Talking Shop

Poland's Camenmage festival gave 'Sight & Sound' the chance to canvass a baker's dozen international cinematographers about the state of their craft. Interviews by Roger Clarke and Edward Lawrenson

Roger Clarke & Edward Lawrenson

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Think of the great figures of cinema history and which names come to mind? Chances are it will be important directors or movie stars, at a push it might a producer mogul such as Louis B. Mayer or David O. Selznick. Whoever it is, it's unlikely to be the true image-maker who sits behind the camera: the cinematographer. And yet when we think of the great films those directors made, starring those actors and funded by those moguls, it's the indelible images crafted by the cinematographer that appear in our mind's eye.

Given that cinema is primarily a visual artform, it's surprising that writers on film pay so little attention to the cinematographer. Theirs is a mysterious role for many people. It could be that the technical side of their job isn't well enough understood by most to be fully appreciated, or perhaps the auteur theory, with its notion of the director as the sole authorial voice behind a film, has caused the cinematographer to be overlooked as a 'mere' technician — skilled for sure, but ultimately a servant for the vision of the director. This is why, with this issue of 'Sight & Sound', we've attempted to redress the balance.

In a series of interviews conducted by Roger Clarke and Edward Lawrenson at Poland's Camerimage festival, 13 of the best cinematographers at work today discuss various live issues that affect their work, from collaborating with dictatorial directors to the potential of digital technology. Elsewhere, Barry Salt charts the development of cinematography over more than a century of cinema history, and Dante Spinotti talks about the liberating experience of using the latest digital cameras to capture the look of 1930s America in Michael Mann's forthcoming 'Public Enemies'. We also highlight some key innovators whose work has had a profound influence on the history of the cran. It's a highly selective list that inevitably leaves out many greats such as James Wong Howe (pictured left), Vilmos Zsigmond, László Kovács, Jack Cardiff, Miyagawa Kazuo, Subrata Mitra, Raoul Coutard, Haskell Wexler, Robby Müller and many, many more, but which we hope will give 'painters with light' their proper due.

James Bell

Camerimage, the annual celebration of cinematography held in Lodz, may be the best kept secret on the film-festival circuit. For a week in December this Polish city plays host to scores of the world's finest directors of photography. Run by Marek Zydowicz, who started the festival in the neighbouring town of Torun, Camerimage is part festival, part trade show and part informal talking shop. In the large, functional cultural centre that houses the festival, august manipulators of light — multiple Academy Award winners among them — huddle together discussing past jobs, inspecting the camera gear that Panavision, Arriflex and others exhibit in the lobby, and giving candid advice in the many workshops to colleagues and students (Lodz is home to Poland's most renowned film school). The mood is relaxed, informal and bracingly film-focused.

The responses below were collated and edited by Edward Lawrenson.

The Participants

Sean Bobbitt

Films include: Wonderland (1999). Mrs Ratcliffe's Revolution (2007), Hunger (2008)

"Part of the beauty of making drama is in the preparation, but you have to make sure you're always open to spontaneity, recognition of the unexpected. Quite often the things that make a film are the things you're not prepared for."

Cesar Charlone

Films include: City of God (2002), The Constant Gardener (2005), El Baño del Papa (2007), Blindness (2008)

"We're living through such a revolution. You're going to have two kinds of film experience: on the one hand, the internet and iPhone; on the other, the big-screen experience in a beautiful theatre, probably in 30 and IMAX. If you get in a car and drive to a mall, you expect a little more."

Michael Chapman

Films include: The Last Detail (1973). Taxi Driver (1976), Fingers (1977). Raging Bull (1980). The Fugitive (1993). Bridge to Terabithia (2006)

"You mustn't overestimate a script's intellectual content. Much more unconscious material is released while you work and you don't know it until much later."

Roger Deakins

Films include: Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984), Fargo (1995). Kundun(1997). The Man Who Wasn't There (2001), No Country for Old Men (2007), The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford (2007), Revolutionary Road (2008)

"Everything is a compromise: you wanted another light but it would have taken too long; the framing is compromised because the actors weren't on the mark, yet you know another take would compromise the acting. You're aware of all those compromises building up during a shoot. So it's nice to come back to a film, watch it fresh and think, 'Actually it's pretty good.'"

Rainer Klausmann

Films include: Das Experiment (2000). Downfall (2004). Lemon Tree (2008), The Baader Memhof Complex (2008)

"Some cameramen think from the lens backwards: they like technique and all the new gear. But I only think from the lens forwards: about a good script, actors and locations."

Marc Koninckx

Films include: Johnny Mad Dog (2008)

"We're translators for the director. The DoP is the person who gets the energy going on set."

Ellen Kuras

Films include: Swoon (1992), Summer of Sam (1999). Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004). Be Kind Rewind (2007)

"Cinematography is finding meaning in images: from the way the camera moves, from the point of view of the camera and all that bears on the 'voice' of the camera. Cinematographers get caught up in making beautiful images, but the best know it's in service to the story."

Karl Walter Lindenlaub

Films include: Moon 44 (1989), Stargate (1994). Rob Roy (1995), Independence Day (1996). Black Book (2006), The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian (2008)

"Big movies are a great challenge, but they have their own pitfalls. They take a long time to shoot, the crews are huge. Being on a small film can free you up to find out where your interest in film-making came from in the first place."

DONALD McALPINE

Films include: Moulin Rouge (2001). The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (2005), X-Men Origins: Wolverine (2008)

"The closer I get to a director's brain, the better a cinematographer I am."

KRAMER MORGENTHAU

Films include: Mayor of Sunset Strip (2003). The Factory (2009)

"Actors are a whole other breed — they're nuts. [Acting] attracts people who make themselves very vulnerable; it's like standing naked in front of millions of people every day."

BENEDICT NEUENFELS

Films include: The Counterfeiters (2006), A Woman in Berlin (2008)

"I'm delighted that digital has widened our choices. There is a romanticism about film, but I won't stop being interested in anything else that makes images."

JOHN TOLL

Films include: Braveheart(1995), The Thin Red Line (1998), Gone Baby Gone (2007). Tropic Thunder (2008)

"I first worked in a darkroom when I was ten. Cameras felt natural to me. I'm not a painter, but I study painting and I use stills for reference."

BILLY WILLIAMS

Films include: Sunday Bloody Sunday (1971), The Wind and the Lion (1975), On Golden Pond (1981). Gandhi (1982)

"You're in the hot seat because the shooting period is the most expensive and the most complex stage, especially if you're on location and relying on the weather."

The Questions

How Did You Become a Cinematographer?

ROGER DEAKINS: I wanted to be a photojournalist. Then I thought maybe I could make documentaries. The National Film School was opening [in 1971]: I got a place in the second year, where I made my own documentaries and shot films for other people. When I left, I got the chance to do some crazy documentaries other people didn't want to do, like sailing round the world filming people on a yacht, and filming in war zones for British television. Gradually I got offered dramatic work.

ELLEN KURAS: I started making a documentary in 1984 [The Betrayal, completed in 2008]. I saw myself then much more as a film-maker. I knew I had a special interest in camerawork, but I didn't know how to get there because there weren't many women shooting film, so I hired a cameraman and we talked about the ideas I was interested in and shot some material. When the dailies came back, they were really beautiful but didn't say anything to me: I couldn't see the relationships of the people or any wider meaning. I was interested in finding the meaning in images. I knew that images could be metaphors for ideas and speak their own language. So I picked up the camera myself.

SEAN BOBBITT: I studied television producing and directing at university and always thought I'd be a writer-director. I ended up as a freelance news cameraman, thinking, "I'm just doing this for the money and one day I'll be a director." News sucks you in and burns you out, so I got into documentaries and light entertainment, still thinking I was going to be a director. But, after a workshop with Billy Williams, I realised I was a cinematographer and suddenly developed ambition. I came out of that workshop with a drive and desire to get into drama, which didn't happen for about ten years. Then Michael Winterbottom plucked me from obscurity to make Wonderland (1999).

Many of You Have an Early Background in Documentary. How Useful Was That for Your Dramatic Work?

ROGER DEAKINS: It's great life experience for a start, but it really hones your skills for working out where to put the camera, how to cover a scene. Most of the

dramatic films I do are lower budget, so there's not an open-ended amount of time. You've got to set something up and shoot it, so it helps to know how you can cut corners but still get something you're happy with.

SEAN BOBBITT: Documentary is probably the best training you can put yourself through. You're forced to understand the basic tenets of cinematography; quite often you have to deal with light without being able to change it. You really learn what light is: that you can't manipulate it for your own desires — and that sometimes you don't need to. It also teaches you speed, accuracy, the ability to compose on the fly and to break a scene down into its constituent elements in real time. You're always thinking, "What does the editor need to make this scene work?" You don't get a chance to redo it.

KARL WALTER LINDENLAUB: Documentaries should be mandatory [training]. They're a great way to look at life and people, and at light too. Unfortunately in Hollywood you have to forget that quickness sometimes. Big pictures are all about asserting complete control, which is the opposite of documentaries. You have to keep the same atmosphere over a long period of time. You have to fight the sun — overriding the existing lighting conditions just to be consistent — and be more protective of the talent. It's not the most creative way to work, but it's some of the skills we have to have.

How Do You Decide Which Film to Work on?

SEAN BOBBITT: You read the script, and if the script is good, that's everything. The director comes next. The first time, I always try to read the script just for the story: does it have something that moves or excites me? I try not to previsualise too much. I don't want to be put into the position where I meet the director, he comes up with an idea and I'm in conflict with it right off the bat.

ELLEN KURAS: If it's a first time director I need to hear what the voice of the script has to say, then I'm interested in meeting her or him and knowing their point of view. Look at a film like Eterna! Sunshine of the Spotless Mina who would have known from reading the script that it would have so many visual twists and turns? All of that has to do with the visions of the director and cinematographer coming together. If the director is a proven talent, I'll look at their body of work and see where their voice is strongest.

BENEDICT NEUENFELS: There's always a risk [in working with a new director). That's why you spend so much time finding out if it's the right project. If you have two or three offers, you meet the director to find out if you are the right person. If the director is saying something like "I only want to shoot the film with one kind of lens" then I'm out.

KARL WALTER LINDENLAUB: You meet a director for half an hour in some office and everybody is happy and relaxed and very enthusiastic. Then, on the first

day of shooting, it's a whole different story, especially with directors who have a lot of pressure on them. Everybody wants a piece, so they might turn into someone completely different. As a cameraman you have to live with that person for the duration of the shoot. The best thing you can hope for is that you trust each other. If there's a big alarm bell ringing during that first meeting, better trust your instincts!

ROGER OEAKINS: Sometimes I've said, "No, this isn't going to work," but I've been so drawn to the script that I've then said yes. And, quite honestly, it's not good for me nor for the production.

RAINER KLAUSMANN: I like to eat with directors who want to work with me. It's very important to note things like the time they take to eat, if they drink wine or only water; you develop a sense for reading what these things mean for any collaboration. It's a gut thing.

How Would You Characterise an Ideal Collaboration With a Director?

KARL WALTER LINDENLAUB: There's no one way. It really depends on the individual relationship. Some directors have everything written down before you go on set; others show up in the morning, rehearse and look at you and say, "What do you think?" The best thing is if you trust each other and the director is willing to listen.

CESAR CHARLONE: DoP and director is a stronger relationship than a marriage. Even when it goes wrong; poppa and mamma are fighting over a shot and the kids are watching. We're the wives. We do the feminine side.

MICHAEL CHAPMAN: People like Marty [Scorsese] have a vast visual sense of storytelling. That's a delight, because you don't have to sweat it out yourself. Other directors don't give a damn about working out the shot and they'll let you do it. It's the middle ground that isn't so satisfying: when the director may have some idea of what they want, but it isn't necessarily a good idea. When you work with a director for the first time it's a negotiated settlement. There is an element of risk. Look, we're all just migrant labourers, so whatcha gonna do?

JOHN TOLL: [The director] has to be receptive to a true collaboration, not just with the cinematographer, but with the production designer, editor and all the key collaborators as well. Some of the most difficult projects are also the most creative and successful. But if you feel like you're doing something worthwhile, it doesn't matter if it's painful.

KRAMER MORGENTHAU: I like to think I'm a chameleon. I prefer a director who has vision, as opposed to one who doesn't. They hire you because they think you can communicate what they want. A cinematographer has to be a politician and a psychotherapist. Some minds you encounter on a set are healthy, some aren't. You can't just be the guy in the corner playing with the lights.

CESAR CHARLONE: Ridley Scott operated the camera and did his own framing for Blade Runner, I remember hearing from Vittorio Storaro that Coppola didn't interfere with the framing and was more concerned about the actors; meanwhile, Bertolucci would come on set with a viewfinder and would be very precise: you wouldn't say one was better than another.

SEAN BOBBITT: My job is to service the ideas of the director, if they have ideas, and to supply ideas if they don't. There are some truly fantastic directors who are not visual; they're actors' directors, but they're still fantastic directors. In a way that's even more exciting because you have freedom and responsibility to do the best job you can.

RAINER KLAUSMANN: I sometimes say to a director that I don't believe what the actor's doing after his or her take. But to make this kind of comment you have to know the director well, otherwise he'll say it's not your job. It's good to find a warmhearted director who's open to this, but there aren't many: most of them are terrorists.

Would You Like to Direct?

MICHAEL CHAPMAN: Directing's a mug's job. Everybody's yammering at you, the star wants this, the studio wants that, and unless you're really powerful because of your body of work — like Marty — you're hammered. Until recently, the one person they left alone was the cameraman — as long as you didn't lose the magazine or anything because all the suits think they know how to write and direct, but they don't know how to shoot.

JOHN TOLL: Directors spend a lot more time getting films together than actually making films. I just enjoy the process of being on the set. Directors do a film every two or three years. Cinematographers do two or three a year.

DONALD McALPINE: I'm pretty sure I could make a better movie than 50 per cent of the directors I work with. But then there's the other 50 per cent who, in my heart of hearts, I don't believe I can get anywhere near. I'd not want the aggravation of being mediocre.

SEAN BOBBITT: I recognise the qualities that a film director needs that tenacity, that single-mindedness, that dedication to a project that might take two or three years to get off the ground, the trauma of getting it off the ground, the shooting, the post-production — that's a big chunk of your life. I don't have that kind of drive.

What's Your Attitude Towards Storyboards?

SEAN BOBBITT: I leave that up to the director. If they want to storyboard, go ahead. I'll give a brief glance to the Storyboards, then do what needs to be done. If

I'm working with a young first-time director, there will be certain scenes that we'll storyboard so that they think about what they're going to shoot. I don't think I've ever shot a storyboard as such, but it's a useful tool to focus attention on scenes that might be problematic. Usually, once you get to the location and you bring the actors in, things change — that's the excitement of it.

BILLY WILLIAMS: I worked in commercials and I didn't like storyboarding because you'd never get the shot required. On most of my earlier films there was almost no one who used it, except the art director, who would do it for bluescreen or battle scenes. I prefer to work with the director having seen the rehearsals and worked out where to put the camera, otherwise it becomes a bit mechanical how can you tell beforehand how an actor is going to perform?

KARL WALTER LINDENLAUB: They're one way to think a scene through and they're very helpful when it comes to visual effects because there are so many elements involved. With a big crew and a lot of effects, many people need to know what's going to happen and you can't tell them at ? iam that this is what you want to do — they need to know six weeks in advance or big pieces of equipment won't be there. So it's a great communication tool, but not the real thing. Until you really rehearse and put a camera there, nobody really knows. The biggest trap is to think, "Oh, this is exactly how it's going to be." Things are different in reality; it's the human element, the most interesting part of film-making. If you see something better you should be able to make an adjustment.

I remember a really complicated shot in Prince Caspian three horses had to gallop into the castle, stop on a mark while we were on this huge 50-foot crane and end on a very specific frame. The shot in the animated storyboard was interesting, but the horses would never hit that mark; horses don't stand still and never hit a mark super-precisely.

CESAR CHARLONE: For Blindness we had the A camera telling the story, and that allowed me to use the B camera to find more interesting framing. You have to be very open to improvisation. If nothing happens you still have the conservative side of your planning — the storyboard. I always joke (I'm not religious at all) that God is more creative than us. Whatever you prepare, if you are open to chance, to God's finger, you'll find something more creative.

ROGER DEAKINS: The only people I've really worked with on Storyboards are Joel and Ethan [Coen] — and they storyboard everything. They'll be very specific about where they're going, but then you can throw it all away, because on the day you can change things. For them, it's great to have that foundation; they can be so efficient and put so much on the screen for the amount of money they've got. But it's equally enjoyable and creatively fulfilling to do something like Sid and Nancy, where you're making it up as you go along. You think, "We'd better shoot this handheld because we don't really know what we're doing," but that's part of the spontaneity.

ELLEN KURAS: I prefer to have discussions with the director before we get on set and I like to have a shot list so that I can see it in my mind's eye. When I'm shooting

the boards on commercials it sometimes gets really boring. I like to be able to prep with the director so much that when we walk on set we already have a game plan. At least then I have an idea of the arc of the movie. Prep is also really important, because we don't have a lot of time. One of the DoP's roles is to see that the day's shoot is completed. Even if the actors arrive late, even if the director takes two hours to block the scene, you are still are expected to make your day.

MICHAEL CHAPMAN: I've had a lot of experience working with them, but I myself don't like them. I can see the Storyboards in many films, especially in big action scenes. They seem to be the death of some kind of spontaneity. Marty was the only person whose Storyboards weren't like that. They were barely diagrams — he couldn't draw they were only suggestions. Most storyboard artists might just as well publish a goddamn comic book. Latterly, I tended to work with first-time directors and producers. They would want Storyboards, so I'd draw them, but most of that was to just shut people up.

BENEDICT NEUENFELS: With The Counterfeiters we did a four- week rehearsal with the actors. Then we shot the whole movie over two days on video — in the completely absurd environment of the office — and we cut it on video. From this we made the breakdown for the scenes. Partly I did it because we wanted to shoot this movie very quickly. We built that concentration camp [where the film was set]. We'd get in in the morning and we'd get out in the evening, and it actually felt like going into a concentration camp. So we said, "Let's do it for 25 days, we can't stand to do more."

Do You Have a Preference: Celluloid or Digital?

KARL WALTER LINDENLAUB: I'm very cautious about digital. I know it's coming, I can see the possibilities, but there are definitely a lot of big drawbacks as well. The danger is to run to it because it's new, forgetting what we have. Film has matured over a hundred years or so, and it's never looked this good or been this easy. The mechanical design of cameras has gone through a lot of changes and we basically have the best equipment we've ever had right now, with the biggest flexibility to do whatever we want, yet suddenly we're going over to something that makes noise and needs cooling and needs cable a lot of the time. I've done tests, I haven't done any movies yet. For the projects I was doing, it's turned out film was better-looking or more practical.

It'll take a bit until it settles down. Right now we're at a period when everything's changing, the standards are changing, the equipment is changing, and the danger is five years from now you won't be able to look at the stuff you shot because the hardware has changed and no one has the applications to look at it. And how you do preserve the data? We haven't really found digital media that can be stored over a long period. On the post-production side, DI [digital intermediate, the process of digitising a film

so that colour and so on can be manipulated post-production] is something we all use now, but I also look at movies and think they have that certain DI look; they don't look exactly like a film print used to look. It's not all great.

CESAR CHARLONE: The last three films I've worked on have all been digital. City of God was my first fully digital film; I put the credit for the colourist together with mine because I consider that he was equally important to the creative process.

I see digital as a frame to hang images on. El Baño del Papa, for example, comes from i6mm, mini-DV, 3 5mm and VHS sources. I make the analogy with sound mixing: when I walked into Framestore in London to work on The Constant Gardener, the studio reminded me of a DJ booth. I joke that now cinematography is painting with a mouse, not painting with light.

If you bring lots of tools on to the set you interfere with the reality of the director and the actors. In Blindness we had a situation where the light outside was changing and the windows were going pink. Ten years ago we would have stopped and changed the gels while the actors hung around. Now we keep shooting -you can fix everything except focus later on. But I wouldn't be surprised if even that changed, with so many people putting an effort into it.

DONALD McALPINE: I've realised how computers were going to affect our industry ever since Predator, but I cannot convince producers to shoot digitally. I'd love to. For years now I've been using an HD digital film camera on set. I pull the director in to look at what I've done before the shot is taken. I cherish the chance to get his input — you go home at night and sleep. Take Narnia: by the time we'd finished filming we had half a roomful of petrochemical junk that had to be dumped i somewhere. It's not in the least bit eco-friendly. When I first became a cinematographer we owned the magic. After the day's filming ended, we were the only people for 24 hours who would know what was there. It would go to the lab and some guy would come in at 3am and these dailies would sometimes be brilliant, I sometimes a disaster. But I want to i create magic, I don't want to hide behind it.

I asked if I could shoot Wolverine digitally, but it was denied. When I happen to go to a screening of one of my films, I'm often disappointed with the print. They do ten prints that I usually supervise in Los Angeles that go to key cities. The people who see those see the film I made. The rest of the world are seeing God knows what. If you have a digital file, it's usually incorruptible — the smallest village in Africa sees the same thing as downtown New York.

BILLY WILLIAMS: Though I retired from full-time work 12 years ago, I think film is still the best originating material. The great majority of British cinematographers still prefer it. The BBC strongly favours digital at the moment. My son-in-law is a director shooting with HD in Hungary with the Robin Hood series and there have been a lot of problems with contrast: sunshine coming through trees, for example — digital can't handle dappled sunlight. They waste a lot of time sorting it out. It can't tolerate extreme overexposure in the way that film can.

ELLEN KURAS: I prefer to shoot a film original and post in DI, then out again to film. Film has a much more rounded, creamy feel to it. There are so many different choices out there, it's not easy for film-makers to navigate through. It's not as simple as it used to be. Celluloid is still being developed every day. Fuji and Kodak are constantly revising their film stocks to answer the needs of cinematographers. The medium is always changing.

MARC KONINCKX: The best thing for cinematographers is to look through the viewfinder and see the light on the ground glass. With HD you don't know what you're doing it's all in post-production. In a few years you're going to go to digital projection — it's the economics, I hope we can still use both. You can see The Class (Entre Les Murs) is HD; digital is the only way to shoot a film like that. I just shot a film in Rwanda on 3 5mm. In HD, the foreground and background are both in focus. It's like television. You have to shoot with an open stop to have less focus. With HD, the director can judge straight away what you are doing. He can see it on the monitor immediately. Before, when the grading was done on the negative, I would be alone in the lab. I'd look at the first print and do some corrections for the second and only then show it to the director. Now the director (and sometimes the producer) is sitting there when you start. You're looking at a computer screen — that's the problem.

ROGER DEAKINS: I don't really mind what I shoot on, but the fact is that film works very well. It's such an old-fashioned, antiquated way of capturing an image, it's ridiculous that we shoot on film, but the fact is it works. Until the digital option gives me more than I get from film, why should I change? When all cinemas use digital projection, that might be a different matter. I'd like to shoot more on digital because I'd like to know that I have that scene instead of having to wait for the dailies report the next day. I do wake up in the middle of the night — even now — and think, "Oh my God, did I blow that?" I'm incredibly nervous. I can't ring the labs in the morning; I get my assistant to do it.

[With digital] you're taking away some of the mystery — the idea of that old black box that captures the images. Also, celluloid is a finite amount of screen time in a magazine. It helps to focus everyone. When the clapperboard goes, everybody is focused to produce the best take they possibly can. But if you're shooting digital and the camera's just running and the director's saying, "Do it again, do it again," it becomes a yawn.

RAINER KLAUSMANN: I've done two or three films on digital, and when I do, I shoot with the really touristic small ones, with automatic focus and exposure — that's digital for me. It's the choice between pommes frites and purée [mashed potato]: it's fine if you want pommes frites, but don't expect it to look like purée.

SEAN BOBBITT: I am so bored with this debate. I shoot film and I shoot digital. I'd make films with little flipbooks if necessary. It is annoying that some of the digital formats are complicated and technically a huge step backwards: you're connected by cable to a recorder; sometimes you're not getting quite as much image quality as you'd get from 3 5mm film. There are a lot of misconceptions in terms of how they work. It's

a quagmire right now, but it's happening. If a production has the money, then I will push to shoot film because it's relatively simple compared to the other technologies. And the quality of the image, particularly with the modern film stocks, is better than it has ever been. To deny that is madness. But at the same time, it's all about the story and the performance. You can shoot something on your mobile phone and it can still be a compelling piece of cinema. So shoot the format you can afford and just get on with it.

Innovators

Charles Rosher and Karl Struss Charles Rosher had pioneered many of the early techniques of cinematography in his work throughout the silent period, and Karl Struss had done groundbreaking work with Cecil B. DeMille, Fred Niblo and others before they collaborated to masterful effect on Murnau's 1927 masterpiece 'Sunrise' (above). It won the first Oscar for cinematography.

Gregg Toland Such was Orson Welles' respect for the huge contribution Gregg Toland made to 'Citizen Kane' (above) that he insisted that their names run on the same title card in the film's closing credits. In its stunning use of deep focus, low angles, high contrast and dark shadows, Toland's radical work on 'Kane' helped to redefine film language. He tragically died aged 44, in 1948.

Sven Nykvist With a deceptive simplicity that belied the remarkable subtlety and attention to detail in his work, Nykvist's collaborations with the great lngmar Bergman, such as in 1966's 'Persona' (above), stand among the greatest achievements in cinematography. He favoured a naturalistic use of light, but one which always demonstrated absolute control.

Sergel Urusevsky A true virtuoso, Urusevsky's eye-popping work with director Mikhail Kalatozov on such Soviet-era films as 1957's The Cranes Are Flying' (above) and 1964's 'I Am Cuba' remains astonishingly audacious. His fusion of deep-focus, subjective perspective and balletic camera choreography pushed the technology of the time to its limits, creating unforgettable images.

Conrad Hall In his work on films from the 1960s, such as 'In Cold Blood' and 'Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid', Conrad Hall helped to liberate approaches to cinematography by making virtues of so-called 'mistakes', like the sun hitting the lens in 'Cool Hand Luke' (above). He received three Oscars, for 'Butch Cassidy', 'American Beauty' and 'Road to Perdition'.

Vittorio Storaro With 1970's 'The Conformist' (above), the Italian Storaro served up a dazzling compendium of cinematographic styles that was to prove hugely influential. He has gone on to win Oscars for his work on 'Apocalypse Now', 'Reds' and 'The Last Emperor', and has also written with great insight about his approach in the three volumes of his book 'Writing with Light'.

Cardon Willis Nicknamed the Prince of Darkness' by his friend Conrad Hall for his use of rich blacks and darkly lit interiors on 'The Godfather' (above), Willis is a master at matching the style of his cinematography to the film he's working on, from the sepia tones of the Robert De Niro sections of 'The Godfather Part II' to the scratchy, newsreel effect he achieved for Woody Allen's 'Zelig'.

Christopher Doyle Perhaps the one ‘superstar’ cinematographer still at work today, Australia-born Doyle made his reputation in the 1990s with Hong Kong director Wong Kar-Wai, with whom he collaborated on such films as ‘Days of Being Wild’, ‘Happy Together’ and ‘Chungking Express˜ and helped craft the intoxicating, vividly colourful, stylised world of ‘In the Mood for Love’ (above).

Roger Clarke & Edward Lawrenson
Talking Shop
Poland's Camenmage festival gave 'Sight & Sound' the chance to canvass a baker's dozen international cinematographers about the state of their craft. Interviews by Roger Clarke and Edward Lawrenson

Sight and Sound (London, UK Magazine), Vol. 19, Iss. 4, April 2009, pp. 19–24.
<reader.exacteditions.com/issues/58469/page/20>
A panel discussion featuring several international cinematographers including Sean Bobbit, Cesar Charlone and Michael Chapman, and moderated by Roger Clarke and Edward Lawrenson. The participants talk about how did they become cinematographers and how did they decide which film they work on.
British Film Institute Apr 2009