant Career* (1979)

Image 5.17: *Little Women* (1994)

Some observational documentary footage and additional interviews were captured with a digital camera in a printing factory in Sydney (Images 5.18 and 5.19). These are filmed using a combination of available and artificial light sources and incorporating high angles and cutaways to mask jump cuts. The stylised frames of wallpaper were not used in these interviews although wallpaper is still included and strategically positioned within the frame. This scene provides another example of the difference in visual control between studio and location interviews with the reduced production design resulting in less colourful almost monochromatic compositions.

Image 5.18: Lennie interview in the factory

Image 5.19: cut-aways in the same location.

Unfolding Florence embraced emerging digital camera and compositing techniques. A film camera to capture representations from a lost past is contrasted with digital cameras to capture the present and used strategically to show the many diverse attributes of Broadhurst's life. The strategy is an

Eisensteinian one of creating energy through difference.[343] The task of the cinematographer is to execute visual strategies that sustain this aesthetic of difference. It is a strategy that will be carried over into the next documentary directed by Armstrong.

Women He's Undressed (2015)

There are many articles and reviews linking *Unfolding Florence* and *Women He's Undressed*. Where the observational style in *Love, Lust & Lies* strives to appear authentic the dramatised documentaries (*Florence* and *Women*) were never intended to be read that way. As Lisa French writes, 'neither film attempts to hide its construction and [both] are quite stylised', with the prominent inclusion of animation, projection, film and digital camera footage and actors with documentary interviews.[344] *The Guardian*'s Luke Buckmaster, for example, wrote that: 'Armstrong has dialled back *Unfolding Florence's* peppy vibe a notch, replacing it with an art deco veneer that comes across almost as filmed theatre.'[345] It is typical of the way in which cinematography is generally undervalued that Buckmaster attributes this solely to the director. This is especially ironic given that *Women's He's Undressed* is about the unrecognised behind-the-scenes creativity that sustained the Hollywood system. Buckmaster's reference to theatre stems from the use of staging techniques such as colourful side lighting, the camera positioned from a single, frontal angle, preserving the fourth wall and actors speaking directly to the audience through direct address. The drama sequences once again provide a counterpoint and change in pace, necessary to generate a 'peppy vibe' and break up talking head interviews. These imagined scenes contrast with the black and white footage and photographs as well as to the interviews. The dramatic narrative is informed by the diary of Orry-Kelly and anecdotes from his friends, while the colours are derived from found props based on historical photographs and Kodachrome footage.

By 2015 digital cameras and lenses had the advantage of several years' development and industry practice and the use of digital post-production was standard. Howard and Armstrong embraced digital technology with its advantages of flexibility and economy. Anna Howard filmed *Women He's Undressed* with an Alexa Classic, at 2k resolution in a 16x9 format. For the interviews she chose an Angénieux 12-120mm zoom lens and for the studio shoot, a set of Zeiss MkII superspeed prime lenses of 18, 25, 35, 50 and 85mm.[346] The Alexa Classic was first released in 2010 and ten years later ARRI could still claim that the cameras 'have exceptional image performance and are simple to operate, reliable in the most extreme environments, and versatile enough to cover a wide range

[343] Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,1949), 52.
[344] Lisa French (ed), "Gillian Armstrong: The line between fact and fiction," in *The Female Gaze in Documentary Film* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
[345] Luke Buckmaster, "'Women He's Undressed' review: Orry Kelly, an unsung Oscar-winning hero," *The Guardian*, 16 July 2015, accessed 12 April 2021.
[346] Anna Howard, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 150.

of workflows and budgets.' [347] The advantage of superspeed lenses is that they can have a larger aperture and are more suited to filming in low light situations. Howard used these qualities for manipulating depth of field throughout the film.

The edit of *Women He's Undressed* is largely constructed around the use of Hollywood film footage and is therefore less reliant on the new footage (about half and half). Whereas archival footage used in *Florence* is monochromatic black and white, *Undressed* uses footage from Hollywood films made from the 1930s through to the 1960s and therefore transitions from black and white through to colour. Interviews are filmed with real people, while actors play Orry-Kelly and his mother. In both cases eye-lights are a strong visual element. While the studio and interview material were all shot on the same camera, the range of visual styles and image sequences captured is very broad, with more internal diversity than in any other Armstrong-directed film. The press kit for *Women He's Undressed* describes this extensive, combined material as 'a pastiche of stylised images and heightened re-enactments, articles, letters to his mother, clips from the films, comments from actors and other outstanding Academy winning costume designers, design experts and Hollywood historians.'[348] *Unfolding Florence* adopted this aesthetic partly through necessity though this film turns the collage aesthetic to its advantage with the cinematography foregrounding differences in the visual style and filming techniques.

Michael Hili, writing for *Australian Cinematographer,* emphasises the importance of the interview footage for the film:

> The guy (Orry-Kelly) was and still is a big deal, this is evident from the accounts which Armstrong has captured forming the interview footage, beautifully taken by Cinematographer Anna Howard ACS. This is really the film's most intriguing element.[349]

The interviews to which Hili refers are filmed against deep backgrounds with soft key lighting and strong eye-lights and are strongly influenced by off-screen window light sources. According to Armstrong, the interviews were filmed first, and the dramatised footage created afterwards.[350] This indicates the priority of the interviews both for narrative structure and for setting the style and tone aesthetically. SBS reviewer Julia Scott-Stevenson contradicts this view writing, 'The interviews are lacking a coherent visual style to match the sumptuous historical film clips.'[351] While the reviewer can see that the interviews and dramatisations are filmed in very different styles, she reads stylistic

[347] Matthew Allard, ACS, "The ARRI Alexa is 10 years old," *News Shooter,* 2010.
[348] Cathy Gallagher, "Official Press Kit: 'Women He's Undressed,'" *CG Publicity,* 2015.
[349] Michael Hili, "Film review: 'Women He's Undressed,'" *AC Mag,* 1 September 2015.
[350] Stephen Saito, "Interview: Gillian Armstrong on finding freedom in documentaries and 'Women He's Undressed,'" *Moveable Fest,* 14 September 2015.
[351] Julia Scott-Stevenson, "'Women He's Undressed' review," *SBS,* 16 July 2015.

unity as coherence. This film is entirely structured around difference and contrast. But more importantly, the comment misreads the stylistic strategy at play here.

Image 5.20: Interview set-up on location

Image 5.21: same location, different set-up

Photos: Rialto Films

Rather than 'lacking' style or displaying diverse visual style, the interviews with industry experts and costume designers filmed in the US display rigorous similarities, which in turn, function to contrast with the more flamboyant approaches of the dramatisations. It is worth pausing over the stylistic homogeneity of the interviews as this will have much to show us about Howard's digital cinematography. The US interviews include the same architectural detail indicating they were shot in the same location (Image 5.20 to 5.23) and suggesting that they hired a location to film these interviews. In all of these shots, there is a window positioned behind the subject, providing substantial natural backlight, which is then balanced by artificial light positioned near the camera. The cinematography makes use of architectural designs to create a balanced, closed frame and to motivate the lighting both natural and artificial. Through the use of shallow depth of field, by a large aperture on the lens, the subject is separated from the background. This represents a significant difference from Radel's work on *Unfolding Florence*. There is enough depth to identify background features and to locate the interview setting but the features are soft enough so as not to draw attention away from the subject. The lighting is very soft, coming from the right-hand side of frame, suggested but not motivated by the presence of the window. Howard describes filming at specific times of day to avoid excessive light in the exterior backgrounds.[352] The use of the window and consistent framing unifies interviews filmed at different times and places. Unlike the earlier digital cameras such as the Panasonic P2 used on *Love, Lust & Lies* (2009), the Alexa has increased latitude and can therefore record greater detail in highlights such as windows, so the positioning of interviews is very different in these two films.

Whereas *Love, Lust & Lies* sought to avoid such situations, *Women He's Undressed* deliberately incorporates the windows into the back of frames. Both *Women He's Undressed* and *Unfolding*

[352] Anna Howard, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 150.

Florence employ depth staging in their interview sequences—but crucially for my discussion of cinematography, they adopt opposite tactics to incorporate backgrounds. In *Florence*, the backgrounds include Broadhurst's wallpapers and significant depth of focus is important in maintaining them in focus. In *Women He's Undressed*, the window backgrounds are employed to signify the real (ie. extra-cinematic) world and natural light is important as a contrast to the stylised lighting of the theatricalised dramatisations. It is enough that we see natural light, but the window source does not have to be in focus, and so shallow depth of focus is employed. These manipulations in depth of focus are facilitated by digital cameras which are able to stop down by manipulations of ISO or open up the iris through using available light. The backlighting in *Women*'s interviews provides modelling as opposed to planar flatness and its effect is to accentuate the shape of the subject's hair (a technique also used by Malcolm Richards in *14s Good, 18s Better*). Within this basic schema there are two variations with Image 5.22 situating the window directly behind the subject and using a light source to the left of the camera (see Image 5.20 for this set-up) while Image 5.23 frames the window to the side, allowing for sidelight with a key light (Image 5.21).

Image 5.22: twisted column in both interviews


Image 5.23: windows in the background

Well-known Australian costume designers are also interviewed for *Women He's Undressed* replicating the style of the US interviews, framed slightly off centre and speaking to the implied interviewer to the left of frame. An interview with designer Catherine Martin (Image 5.24) is filmed in front of a window, replicating the staging of Image 5.23, with sunlight streaming through, and to reduce this quantity of daylight a net curtain is drawn in front of the window. The inclusion of a rope barrier on the side of frame and positioned in front of the window highlight, suggests a hotel location, making use of the frame width while also serving to break up the large block of white on the left of frame. The dark panel behind the light side of Martin's hair uses contrast, together with the backlighting, to create separation between the subject and the background. Martin stands out in the composition due to the warmth of the key light source, her colourful dress, glasses and nails all of which contrast with the blue-ish monochromatic frame that surrounds her.

Image 5.24: Australian interview with costume designer Catherine Martin.

Other interviews, particularly those involving film stars, are filmed in a variety of spaces though once again, a homogeneity of style is apparent. Jane Fonda is interviewed in a US hotel room against a curtain backdrop (Image 5.26) and Angela Lansbury is filmed in Adelaide while working on another production (Image 5.25).[353] The grey curtains are lit with a central highlight, creating an in-camera vignette. These do not include the use of windows or reveal much about the location, though once again soft key lights and shallow focus are employed. By using similar cinematography techniques across time and location, the interviews have a more consistent and unified visual style to present a thesis to the antithetical style of the dramatisations.

Image 5.25: Lansbury in Adelaide Australia

Image 5.26: Fonda in the US

Armstrong makes the point that the drama scenes are not re-enactments of prior events, but rather imagined scenarios and impressions from situations described in Orry-Kelly's diary. Where the dramatic scenes in *Florence* were filmed in a relatively cohesive way, designed to achieve

[353] Lesley Coffin, "Interview: 'Women He's Undressed' director Gillian Armstrong," *The Mary Sue,* 17 November 2015, accessed 27 November 2023.

consistency in the use of colour, light and movement, the dramatisations in *Women He's Undressed* employ a wide variety of lighting and camera styles creating difference and, hopefully, energy as the core aesthetic. Each scene or sequence employs a different cinematography technique, including shallow or deep focus, monochromatic or saturated colours, and layers of foreground or none at all. These differences combine to create a vibrant demonstration of cinematographic possibilities.

Dramatisations are mostly shot in a studio through projection of digital and archival footage to create a background against which dramatic scenes were filmed on a cinema stage. While one might have expected green screen and digital compositing, this film explores a lower tech alternative. Armstrong observes, 'We took the video projector into the room to project it on the wall, we realized it was great the way [the light] bends on the floor.' [354] Projectors are daylight balanced, low intensity light sources so the foreground lighting needs to be at a low enough intensity to allow a proper exposure of the projection. Digital cameras are very useful here for working at lower light levels by increasing the ISO and making use of the latitude at the low end of the exposure curve. So as not to cast light on the screen and thereby wash out the projected images, lighting must come from the side or back of the stage.

Image 5.27: *Women He's Undressed* Behind-the-Scenes (BTS) showing the use of projection behind the actor interviews. Stills photographer Prudence Upton.

A lot can be learned about the cinematography, cameras and lighting from behind-the scene-photos (BTS). For example, the BTS photo above (Image 5.27) shows the use of an ARRI light directed through a cookie or gobo frame, a black board with areas cut out to allow light through in a varied pattern shape. The cookie can be used to break up light and make it less stark as though

[354] Stephen Saito, "Interview: Gillian Armstrong on finding freedom in documentaries and 'Women He's Undressed,'" *Moveable Fest,* 14 September 2015.

coming through a tree branch or curtain. To counter the daylight-balanced projection the on-set tungsten lighting (3200°k) must be adjusted to match through the use of colour correction gels or LED lights set to daylight frequencies (5600°k). In this example a daylight-balanced lamp head is used. An alternative strategy is to contrast a tungsten or warm source against the blue projected source, a technique also used by Howard to light some scenes. Armstrong explains, 'We came up with the idea of doing all of those projections to change the mood, and going with the theatrical look. And I know that some people go with it, and some people find that it's an odd thing in a documentary. As it was about art and design, I felt that we were allowed to go for it.'[355] She articulates here the shift on the Griersonian continuum that I have identified, away from actuality and towards its creative treatment; that documentaries can be artistic and adventurous while still communicating real life experiences and stories in a more stylised fashion.

Image 5.28: Actor Damien Gilshenan positioned in front of the Orry-Kelly projection.

Projection in *Women He's Undressed* is frequently used to provide an impression of light and detail, such as the example in Image 5.28 where the actor is in focus but the archival projection behind is soft and partially obscured. In contrast to the tungsten-balanced production light sources, the projection is daylight-balanced and reads as blue. The cinematographer makes technical decisions whether or not to match the colour temperature, for a creative outcome. In this case, the projection is left blue and the actor warm. Despite the out-of-focus projection, the subject is still discernible and viewer attention moves between the two faces making a connection between the actor and the real-life face from past. One face (the actor) is warmly lit, moving and sharp, the other (archival footage) monochromatic, static, and distant. The spirit of Eisenstein hovers over the

[355] Christopher Reed, "A conversation with Gillian Armstrong (The people he's undressed)," *Hammer on Nail*, 10 August 2016.

image, as if determined to accentuate what he saw as graphic montage *within* images as well as between them.[356] Howard describes the use of projection to create a direct visual link between the new filmed footage and the old movie footage. 'The studio part of the film was really stylised. I did incorporate some projections just to thread it through the narrative.'[357] The technical process of layering footage is reflexive and prominent. While the projection of archival footage introduces evidence from the past, it also serves to remind the viewer that they are watching an image.

Another tactic employed to differentiate documentary interviews from dramatised recreations, is to have the actors speak directly to the camera. Orry-Kelly, portrayed by an actor (Darren Gilshenan), is seen directly addressing the audience with words sourced from his journals and letters. The technique is a progression from that found in *Florence*, where Broadhurst is narrated by an actor, and as she is filmed from behind, her face is not seen while she is speaking.[358] Linking these techniques (direct address and voice-over) with performance by actors suggests a combination of Orry-Kelly's own (imagined) perspective, alongside all the other perspectives that are marshalled to tell his story representing truths of a more personal nature.

Image 5.29: Projection and live action combined in-camera

Interviewing Armstrong for the premiere of *Women He's Undressed*, Stephen Saito comments, 'You actually haven't seemed to have this much fun with colour since *Starstruck* (1982).'[359] This

[356] Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,1949), 52.
[357] Anna Howard, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 150.
[358] Brad Mariano, "'Women He's Undressed' – An interview with director Gillian Armstrong," *Four Three Film,* 17 July 2015.
[359] Stephen Saito, "Interview: Gillian Armstrong on finding freedom in documentaries and 'Women He's Undressed,'" *Moveable Fest,* 14 September 2015.

observation makes a salient connection between the two films, as both reference the formal and bright cinematography styles used in Hollywood musicals. The use of colour is bright and strong, contrasting with the interviews and black and white Hollywood film footage. In the scene with the boat in front of the Warner Bros. logo, (Image 5.29), the actor's hair is back lit with a blue rim, suggesting the source comes from the daylight-balanced projection. The contrasting key light source is correctly balanced for tungsten light. The use of blue ties together the logo, the boat and the clouds and provides a visual link to water, especially as it reflects onto the studio floor. The tungsten light ties together the brown tones of the suit and the interior of the boat. Armstrong connects the use of contrasting colour motifs to the Orry-Kelly designs: 'because his color work is so vibrant, we wanted to subliminally set that up in the color choice and the style.'[360] The red boat here, sourced by the art department, provides motivation for the use of red highlights throughout the film and contrasts with the blue projector light source.

Image 5.30: Blue projection with contrasting yellow side lighting.

An example of the projection and lighting working together to create colour contrasts is the final scene in the boat (Image 5.30) with blue and yellow highlights in the projection replicated in the choice of lighting on the actor's face. Blue and yellow are complementary colours, and so work in this case to create separation between the foreground and background. Yellow light on the blue rim of the boat combines to create a green hue. Reflected water ripples using lighting techniques are artificially created on the side of the red boat, tieing together the live action and projection. Unlike the interviews, the composition in this scene and others using projection is very flat, with the action staged in front of a two-dimensional moving image. There is little use of foreground.

[360] Bilge Ebiri, "Gillian Armstrong: One of our great directors, on the genius of costumers," *The Village Voice,* 17 August 2016.

Image 5.31: foreground action

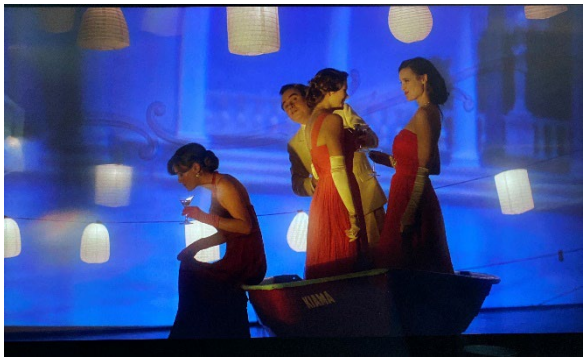


Image 5.32: use of colour bokeh

However, we should expect that any visual technique used here will quickly be accompanied by its opposite. Juxtaposed against the previous images (5.29 and 5.30), an alternative technique positions the primary actor behind an out-of-focus foreground, the face partially obscured by movement and light. Image 5.31 employs the technique of shallow depth-of-field to isolate Orry-Kelly from the two women that frame him. Even though the foreground women dominate the frame, they are very out of focus and undefined, whereas Orry-Kelly is sharp and clearly defined against the blue background and the viewer's eye connects with his face. The use of the longer lens with less focal depth for the close-up emphasises the difference. Even compositions that have a flat projected background are given out-of-focus bokeh which can exist behind and sometimes in the front of an image. Images 5.31 and 5.32 above demonstrate the strong use of shallow focus and therefore bokeh, with soft fore and back grounds, along with strong colour in the lighting design, providing a counterpoint to the black and white footage from original Orry-Kelly films. The background projection is allowed uncorrected to read strongly as blue. On the use of colour in the dramatisations, Armstrong explains, 'I wanted something that was thematic and also had a lot of color in it, as a link, because we knew we were starting off with a lot of black and white but were going to end in the 1960s, when his designs were so vibrant.'[361] As Armstrong implies, colour choice also comes from the production design and, in this case, the digital images used in the projections. The tones are mostly blues and yellows with some carefully placed reds.

[361] Christopher Reed, "A conversation with Gillian Armstrong (The People He's Undressed)," *Hammer on Nail*, 10 August 2016.

Image 5.33: CU slash of light on the face

Image 5.34: wide shot with projection and foreground

The showy stylistic flourish of these dramatised scenes in *Women He's Undressed* provides an opportunity for cinematographer Howard to be expressive and creative through the use of lighting. In one very beautiful and well executed scene that combines live action with projection (Image 5.33), the actor is bathed in a soft, yellow light coming from above, emulating a streetlight. Across his face is a slash of whiter light (an eye bar light), the shadow created by the use of cutters positioned in front of the lamp. The yellow light isolates him from the surrounding frame. The background projection is blue and includes a face positioned on the opposite side of the frame. In front of the actor are lines of telegrams that move across the frame (Image 5.34), in and out of light, like washing on a clothesline. The yellow light creates a nostalgic ambience and contrasts with the blue. The shadow areas in these frames are dark. In the wider frame the chairs and telegrams are silhouetted against the bright projection. The projection is reflected in the shadow areas of the shiny floor surface.

These imagined dramatised scenes provide a means by which Armstrong revisits her own history as much as that of Orry-Kelly. The rowboat scene borrows a device previously seen in her early student short, *The Roof Needs Mowing* (Chapter One, Image 1.11) where the actor is seated, directly addressing the camera, in a boat that is revealed to be stationary in fake or contained water. The curtain motif from *Starstruck* (Chapter Three, Images 3.36, 3.37) is also reprised in *Women He's Undressed* (2015) with a short sequence of the young Orry-Kelly playing with a toy theatre set (Images 5.35 and 5.36). The curtain obscures his face and draws attention to the constructed shot layers of foreground, midground and background action. My concentration on the work of cinematographers need not lead me to deny the existence of directorial connections between films. Indeed, a concentration on the poetics of image construction can provide fresh materials for auteurists, though it should not be forgotten that cinematographers have translated these visual connections into concrete and complex images.

Image 5.35: Young Orry-Kelly playing

Image 5.36: Young Orry-Kelly behind curtain

Other dramatised scenes take place on location, on the banks of a river and on a hill in front of a light house. These often-wide exterior compositions are brightly exposed with a combination of daylight, reflected light and artificial light sources. These scenes are shot with a combination of objective camera positions and subjective direct address. The range of contrast and latitude required to film the funeral scene with detail retained in the sky (Image 5.37) provides an example of the way in which digital cameras have the capacity to record detail in faces (mid-tones) while also capturing information in the highlights of the sky and clouds. The foreground grass also retains detail and is free of noise. The capture of detail in bright and dark areas of the frame ensures flexibility in postproduction to adjust parameters such as gain, gamma, lift and colour. The latitude achievable in this shot was not possible with the earlier digital cameras such as the Panasonic P2 (*Love Lust & Lies*) but the ARRI Alexa was considered a major step forward in image production. On the 10-year anniversary of the ARRI Alexa, cinematographer Robert McLachlan (*Game of Thrones*, *Westworld*) enthused, 'I've been a cameraman for more than 30 years and this is the first quantum leap in filmmaking technology I've seen since I started out.' [362] *Women He's Undressed* utilises the camera's technical strengths to capture images with deep contrast, saturation and exposure latitude incorporating them into its aesthetic of contrasts.

Image 5.37: funeral dramatisation

Image 5.38: Orry-Kelly's mother

[362] "ALEXA 10th Anniversary," *ARRI*, accessed 2021, link no longer accessible. See also, "ALEXA 10th Anniversary," *Cineom Broadcast DMCC,* 8 June 2020, re-post accessed 30 July 2023.

The reviews of *Women He's Undressed* rarely mention the cinematographer, but clearly the use of light, colour and projection bring a lot to this film, while requiring a great deal from the cinematographer. Reviewer Brad Mariano writes that 'Armstrong's intelligence and vision' means that 'its entire ambitious gamut of content works together seamlessly.' [363] Rather than being seamless, I have tried to show that the cinematography is based on difference and contrast, and that any consistencies function to reinforce those contrasts, producing what Christopher Lucas describes as a 'hybrid look' or what Eisenstein would refer to as montage within the image.[364] Embracing both digital and film cinematography sources, modern, colourful dramatisations collide with black and white film and photographs to create images that imagine a life that is no longer here to be filmed.

Sandwiched between these two collage or hybrid documentaries is the more sober observational cinematography of *Love, Lust & Lies*. As argued in Chapter Two, Costello worked with a functional style embracing a variety of lighting situations using a camera that brought flexibility on location but which was also limited in its capacity to record shots with high dynamic range (for example bright skies). Filming on location was a constant battle to achieve sufficient exposure while also mitigating highlights such as windows and skies. As with the two films discussed here, footage was included from prior films and Costello produced scenes that could be intercut with older film material. Where *Women He's Undressed* relies on contrasting colour and light quality, *Love Lust & Lies* seeks to combine scenes and locations in a seamless way. A substantial difference in the methodology can be found in the reduced image capture quality of early HD cameras of the time that were not as capable of capturing exposure latitude as either film or the ARRI Alexa cameras.

The enthusiasm for using digital technology for new forms of non-fiction filmmaking is shared by cinematographer Kirsten Johnson: 'Because of the great expansion of creative nonfiction that is happening in the documentary ecosystem right now, I think that we're all really excited about what we can do.'[365] I have already noted the views of Dion Beebe on the use of digital versus film capture, to work with lower exposure levels. His view is that 'I'm not saying you don't need to light in digital — that's a huge fallacy — but you can work toward these ambient levels. You're still using lighting, but you're using it in a different way, with a softer touch.'[366] The capacity for digital cameras to work in lower lighting situations such as night exteriors and in people's homes means that decisions can be made to use fewer or no additional light sources. This is borne out by a diverse range of examples of low light digital cinematography such as the factory interview in

[363] Brad Mariano, "'Women He's Undressed,'" *Four Three Film*, 12 June 2015.
[364] Christopher Lucas, "The modern entertainment marketplace, 2000-present," in *Cinematography,* edited by Patrick Keating (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014), 146; Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,1949), 53.
[365] Orla Smith (ed), "How do you classify your nonfiction film?" in *Subjective Realities Volume 4.2,* edited by Alex Heeney and Orla Smith (Toronto: Seventh Row, 2021), 42.
[366] David Heung, "Beebe on 'digital aesthetic' 10 years after 'Collateral,'" *The ASC,* 2 July 2014, accessed April 2023. Please note: At the time of thesis publication The ASC website was undergoing site maintenance, and as a result, several articles are no longer accessible via their hyperlink.

Unfolding Florence, the night exterior bus scene in *Love, Lust & Lies* (Panasonic P2) and the projection sequences on *Women He's Undressed*. The advantages of these camera technologies has been widely discussed in the trade literature above. The Panavision P2 HD camera was also used on feature drama *Laid to Rest* (DOP Scott Winig, 2008) colour corrected using Da Vinci Resolve software and output to film for projection. The director and cinematographer praised the camera for its ability to film at night, in extremes or weather and with mixed lighting situations.[367]

As I have shown, changes in camera technology do not lead to a single set of possibilities, such as the use of low-light. The significant differences in the three documentaries I have considered in this chapter demonstrate that fast-changing digital capture technologies have opened up a wide range of uses and challenges for contemporary cinematographers. Radel used the flexibility of exposure to increase depth-of-field for compositions that decentred characters in favour of wallpaper design, while the digital capture of both skin tones and colour saturation improved to the extent that *Women He's Undressed* could creatively combine both attributes in a playful and visually striking manner. Where Costello could be functionally self-effacing in his style, Howard was able to really show off her lighting and technical skills through expansive and bold cinematography.

Cinematography in the Age of Digital Postproduction

With the exception of Armstrong's first documentary *Smokes and Lollies* (1976), all of the documentaries discussed in this thesis include the use of footage from other films, that is material shot by other cinematographers for other projects. In the Adelaide Girls series, work from previous films is included in the later films, while *Florence* includes the use of archival films alongside digital collages and *Women He's Undressed* includes footage from Hollywood feature films and archival sources. Armstrong along with her cinematographers and editor (Nicholas Beauman) have developed over a long period of time, methods for combining and synthesising the work of very different cinematographers into the one film. In some cases, the aim is to hide or minimise the different material and in others it is to accentuate the difference. In all situations, the work of the cinematographer must increasingly be discussed in conjunction with other digital technologies and professional specialisations during the postproduction process.

[367] Nick Drager, "No rest for the weary," *Digital Cinema Report*, 23 July 2008.

Image 5.39: filming on location in the US

Image 5.40: High-angle camera rig [368]

These three films differ from the previous Adelaide Girls documentaries in their reliance on a digital post-production pathway. Armstrong refers to a 'fantastic group of young animators, working day and night' on *Florence*.[369] Tim Richter who is credited as the Animation Supervisor describes creating over 100 animations including 'combining stop motion of archival photographs with digital effects delivered in high definition.'[370] *Women He's Undressed* was also a collaboration with VFX and motion graphics artists. On the website of FrenchBaker is the claim that: 'FrenchBaker created a broad range of visual storytelling techniques to enhance this predominantly archive-based film. We produced motion graphics and visual effects including opening/closing titles, sequences for over 120 archival stills, visual effects for projections as part of Orry's stylised dramatic sequences, costume sketch, newspaper and magazine sequences.'[371] The influence of visual difference, or 'peppy vibe', these digital artists add to the documentaries was made possible due to the rapidly expanding range of digital technologies available at the time of production. This included high resolution film scanning of old footage, importing digital animation and motion graphics into a digital postproduction environment and producing a digital colour grade in the final stages.

These digital barcodes created from scanning frames of entire films, show *Women He's Undressed* and *Florence* using a similar colour palette and restricted range of tones. However *Florence* (Image 5.41) has a greater prevalence of browns and warmer tones, while *Women He's Undressed* (Image 5.42) illustrates greater variety with the daylight tones from interview footage, the blue-green of the projection sequences and monochromatic lines representing the use of black and white footage.

[368] Anna Howard, ACS, 2016, Production still.
[369] Graham Shirley, "Gillian Armstrong Interviewed by Graham Shirley: Oral History," NFSA ID: 1050278, Film, *National Film and Sound Archive of Australia,* 22 November 2011 – 11 January 2012.
[370] Tim Richter, "Resume," *Richer Vision,* 2017, accessed on 26 January 2021.
[371] Michelle French, "'Women He's Undressed,'" *French Baker,* accessed 2020.

Image 5.41: Digital barcode from *Unfolding Florence*

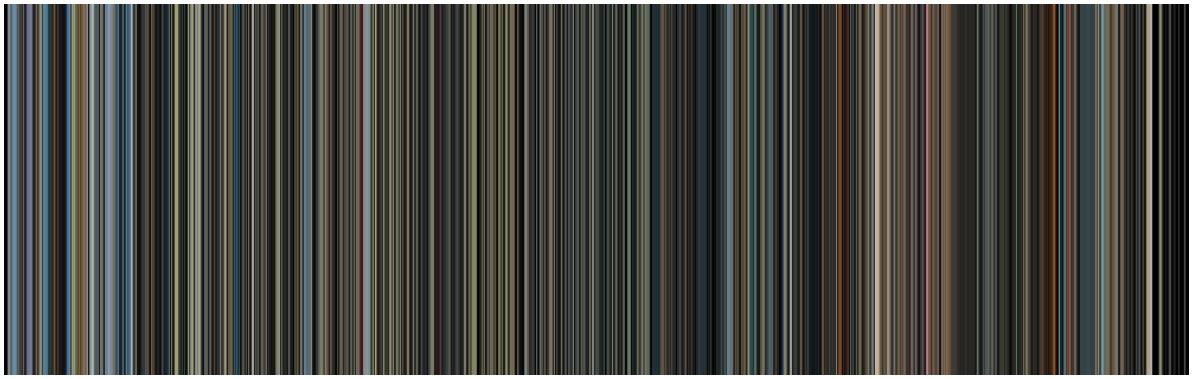


Image 5.42: Digital barcode from *Women He's Undressed* illustrates the transition of Hollywood films included in this film, from black and white to colour.

A comparison of these codes shows a consistency throughout *Unfolding Florence* whereas *Women* progresses from blue tones combined with mostly black and white Hollywood films through to the use of colour films after 1961. This moment in time is visually obvious approximately two thirds along the bar code. The coloured bars in the last third coincide with the colour films Orry-Kelly designed.

Although these three films all had a television release and colour grade, they were also all screened in cinemas. The colour grades for *Unfolding Florence* (colourist Dwayne Hyde) and *Love, Lust & Lies* (colourist Keiran Bleakley) had a film output with 35mm answer prints (by Movielab) screened to review the grade. Less than a decade later, *Women He's Undressed* (colourist Billy Wychgel) was produced for DCP test screenings in a digital cinema. The Astor website details the restoration of the theatre in 2015 and proudly boasts the installation of a state-of-the-art Barco 4K projector to be launched with the screening of *Women He's Undressed*.[372] The colour grade designed specifically for a digital theatre would be very different from the 35mm output, with enhanced capability to adjust and correct the brightness and contrast, while also producing for better or worse a sharper image.

[372] "The Astor Theatre: Our new 4K projector," *Astor Theatre,* accessed February 2021.

Of all the stages of cinematography, the least obvious or visible to audiences is the colour grade, also known on film as colour timing. While tools such as colour timing, optical printing, and the creation of inter-negs has long been a tool known for those working in film, the transition to digital postproduction has increased the visibility of the tools for visual manipulation during postproduction. Geoffrey Simpson observes that in the digital domain, the colour grading tools are 'far more sophisticated and more complex than what we had in the purely photo chemical world.'[373] For director and editor Matthew Pellowski, 'Color correction is often the most misunderstood stage of the filmmaking process. It can be daunting and confusing.'[374] It is an important aspect of cinematography, as decisions are frequently made on set to either preserve image detail or information for later stages or, knowing that (for example) a digital cutter or vignette could be used to darken an area of frame, economising on lighting. During the grade, the image can be altered, corrected or improved by adjusting tonal qualities such as hue, saturation and gamma as well as luminance and contrast. The images can also be re-sized or re-framed resulting in altered composition while the increased pixel capacity of many cameras is based on the ability to expand areas of the frame without loss of quality. Geoffrey Simpson eloquently articulates the dilemmas facing all cinematographers, noting that others 'have total control now, can make a Close Up tighter, not caring or noticing why the cinematographer had found a balance in the composition that works and looked good. Same with lighting.'[375]

While cinematography has become more flexible and adaptable through the use of digital pathways, it has also come at a cost. Patrick Keating's anthology *Cinematography* documents the cinematographer's increasing and inevitable loss of control of the image as digital processes are used to create and enhance visual style. The final chapter by Lucas sums this up, 'The ability to make "creative contributions" has expanded dramatically to other role players and into new production workspaces.'[376] Re-framing, lighting, contrast, colour and grading are now adjusted and revised by numerous other people. Even eye-lights can be added and removed. The cinematographer is not always included in these later stages of production although they hopefully still attend a colour grading session, or more commonly now, are sent digital files for comment. Martha Ansara in *Shadowcatchers* writes 'Professionally, cinematographers now work with a new range of collaborators, and often only contribute one element of an image which is ultimately controlled in postproduction.' [377] The primary contribution is in pre-production planning and on set

[373] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[374] Quote by Matthew J Pellowski on back cover of: Charles Haine, *Color Grading 101: Getting started color grading for editors, cinematographers, directors, and aspiring colorists* (New York: Routledge, 2020).
[375] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[376] Christopher Lucas, "The modern entertainment marketplace, 2000-present," in *Cinematography,* edited by Patrick Keating (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014), 157.
[377] Martha Ansara, *The Shadowcatchers: A history of cinematography in Australia* (NSW: Austcine Publishing, 2012), 255.

during production, while any subsequent contribution can now be considered optional. Simultaneously, film grain is added to digital footage, while film grain is removed from film originated footage often without consulting the cinematographer. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* has been remastered for DVD masked for a 1.78 aspect ratio preferred by the director and more recently for UHD Blue Ray format with film grain removed and then digital grain added. Film academic and blogger David Hare scathingly describes this as 'just another case of a directorial re-invention.'[378]

As the colour grading and technical correction of images has become more embedded across the whole filmmaking process, cinematographers require a strong understanding of all the issues and complexities in order to capture in production the correct image details for later colour grading and post processing. 'Traditionally the "colour session" happens at the end of the post process… Over the last few decades the colour grading and management process has bled over into other stages in post and even onto set.'[379] A Lookup Table (LUT) is developed in pre-production by the cinematographer in conjunction with editors, visual effects and post production supervisors, to adjust gamma, sensitivity and colour space (image attributes such as brightness, contrast and saturation) so that log and raw footage can be viewed on set and in the edit the way they will look after post production. Without the LUT, uncompressed images appear flat, without obvious colour or contrast detail. Films are now shot this way in order to preserve as much image detail and data as possible for use in post-production. LUTs are applied to camera data and video monitors on the set and then used at a later stage in the edit and colour grading. By using in-camera effects such as lighting and projection in *Women He's Undressed*, Howard retained more control of the way the image would ultimately look.

Howard describes a positive collaborative relationship with the colour grader on *Women He's Undressed*: 'I was involved in the whole grading process. I had a wonderful grader Billy Wychgel. He has done numerous productions with me. We graded in the projection suite at Sound Firm on the Fox Lot in Sydney.' [380] Given Howard's preference for setting the look in-camera, the grade would complete her cinematography process.

[378] David Hare, "On Blu-ray and UHD – David Hare is less than impressed with a new edition of 'Picnic at Hanging Rock' - Peter Weir, Australia, 1975," *Film Alert 101,* 8 May 2023, accessed 30 July 2023.
[379] Charles Haine, *Color Grading 101" Getting started color grading for editors, cinematographers, directors, and aspiring colorists* (New York: Routledge, 2020), xi and xii.
[380] Anna Howard, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 150.

Image 5.43: Composited visual effects created by French and Baker, from the same shoot as Image 5.27.

Conclusion

Cinematography has changed a great deal since Tom Cowan first rolled the 16mm ARRI BL camera for *Smokes and Lollies* (1976). Camera manufacturers such as Red, Sony and ARRI continue to develop new digital cameras, more complex and capable than anything previously seen. Importantly, the more subtle aspects of cinematography are now achievable on digital formats. Panavision's current lenses include 'vintage and modern large format glass [that] offers artists the optimum system for creating the unmatched aesthetic of large format cinematography. Attributes such as a 'shallower depth of field, greater magnification and a wider field of view' produce a softer, pleasing, more natural image.'[381] The Sony Venice camera was released in 2018, along with the CineAlta camera featuring a 36x24mm full frame image sensor. In February 2021 Red released its Komodo 6K camera with a global shutter and extremely high dynamic range (HDR). The camera is also lightweight and very portable. Sony released a similar small camera the FX6 in their Cinema Line, combining the high-end Venice capability with the smaller FX9 features. With small camera bodies, capacity to film in low light situations and flexible recording codecs (video compression) any of these cameras would be an excellent choice for documentary filmmaking.

Parallel to this though, filmmakers working in both documentary and fiction, continue to choose film capture. According to Internet Movie Data Base site (IMDB) in 2019 a total of 48 films were shot on 16mm, 35mm and 65mm formats, some in combination, others on a single gauge.[382] These

[381] "Camera & Optics: DXL2: Millenium DXL2," *Panavision,* 2020.
[382] Bow_89, "2019 shot on film 16mm/35mm/65mm," *IMDb,* 25 July 2017.

included Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (DP Robert Richardson), *Pokemon Detective Pikachu* (DP John Mathieson) and the latest iteration of *Little Women* (DP Yorick Le Saux). Indiewire compile an annual list of cameras used to shoot the films screening at Sundance in the drama competition and in 2020 many of those films were also shot on film, *Indiewire* cites multiple reasons for this choice such as soft skin tones, poetic pictures, a baked in look or a style that represents the past.[383]

Emmanuel Lubezki speaking about the ARRI Alexa and *Birdman* (2014) articulates the desire of cinematographers: 'To me what is important, and what I wish for, is that we have many brushes, many different tools to tell stories and express emotion in different ways.'[384] Although this comment is vague and romantic in its description of cinematography, Lubezki points to the important nexus between technology and technique, the two being inextricably intertwined. The role of the cinematographer has now become more of an image manager rather than the sole producer or author of the image. Christopher Lucas encapsulates this change in attitude: 'Since the digital turn, however, the language of management has become more embedded in cinematographers' practice.'[385] The process of shooting, editing, colour grading and finally projection is now referred to as Workflow or Pipeline with asset and data management becoming key imperatives. Yet, by using the case of these three documentaries, I hope to have shown that the cinematographers have made significant aesthetic contributions to the film, even in cases where their work is by no means the entirety of the footage generated for the film. Geoffrey Simpson remains positive about the future of cinematography: 'Even with the changes that the digital world has brought to cinematography the positives outweigh the negatives massively. The possibilities with digital film making are endless. Right now, is a very exciting time to be shooting and making movies.'[386] As I prepare for teaching my students to use a new state-of-the-art camera, the ARRI Alexa 35, alongside the 1970's 16mm Aaton XTR, it is important to understand the differences in approach to shooting with these vastly different image capture systems. The cinematography in these three documentaries demonstrates some of the possibilities for emerging cinematographers.

[383] Chris O' Fait, "How I shot that: Here are the cameras used to shoot this year's Sundance Films," *Indie Wire,* 22 January 2020.
[384] Jon Fauer, ASC, "The history of ARRI in a century of cinema," *ARRI,* accessed 23 February 2021.
[385] Christopher Lucas, "The modern entertainment marketplace, 2000-present," in *Cinematography,* edited by Patrick Keating (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2014), 157.
[386] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

> I think the cinematographers are collaborative artists, not uniquely as a single creator, as their work is a creative combination of other crafts exchanging ideas. Mostly, with the director but also importantly with the art department, lighting and the other crafts making their own contributions. Needless to say, the cinematographer has to combine all of the ideas together to create the art form.[387]
>
> Russell Boyd

At the heart of this dissertation, there has been a simple assumption that in order to gain an understanding of, and respect for, what it is that cinematographers do it is important to look closely at film images. My initial inspiration came from Sontag's proposition of looking *at* artworks rather than *through* them. She argues in her well-known essay, *Against Interpretation*, that film criticism should primarily exist to 'show how it is what it is' and not disguise the materiality of filmmaking beneath interpretation. [388] In my study, the luminousness of cinematography relates to the material and physical artefacts and devices used in cinematography such as cameras, filmstock, monitors, lights and light meters that are used on film sets to record images. I am interested in what it is that cinematographers and their crew do to control, adjust and change with each frame.

My survey of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong, both in Australia and internationally, has confirmed that, aside from script, performance and theme, there is an enormous amount more work involved in the construction of images, much more than is initially obvious. For example, cinematographers have many problems to solve such as achieving just the right amount of focus, blending daylight and tungsten light (*14's Good, 18's Better, Little Women*) and filming figures against windows (*My Brilliant Career, 14's Good, 18's Better, Women He's Undressed*). These choices are important to the look, the functionality, the sheer materiality of the image-making whether captured by analogue or digital technologies. While I have been at pains to avoid any taint of technological determinism, it is also important to acknowledge that cinematographers work closely with technology, and that as technology changes, so does the profession.

As Russell Boyd articulates in his correspondence, cinematography involves collaboration with producers, directors and other departments, especially production design. In the final credits of

[387] Russell Boyd, ACS, ASC, OAM, in email correspondence with the author, 2020. See appendix: *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* (Heyzine Flipbooks, 2023), 10.
[388] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and other Essays* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1966).

Peel (1982), a short drama directed by Jane Campion, Sally Bongers is credited as Collaborator/cinematographer recognising an important creative and working relationship.

A significant part of my research has been the recording of oral and written histories from a specifically cinematographic perspective and from people who might not necessarily comment on the detail of their work. Most of the films included in this documentation were made many years ago and the information while worth preserving, is at risk of disappearing. One of the advantages of concentrating more on what cinematographers do, is that histories are recorded that are deeply involved in questions of industry and technology as well as other aesthetic considerations. Writing about the technology and industrial contexts in specific terms results in a different set of research questions and directs attention to areas previously underexplored.

Focussing on the cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong has provided a means of examining something other than Gillian Armstrong as director. She has had a long career, but most importantly for me, has been its range. Each of the chapters have defined technical requirements and industrial contexts while also comparing and contrasting the use of genre (period and contemporary), camera capture (film vs digital), budgets and crews. Making a film for an American studio (*Mrs Soffel, Little Women*) is a different process from working with a Screen Australia grant or funding from a local broadcaster. This necessarily has an impact on the fundamentals of cinematography discussed earlier: aesthetic, technical and organisational. Close visual analysis reveals the flexibility and creativity with which cinematographers must respond to widely differing industrial contexts. Through this research I have contributed to the definition of what the cinematographer actually does and described a range of processes and practice.

Dealing with new contexts, new collaborators and new technologies has been a significant part of Armstrong's career. An example has been seen in the different treatment of film stocks by cinematographers Cowan and Richards. The look of some of the early documentaries shot on film, and the techniques used, is reliant upon a detailed knowledge of that particular Eastman 7247 filmstock. Later documentaries using digital cameras, shot by Radel, Costello and Howard, present a different set of challenges, dealt with differently by each of these cinematographers. Costello, working in observational situations with a first edition digital camera, controls exposure of highlights in the frame through the use of fill-light, filming at a specific time of day and with careful camera position. Radel and Howard using 16mm film and ARRI digital cameras respectively, have the exposure latitude and freedom to position women in front of windows, and to use lighting and colour creatively. Through the writing of this thesis, my admiration for Armstrong has grown, by her demonstrated openness to change and ability to incorporate different industrial and technological contexts as well as embracing different professional collaborations. Armstrong is good at choosing the right cinematographer for the film.

This is not to say that the body of films directed by Armstrong lack stylistic cohesiveness or progression. My analysis of Armstrong-directed films has shown a movement from close-up centric films such as *My Brilliant Career* to the incorporation of depth in *Oscar and Lucinda*, to *Unfolding Florence*, where the camera is kept at a distance, in order to stress designs in the backgrounds. Whilst this may indicate a stylistic progression in Armstrong's work, it is the cinematographer whose key task it is to achieve these attributes. Armstrong has shown a flexible approach towards different cinematography styles in relation to depth of focus and its manipulation, a key factor in the last three films. She works with Boyd (*Starstruck, Mrs Soffel, High Tide*) for shallow-ness and Simpson for depth (*Last Days, Little Women, Oscar and Lucinda*). When working with Howard (*Women He's Undressed*) these techniques are combined with interviews staged and lit for background depth, while dramatic scenes incorporate soft foreground elements. Finding stylistic difference between and within films is a way of paying attention to what it is that different cinematographers do. Boyd's pictorial concentration on the image surface versus Simpson's classicist depth-oriented style deliver Armstrong alternative forms for diverse filmmaking.[389] Reviewing their work in these films and reading their responses to my questions reveals a continuum of styles with practical approaches.

In my research and conversations with each of the cinematographers, there is a commonality of approach when working with Armstrong, where attention and emphasis is placed on the planning and pre-production stage. Simpson writes about this period as 'an incredibly important part of our work. It's the time to get to know the director and the production designer.'[390] He writes about Armstrong being very organised and prepared, sharing lots of detail through drawings and paintings. Richards, working on the Adelaide Girls series describes a similar experience, 'She had a pretty fair idea of how the scene was going to go together. Even with a documentary.'[391] The cinematographers on these films find varying solutions to similar problems such as lighting figures against windows whilst managing the contrast ratios and different colour temperatures or filming people from a high angle with a camera mounted above.

When I began this thesis, 14 Australian women were ACS accredited and now there are 20. Thankfully the landscape is changing. Women have been nominated for cinematography awards at the Oscars and Baftas. Women cinematographers are now more known and accepted. Although Armstrong has notably only collaborated with one woman cinematographer (Howard) she has been a strong advocate for change. As a panel member of the Screen Australia *Gender Matters* initiative, Armstrong concedes her 'support for gender diversity-targeted funding is the result of an

[389] Patrick Keating, *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[390] Geoffrey Simpson, ACS, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 162.
[391] Malcolm Richards, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*, 66.

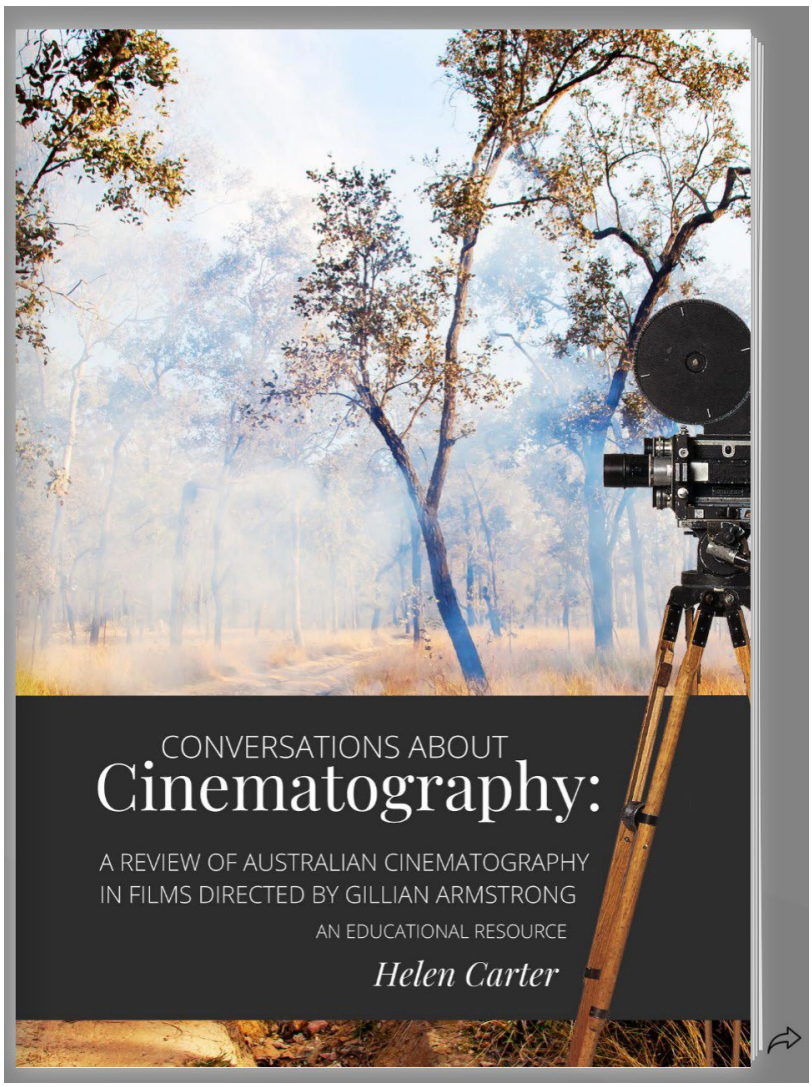
ongoing attitude shift.'[392] For her work on biopic feature *Elvis* (2023), Mandy Walker AM, ACS, ASC won the ACS award for Cinematographer of the Year (2023) and the American Society of Cinematographers Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatrical Releases.[393]

As an academic who teaches cinematography it is important to me to establish a dialogue with cinematographers and camera departments to emphasise as well as de-mystify what they do. In my work teaching emerging filmmakers, it is a priority to educate the next generation of cinematographers who have been raised on auto camera settings, real-time viewing and post-production manipulation of footage. Understanding the technical concepts and creative decision-making processes behind these automated functions gives them skills concerning the choices in their own image construction. My communication with Malcolm Richards for this thesis has simultaneously opened the door to practical advice about film stocks, choice of zoom lenses and 16mm negative scanning in my 16mm film topic and on student honours productions. Although cinematographers are not particularly known for writing about their work, I have been surprised by the willingness of Boyd, Richards and Simpson to communicate by email and answer my many questions throughout this research. Although my original intention was to film interviews with them, Covid travel restrictions meant reverting to text and I was able to correspond over several months and years, asking questions and clarifying details as they arose. In hindsight, this was a more useful process and the accompanying eBook *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong* is the result of this.[394]

When cinematographers are interviewed, it is often by people who know little about cinematography. Consequently, they are frequently asked to talk about their work in large, grand generalisations. For example, while preparing to shoot *Dune: Part Two*, Greig Fraser described cinematography as half practical and half art. 'We're engaged to make something that's on paper – that's intangible – into something that's tangible.[395] It is a useful generalisation about what cinematographers do, but also about what I have attempted here. My thesis covers the process for making this transition from text to shots and scenes possible. The cinematographers included in this study are so important to Australian cinema, are largely unremarked on and usually not understood. Australia has been producing excellent cinematographers for a very long time and we need to pay attention to them. When filmmakers, in this case cinematographers, converse with academics about what they do, there are benefits to both sides. My research contributes to the

[392] James Robert Douglas, "Gillian Armstrong: I used to think, 'I did it, why can't all the other women?'" *The Guardian,* 30 August 2016, accessed 12 June 2023.
[393] "37th Annual ASC Awards - Sunday March 5, 2023 - Live from the Beverley Hills Hilton Hotel," *The ASC,* accessed 12 June 2023; Jackie Keast, "ACS names Mandy Walker cinematographer of the year," *If,* 6 May 2023, accessed 12 June 2023.
[394] Helen Carter, *Conversations about Cinematography: A review of cinematography in films directed by Gillian Armstrong*. 2023
[395] Gary Maddox, "The Australian cinematographer on the cusp of Oscars history," *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 23 March 2022.

documentation and preservation of the knowledge, technique and art these significant cinematographers create and practice.



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