PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Interviews with Feature Film Cinematographers

Vincent LoBrutto

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PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

LoBrutto, Vincent.
Principal photography : interviews with feature film cinematographers / Vincent LoBrutto.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-275-94954-0 (alk. paper).—ISBN 0-275-94955-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Cinematographers—United States—Interviews.
2. Cinematography. I. Title.
TR849.A1L63 1999
778.5'3'0922—dc21 98-46797

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 98-46797
ISBN: 0-275-94954-0
0-275-94955-9 (pbk.)

First published in 1999

Praeger Publishers, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881
An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my uncle, Gino Damiani,
and my father, Anthony LoBrutto,
for sharing Kodachrome dreams
and to Phil Scandura, who taught me that
passion for the arts is contagious.

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Acknowledgments

Thanks to my parents, Rose and Anthony LoBrutto, for their support and for allowing me to borrow the family standard 8mm movie camera to discover my passion for filmmaking. From overseas and cross-country, my children, Rebecca and Alex Morrison, continue to inspire and motivate me with their own flights of discovery. I thank them for their unconditional support. My wife, Harriet Morrison, aided in research, tracked down subjects, chauffeured, acted as consigliere, and, as always, lent her fine hand to the manuscript. My respect and thanks also to Dr. Manhinderjit Singh for his wisdom.

I express my appreciation to the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) for their assistance, especially Victor J. Kemper, former president, and Karin Sciaratta. *American Cinematographer Magazine* made an essential contribution to this project. I thank Stephen Pizzello, executive editor, David E. Williams, associate editor, Christopher Probst, technical editor, and George E. Turner, ASC's history maven, for their kindnesses and professionalism. My gratitude to the International Photographers Guild, Local 600, IATSE, particularly George Spiro Dibie, national president.

Thanks to Barbara Halperin of The Gersh Agency, Wayne Fitterman of United Talent Agency, Smith/Gosnell/Nicholson & Associates, and to Everett Aison for help in contacting interview subjects.

My appreciation to Sam Gill of The Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles, Kathy Bowles-Ruediger of the Steadicam Operators Association, the New York University Library, and the School of Visual Arts Library for re-

search materials. I also thank Saal and Deborah Lesser for special support and use of their office facilities.

My heartfelt thanks to everyone at the School of Visual Arts, especially Reeves Lehmann, chairman of the Department of Film, Video, and Animation, and Sal Petrosino, director of operations, for their unconditional support and friendship. Thanks to all my colleagues and students for inspiration and encouragement. My appreciation to instructor and cinematographer Igor Sunara, who told me as I was about to embark on this project, "Everyone says, 'cinematography is about light.' Cinematography is not just about light. Cinematography is about *movement* and light."

Sincere thanks to the entire staff at Le Montrose Hotel in West Hollywood for their hospitality, especially John C. Douponce, general manager, and to John Sawyer for driving skills second only to Kerouac's Dean Moriarty.

I am most indebted to the thirteen cinematographers who took time out of their busy working and personal lives to allow me to learn firsthand about the art and craft of cinematography. This book would not exist without their knowledge and commitment.

I respectfully recognize the passing of Stanley Cortez, ASC, and Linwood G. Dunn, who were not able to share their extensive knowledge and experience about cinematography with me.

My sincere thanks to Michael Ballhaus, Ralf Bode, Fred Murphy, and Robert Richardson, who, by spending many hours sharing with me their passion, knowledge, and experience about cinematography, enriched my understanding and respect for this craft. Time, logistics, and space did not allow me to talk to cinematographer Philippe Rousselot; I thank him for his interest in this project.

I want to thank everyone at Praeger Publishers for their continued support and the care and attention they provide. Particular thanks go to this book's original editor, Nina Pearlstein, and to Elisabetta Linton, who faithfully saw the project to conclusion. The manuscript was given expert care by the production editor, Heidi Straight, and the copyeditor, Frances Lyon. My thanks to John Bailey for reviewing the glossary and for his expert comments.

Filmmaking is a collaborative process, as is a book of interviews; again my thanks to all who have contributed to this project.

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to allow cinematographers to speak in their own words about the art and craft of cinematography.

On the surface, cinematography is not hidden in the mysteries that surround the crafts of editing, production design, and film sound. The photography of a film is there for all to see. Audiences have been educated in interpreting photographic beauty and drama and in understanding that images come from light and shadow, but the layers of narrative and the atmospheric and psychological impact imparted by the camera suggest and demand a deeper understanding. This deeper awareness is informed by the role of the cinematographer—this most important cinematic collaborator.

Without light there would be no image, without movement there would be no motion pictures. Cinematography visually presents points of view and the verisimilitude and artificiality of movement for a narrative or psychological purpose. The camera records the force and subtleties of the actor's performance and places it in context within the physical environment of a scene. Cinematographers interpret a written screenplay in visual images. On the set, they translate the director's vision to a series of shots, long and short and in a catalogue of compositions, angles, and lens sizes so that these pieces can later come together as cinematic storytelling presented in images and sound.

The cinematographer reports to the director and, with the production designer, is a member of the triad who create the visual style or look of a film. The director of photography is the head of a department including the assistant cameramen, camera operator, electrician, gaffer, and grip.

During the studio system, cinematographers primarily worked in black-and-white and created the rules for Hollywood filmmaking that lasted until the mid-sixties. Conventions such as back light, which added pictorial beauty; diffusion, which eliminated flaws in the face; low angles, which created size and importance; and eyeline-matches, which linked the composition of one actor to another became the cinematic language filmmakers embraced to present their narratives.

The cinematographers in this volume helped rewrite the cinematic language used to make movies. During the sixties and seventies, cinematographers began utilizing natural light and more portable equipment to create contemporary images. Handheld camerawork, desaturated color, flares, the zoom lens, and the invention of the Steadicam transformed the formal aspects of the craft as filmmakers began creating a new kind of cinema which reflected our rapidly changing times and technology.

These interviews, conducted over a five-year period, represent a wide spectrum of artistic and technical accomplishments which embody cinematography in commercial and independent filmmaking. They are presented in an order that attempts to give a historical, developmental scope and to assist the reader in seeing the many connections among these diverse individuals and their work. Individual selected filmographies contain the majority of the subjects' feature film credits. They do not include uncredited work, additional photography, television, music video, and commercial credits. Cinematographers apply their craft in a multitude of ways. The discussions here on the art and craft of the feature film embrace the elements which face the cinematographer on all moving-image projects.

From the landmark single-shot films of the Lumiere brothers to the digital imagery of a cinema entering its second century, the camera has captivated our gift of vision. The true magic of cinematography is a synthesis of chemistry, science, and art that in combination bring images to the screen. Now, let us listen to the men and women who are both alchemists and artists—they make movies.

1

Conrad Hall

Conrad Hall, ASC, the son of James Norman Hall, coauthor of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, was born in idyllic Papeete, Tahiti. Inspired by the tradition of his literary father, Hall was first interested in becoming a writer, but while attending University of Southern California (USC) he switched from the journalism program to the cinema school. There he encountered Slavko Vorkapich, a pioneer in the use of montages during the Hollywood studio system, who headed the department and became Hall's principal mentor.

After graduating in 1949, Hall formed Canyon Films, a production company, with two colleagues from USC. When Canyon produced the feature film *Running Target*, the three partners drew lots to determine the producer, director, and cameraman—Hall cast his fate and became a cinematographer. The experience allowed him to enter the International Photographers Guild. Once in the union, Hall began to work as an assistant cameraman for many outstanding directors of photography, including Ted McCord, Lee Garmes, Burnett Guffey, Ernest Haller, Robert Surtees, and Floyd Crosby. After stepping up to camera operator on the TV series *Stoney Burke*, Conrad Hall became a director of photography, inaugurating a career that has influenced a generation of cinematographers.

Conrad Hall's distinctive photography on *The Professionals*, *In Cold Blood*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and *The Day of the Locust*, broke from the tradition of his Hollywood roots and helped to create a contemporary photographic aesthetic for a new kind of American movie forged in the sixties. Hall experimented with desaturated color, lens flares, overexposure, and many ground-breaking techniques to bring a pictorial realism to

the stories he loved to tell with his camera. His work on John Huston's *Fat City* remains a landmark in cinematography, capturing the dim glint of a barroom glass and the glare of an oppressively hot afternoon which envelops the fate of a down-and-out boxer.

Conrad Hall has worked with many fine directors, including Richard Brooks, John Huston, John Boorman, Bob Rafelson, Michael Ritchie, and John Schlesinger. He has been nominated for an Academy Award eight times and won the Oscar for cinematography on *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.* In 1992, he received the ASC Lifetime Achievement Award. In 1995, Conrad Hall received the Lifetime Achievement Award at Camer-Image '95, the International Festival of Cinematography.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

1958 *Edge of Fury* co-photography

1965 *The Wild Seed*
*Morituri**

1966 *Incubus*
Harper
*The Professionals**

1967 *Divorce American Style*
Cool Hand Luke
*In Cold Blood**

1968 *Hell in the Pacific*

1969 *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid***
The Happy Ending
Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here

1972 *Fat City*

1973 *Electra Glide in Blue*

1974 *Catch My Soul*

1975 *Smile*
*The Day of the Locust**

1976 *Marathon Man*

1987 *Black Widow*

1988 *Tequila Sunrise**

1991 *Class Action*

1992 *Jennifer 8*

1993 *Searching for Bobby Fischer**

1994 *Love Affair*

1998 *Without Limits*
*A Civil Action**

*Academy Award nomination for best achievement in cinematography.
**Academy Award for best achievement in cinematography.

Q: Storytelling has always been important to you as a filmmaker. Your father, James Norman Hall, was the coauthor of *Mutiny on the Bounty.* What influence did he have on you as an artist?

A: I inherited that sense of being a storyteller from my father. He used to tell me stories when I was a kid. I was fascinated. I'd be sitting on his lap and he read me "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," all the way through. So I had a great respect for how I felt when he told me stories. I tried literature, but it's not my language. I realized there was another language; all you had to do was learn how to use it and you could be as fine a storyteller as my father was. I've just been spending my time learning how to use that language. I'm not an academic soul. I am a storyteller, and whether you use music, pictures, drawings, or literature to tell your story, we're all the same kind of people. We have to communicate. We have this sense of urgency to tell somebody a story that will make them feel one way or another. I had some good beginnings. I had Slavko Vorkapich and all those wonderful teachers at USC—people who gave us the principles with which to speak in this new cinematic language.

Q: When did you discover your medium was the camera and film?

A: It was the minute I shot film. In film school we had to shoot and edit a little story out of one hundred feet of 16mm film. I had a concept. I shot it, put it together, and looked at it on the screen coming at me bigger than life. It was very heady to feel that power so early on.

Q: You have been a major influence on a generation of contemporary cinematographers. Beginning in the sixties with films like *The Professionals, Cool Hand Luke, In Cold Blood, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and in the seventies with *Fat City, The Day of the Locust,* and *Marathon Man,* your work helped to pioneer a new kind of cinematography employing desaturated color, natural light, and a sense of artistic realism in American filmmaking. What was your training and what motivated you to break the rules to discover your naturalistic and expressive approach to cinematography?

A: I studied with all the great cinematographers: Ted McCord, Ernie Haller, Robert Surtees, Lee Garmes, and dozens of others. They were the inventors of film. I started studying film at USC in 1947 and graduated in 1949. That's half a century from the beginning of film. So I was working with the

first line after the inventors of cinema. They established rules and regulations that were awesome. They were also demanding. You had to conform to a rigorous standard. People weren't breaking many rules, they were all trying to make it look super-nice and not necessarily very real. I got my first chance at a union job from Leslie Stevens on the TV series *Stoney Burke* with Jack Lord, but he was having a hard time selling me as a cinematographer. So he made me a cameraman for the second unit and I hired Bill Fraker to be my operator. I made a deal with Ted McCord that he would shoot the first six episodes and then move on. Ted didn't want to do television, he did it for me.

If Ted didn't like the light when we were outside and dealing with close-ups, he would take all of the light off. Then he would bring in arcs and other lights and relight it to his satisfaction, which was totally unreal to me. One day he had an angina attack and they said, "Conrad, you've got to do it today." I thought, "What's wrong with the sun? Is there no way to make the sun acceptable other than take it away and make it what you want it to be?" So I just used the sun. I learned whether I liked or didn't like something from watching other filmmakers, but basically I learned from watching light and detail about life. Wherever I went, I was making mental notes. I have a computer right between my ears and it paid attention all the time.

You develop a visual language. I soon learned I could take flares and out-of-focus shots, which used to be called mistakes, and use them creatively to appropriately enhance and beautify the story. I observed naturalistic and realistic sensibilities and bit by bit I became more adept at breaking the rules and still telling the story well. When I'm into a story, I'm just pulling out from my experience. It doesn't mean that I don't love Gauguin, Rubens, Hopper, and all of the great artists, but I've never made a study of any kind. The story influences you more than the individuals you work with. The story is what takes the director to a different place.

The language of film is still not developed, it's only a hundred years old. We're still learning to speak. I've been paying good attention to it using the rules people before us discovered to be true. I learned them at USC from all the wonderful professors I had, but they didn't tell you how to tell a story—they just told you what would happen when you used these rules. They left them up to us to use them.

Q: Did you have to fight a lot of battles with producers and studio executives over your experiments in low-light photography and desaturated color?

A: You do get a lot of harassment from producers and studio heads who don't understand. On *Fat City* they said, "The photography is too dark, we can't see anything. What will the drive-ins do?" On *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, I had to face the black suits at Universal who said, "It's too dark, we can't see Redford properly." So you have to sit there and suffer through the ignorance of their assessments. You know when it gets to the final print it will be wonderful. You have to tell them that. It causes a lot of strain, but I became strong as an operator working for Ted McCord. He didn't like to go to the dailies. He sent me to watch them on a Sam Goldwyn Jr. picture, *Huckleberry Finn*. The director, Michael Curtiz, would lay into Ted's work: "This photography stinks! We have to do this all over again." I thought, "Wow, it's wonderful!" I would have to fight with Michael Curtiz to defend Ted McCord. I developed a strength which I later used in my own work. Often, directors say the photography is wrong when really it's the acting. I was brave enough to tell them it was the acting, not the photography. We'd have shoot-outs, but I got it said, and more often than not we didn't reshoot. When you try to change the norm, you run into all kinds of people who have no sense of growth.

Q: Fat City visually captures the world of a down-and-out boxer played by Stacy Keach, with bleached out, overexposed exteriors which create the atmosphere of a hot, oppressive environment in contrast to the underlit bar interiors that allow the denizens to survive, lit by the dim glint off glasses and bottles of alcohol. Those sequences really capture the way people see in bars and create an ambience for the actors to reveal the psychological depths of their characters. How were they photographed?

A: What you have observed in bars is what I have observed in a bar. I tried to portray what occurred between Stacy Keach, the fighter, and those people in the bar. It was glaringly bright outside. The camera follows him through the bar door until he stops to adjust his vision to the darkness within—only the *sound* of voices and clinking glasses penetrate the frame beyond him. This was achieved by not lighting the interior. As the scene progresses, I wanted to elevate the visibility so it would be, in fact, what everybody experiences in a bar when they come from a bright outside. It's dark when you enter, blown out when you leave.

Q: Did you overexpose the exterior shots outside the bar?

A: Three stops. I worked right at the edge where the color would shift, but I didn't care if the color shifted—it might be interesting.

Q: How did you work with Director John Huston on *Fat City*?

A: Before the picture started, John Huston asked the production designer, Dick Sylbert (*Chinatown*, *Reds*), and myself what we thought the film was

about. I said one thing and it wasn't that, Dick Sylbert said another thing and it wasn't that; Huston said, "It's about your life running down the sink without being able to put the plug in to stop it." Is there anything more visual than that? Huston established a way of approaching the story, which was to take all of the scenes and photograph them in one take from beginning to end, cut off the slates, hook them all together, and you'd have a movie. He suggested a few cutaways in order to shorten dialogue if the film was too long. So you'd do a great scene in one shot, telling the story visually as well as you could by approaching the actors with camera movement, choreography, and blocking and then you'd be done. Huston's idea was to make a film following real life without the use of cinematic technique.

Q: How did that concept affect the way you lit the film?

A: I lit it realistically, because I had to shoot in every direction. A room was lit with no lights inside, so I could point the camera in any direction and have it lit. I lit it from on top, through windows, and with the actual bulbs you saw burning in lamps. When we would go to work, John Huston would rehearse and block with the actors and then go play cards, backgammon, or shoot pool. I would get on the camera and try and figure out how to cover the scene in one shot—to be close on people when I felt it was important to be close on them, panning if there were three people talking. We didn't have video. Huston trusted me. He would then come in to see what I had done and used or altered it as he saw fit to do.

John Huston was a great filmmaker. He was one of the greatest storytellers. The only way you can stay alive in film is to be a contemporary soul, because it's a mass medium—it's about contemporary life. You're not talking to eighty-year-old people, your audience is young for the most part. You've got to learn if you put a baby on your lap and you tell it a story, and you put a ten-year-old on your lap and you tell it a story, you're going to do it differently. When John Huston was on *Fat City*, he stayed contemporary. John Huston stayed contemporary to his last dying breath. He was at the forefront of those who went on and succeeded, time, after time, after time.

Q: Morituri, produced in 1965, still has a very contemporary looking photographic style. What was the genesis of the visualization of the film?

A: I was working with Bernhard Wicki, a director who was a strong visualist. He had done books of still photography in Germany and a film called *The Bridge*. He was used to working in a documentary style. He loved the zoom lens. I learned from him how to use it so you didn't know it was a zoom lens. If you had been in a wide angle and somebody was coming toward you, you'd pan with their body as they got near you and zoom into their body—you didn't really notice the zoom because the body was filling

the frame. Then, when that body clears the frame, you're at 100mm instead of 25mm and you don't know you've changed lenses. Techniques like that are very useful to help tell a story quickly without cutting.

I use the zoom lens quite a bit. I thought I used it fairly effectively in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* to take it out of old-time Westerns and create new, modern visuals.

Q: The shots of the posse stalking Butch and Sundance were very effective in creating the visual impression that the posse was omnipresent. How were those shots accomplished?

A: I used telephoto lenses to frame long shots on the posse shots to create the feeling of being very close, and at the same time very far from them. It was a metaphor to contemporize the story of joblessness due to technological advancements—bank robbers being put out of business by modern-day superposses and invincible banks. The night scenes were shot day-for-night and then darkened in the lab. The actors playing the posse were carrying sun guns, which are very powerful lights. I said, "No matter which way your horse is going—left, right, or straight ahead—you always know where the camera is, so you just aim that light straight at me." It looked like they were carrying lanterns. It's quite effective. Any kind of lighting is problem solving—how to create the emotion to fit the story. Who are those guys? Where are they? So it was my language that visualized Bill Goldman's words. He was very generous in recognizing my language. It was a terrific script and he's a wonderful writer.

Q: The sequence with Paul Newman and Katherine Ross riding a bike to the song "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head" is an early example of a music video. How did this come about?

A: It was kind of obligatory with studios at that time because the "Windows of Your Mind" sequence in *The Thomas Crown Affair*, which Haskell Wexler shot, had done very well. The scene in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* was just a montage. We didn't know what kind of music, or song, or narration was going to go to it. The director, George Roy Hill, just said, "Here's Katherine Ross, here's Paul Newman and turned me and my camera loose with a long lens. We went out when the light was just beautiful and set up a visual involvement that quickly develops the nature of their romantic involvement. Then they came up with "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head." Burt Bacharach won an Oscar for the song and one for the score.

Q: The shot which is photographed through a fence is particularly effective. The light is streaming in and you are not acutely aware the camera is moving past the slats of the fence.

A: Yes, that is pretty magical. When the lens is close to the fence, you have the illusion of not having the fence there at all. It's so good that they cut in the same shot twice. You don't realize it; you think it's a continuation. That's definitely a piece of visual eloquence.

Q: The color in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* continued the experiments you conducted during the sixties. Did your work in this area grow out of a reaction to the use of overly saturated color during the studio era?

A: Yes, it grew out of the first early color processes like WarnerColor, which were very saturated. When color first came out, people wanted to see it colorful. I personally found the excess strength of color revolting. When I look out in the world, the colors with back light atmosphere and everything are all washed out. Desaturation was basically what I saw color to be. I strived for it and learned how to do it by overexposing. Then you could print it back to recoup the amount of color and hue you wanted.

It had to do with observing color beauty such as Sven Nykvist would produce in Ingmar Bergman films—this incredible light. We are making films here in California and we also have incredible light, but it's harsh light. We're in a desert. The fact that we made a garden of it doesn't mean the light has changed. We take that harsh light and use it appropriately. If you have to do a romantic story in Los Angeles, how do you do it? There's the idea of softening the light by overexposing it to the extent that it would affect the sharpness of the image. I sometimes overexpose it, 2, 2½, 3 stops and that would destroy some of the sharpness, so the edges between contrast would be softer. You learn how to make beauty out of harshness.

Q: You photographed *The Professionals*, *In Cold Blood*, and *The Happy Ending* for Director Richard Brooks. How did you first come to work with him?

A: There's a man I love—and I learned more about film from him than anyone that I've worked with. He was a great storyteller—not a contemporary storyteller, he was still stuck back in the forties and fifties. He was stuck in a good way. *The Professionals* was my first film with him. Tommy Shaw (assistant director and producer) and I had done *The Wild Seed* together. He worked with Huston and Brooks a lot and he brought me to Richard's attention. We had a shoot-out right to begin with. I put too much dust in a scene and you couldn't see anything. Richard was yelling and screaming at me. I thought to myself, "I don't really need this, I'll just take a walk on this one." I waited until we reshot it. Then I thought, "How are you ever going to learn anything if you give up before you have a chance to prove to him that you're worthy of being listened to?" So I decided to stay, and it was the best move of my life. He had a lot to offer filmically. We disagreed a lot, but you did

what Richard wanted you to do. He was an auteur. You didn't help Richard as much as you would have liked. So whatever I got done, he could take a lot of credit for—like all of those amazing transitions in *In Cold Blood* that are so wonderful. That's all Richard.

Q: At the end of *In Cold Blood*, before the Robert Blake character is to be executed, he talks to a priest about his father. It is raining outside and it begins to look like tears are running down his face as he continues to tell the story rather dispassionately. How did this powerful cinematic effect come about?

A: Robert Blake rehearsed the whole scene in an empty set; it wasn't lit. When I was lighting the scene, I had a stand-in where Bobby rehearsed the scene. I wanted it dark inside. I kept the light pooled where the chaplin was sitting because he was reading from the Bible. We needed that light, but I kept it very localized; I didn't use it to light up the room. I had been to a real prison where I saw these strong lights outside in the prison yard—they're on all night long because they don't want anybody climbing walls. So I used a strong light from outside the window to come through. We had rain coming down as I was lighting. I had a little wind machine on, and it was taking some of the spray and creating a mist on the window. As the mist became heavier and heavier, it became heavy enough to form a drop which started running on the window. Instead of the drop running quickly, it moved slowly through the rest of the mist which hadn't formed droplets yet. It created these avenues for the bright light outside to come in. I saw the stand-in looking out the window and I said, "Richard, come and look at this," and he knew immediately what we had. I said, "Make sure Robert Blake stands there and doesn't move an inch." Richard told him to just take his place against the wall and say his lines. Robert Blake was very flat—all the emotion was in the visuals—but that counterpoint, that irony of remembering the father, is a very powerful moment of cinema. It was an accident I saw, and used, and capitalized on the moment. That's what I like to do. Often times the gaffer will turn on a light and I'll say, "Stop! Don't do anything else!" Did I put it on and point it in a certain direction?—not at all. It happened to hit, and I saw it. It's the same way when I'm making mental notes visualizing how light effects me emotionally. I make a note of it and then use it. I do it when I'm in the situation of lighting. Vittorio Storaro and Gordon Willis are real artists. They're people who plan. They're conceptualizers. I don't conceptualize, I extrapolate from other people's conceptual input—the actors, the production designer, the director, the writer, for sure—and all of that flows through my veins like blood. I pick out those things that are happening and then I throw in my own bit of invention, but it

wasn't thought of a week before. I read the script the first time to get broad conceptual strokes, but I work out of the moment. I've got to wait for the actors to do something. They're too important to those characters to tell them where to stand or how to do something. I couldn't do that. I need to watch them, then maybe I can suggest. I'd rather watch them interpret the story, then I can quickly come up with ten different ways to see it—do it all in one shot, break it up in ten shots, close, far away, moving, nonmoving—all those things are happening organically with me and the story, the characters, the place, the light, the time of day, and everything else that's in motion. Everything is so interdependent. If you plan ahead, you're eliminating the possibility of finding the accident and using it. Actors capitalize on things all of the time: "Let me try it this way, c'mon let me try it that way." I seat myself in the story and the emotion of the characters. The rest of it is space you've got to fill up.

You have to make choices—hopefully good ones—because there are dozens of different ways of telling the story. There are a lot of rules that help govern that. When you do comedy, it's nice to have two people together so you can watch their interaction without having to cut from one person to the other. I look at a scene and say, "We don't want to break this up. We want to watch them do it," or, "This deserves studying each character and observing how they react to one another more specifically than maybe a two shot would." When I'm visualizing, I don't always think about the camera doing something other than watching actors behave and observing thoughtfully. That's a perfectly legitimate and an important thing for the camera to be doing—not showing itself off in any way by moving this, that, and the other way. All the decisions you have to make about when to move, how close, should you be emotional or should you be very quiet are instinctive with me. I just know when to move the camera and when not to move the camera.

Q: Electra Glide in Blue had a very striking visual style. The film was directed by James William Guerico, who at the time was the producer of the rock group Chicago. How did you work with this first-time director?

A: James Guerico grew up in Chicago, Illinois. His father was a projectionist. When James came out of school he would go to the theater, look at whatever was playing, and fall asleep in the back row until his father finished work. So this guy had seen an exorbitant amount of movies and knew a lot about movies. He liked detail, so we learned how to extrapolate the scene by picking up the elements of it and not going to the heart of the matter to begin with. It was shot anamorphic—it gave you a huge proscenium presence.

Q: The film is structured in a montage style. Were the shot units written into the film or were the scenes broken down on the set during the shooting?

A: Some of it was scripted, like: "He puts on his cuffs," "He puts on his shirt." The rest of the time it was choosing shots.

Q: What was your concept of the use of color in *Electra Glide in Blue*?

A: I don't try to stylize a film too much. *Electra Glide in Blue* is the strongest example of stylization because I was trying to sell James Guerico on pastels and he wanted rich color. I shot some tests. I was overexposing two or three stops. This was after *Butch Cassidy* and I was going in that direction more and more. I thought, "Oh boy, out here in the desert it would be wonderful." The tests came back, and you never saw a longer, sadder look on a director's face in your life. He didn't say anything. We said we'd meet for dinner. I got a telephone call from the production manager and he asked if I would stop by James Guerico's room before we met for dinner. He had put up a whole bunch of postcards on a bulletin board and said, "You know Conrad, I don't know about losing all of this beautiful color. This is what I like." Here were these shots with donkeys and cactus with blue skies so blue that you wanted to throw up. I said, "Why didn't you get Bill Clothier (*The Horse Soldiers, Cheyenne Autumn*)? He's the guy that does this kind of rich, beautiful, colorful, and sharp kind of photography. I like to interpret light, shadow, and sharpness to create different moods. I consider this false because this is not the way I see the desert." So we shot some more tests and I didn't overexpose too much. He got happier as soon as he saw some color come back in. I started the picture with a saturated look and then I weaned him away from that look by sneaking the colors into more of a pastel, desaturated sense which I felt the story belonged in. By the time we were in our second week, I was doing exactly what I wanted to do and he was liking it. But the film is much more saturated than I normally would have made it, because he liked it that way. So what could you do—I went with the director.

Q: The last scene in *Electra Glide in Blue* is a long take of the Robert Blake character after he is shot on the road. The camera, positioned on the back of a vehicle, pulls away from him in slow motion and seems to track back endlessly until the environment of the desert overwhelms the frame. How was this shot achieved?

A: That was a thousand feet. We started in slow motion at ninety-six frames a second. We had Bobby Blake falling and rolling after he was shot. He starts to sit up and then the camera pulls away to leave him sitting in the middle of the road. We drove back very fast shooting at ninety-six frames. The driver was in low gear and *whoosh* we were up to sixty miles an hour in

seconds. We changed the film speed without changing the exposure. We were going faster and faster and it would get lighter, lighter, lighter, more surreal, mystical, and spiritual. Then a black crow flew across, and James William Guerico couldn't bear not to freeze frame, which I thought was very moving. It meant something to him. Crows are a very spiritually meaningful bird in Indian lore.

Q: The climax of *The Day of the Locust* takes place in the 1930s at a big nighttime Hollywood premiere. A riot breaks out and the expressionistic paintings of the central character, who is an art director, come to life. The contorted images and the presence of engulfing flames create the metaphor that the evils of Hollywood are bringing on the end of the world. How was this emotional and visually intense sequence created?

A: It took a couple of weeks to shoot. We started with 750 extras for quite a number of days, then we dropped to 500, to 250, to 125, then to practically nobody at the end. A lot of that sequence was storyboarded so the director, John Schlesinger, could visualize it. The idea of bringing the painting to life was thought up by John and the production designer, Richard MacDonald (*The Servant, Exorcist II: The Heretic, Altered States*). They got an acting company, built these masks, and got them to work together in a dance of horror. So all of that was planned, choreographed, and rehearsed. I put it in the context of shooting through heat waves. I put a lot of flames between. I made my own special effects, but it's all collaborative.

Q: The giant Klieg lights used during that period to advertise a movie premiere and bring awesome glamour to the event were a central image in the scene. How did you create this lighting effect?

A: We used real Klieg lights, which are huge arc lights six feet in diameter, on a trolley. When we first turned them on with a little smoke to pick up the beam, I couldn't do any lighting because they were so powerful. They would hit the ceiling, which was made of beautiful two by twelve and twenty by twenty wood and canvas, and it would bounce back and practically give me daylight. So poor Richard MacDonald had to paint all that beautiful wood black on top on all three stages so the black would not reflect back down again and ruin the lighting. That was quite an involved endeavor.

Q: You achieved many striking effects with those Klieg lights. At one point, the out-of-control mob carries the Donald Sutherland character past a blazing arc creating the symbolism of a crucifixion. The seminal image of the film is a shot of the crowd running past the scorching light pouring into the camera lens. How did these images come about?

A: I came up with the idea of carrying the man in front of the light and people running by. You get this strobelike effect of the shutter going by. Chaos is central to the story at that point. People are not moving like people move. The people running by and the body going up into the light is certainly the strongest metaphor of that chaos.

Q: What attracted you to photograph *Searching for Bobby Fischer*?

A: Searching for Bobby Fischer is a story that interests me. It is about a young genius. It's a wonderful, literate story. It's about competition and what coaches and parents do about it and the conflicts they're in. It's more about the game than being number one. It was a terribly important film in a world that is becoming nothing but competition.

At first I thought, "We want to be careful we don't do *Leave It to Beaver* here. We have to find a way not to end up being maudlin TV, and that's what made me go into magic naturalism. It's magical. Sometimes the light created is so strong the person doesn't seem to be walking on the floor—they seem to be floating on the floor because their legs are burnt out.

Q: The light and color in the boy's room created the magical fantasy relationship children share with their rooms.

A: Yes, it was a beautiful room. It was a real room. We didn't pull out walls. The camera had to be inside or shooting through the door or shooting through a window. There are contrapuntal visual ideas going on that create a sense of awe about him. I never would have gotten into any of this if it wasn't for the kid, Max Pomeranc, those eyes, and the way he behaved. He's a very special child.

Q: His eyes were extraordinary. Did you use eye lights to enhance the sense of wonder in his eyes?

A: No, there are no eye lights at all—he just has the light. He's got this intelligence. The director, Steve Zaillian, cast him because he actually could play chess. So how do you get the intelligence of a chess move in a person's eyes? On certain shots I would watch this kid looking around the board and you'd get the sense that he was just about to discover a move. Rather than wait to see that happen, I'd leave him with the camera. I tried to pick the moment when he was just about to do it. Then I would start slowly to get off of him, so you're leading the viewer to a different idea—a thought process he's having of what to do. Then, there's a flash of a hand coming through to the chess piece. As soon as this hand is flashing through, the camera is now whipping and probably not hitting exactly where the piece is—then catching up to it when he is banging it down. Then it stops in midair, looking at nothing, but slowly drifting back, arriving back at the eyes, again which is to give the idea the thought is developing again.

Q: Did you understand the significance of the moves? Do you play chess?

A: Not at all. I would say, "Which piece is he going to go for?" so I would get a focus, because I work very wide open. The lenses are 1.9 and everything is shot at 1.9. The focus on that is extraordinary.

Q: How did you communicate these complex visual ideas to the camera operator?

A: I operated myself. I'm pretty good, not mechanically as good as my operator, but he's watching on the video and he sees what I'm doing. Then he does it and it turns out even more wonderful, but it turns out the way I wanted it. None of it is rehearsed or choreographed, it's all photographing real life. Basically, the kid is playing chess and we're doing whatever we want to do with the camera. I take one character, my operator takes another character. I'll go sit on his camera and he'll sit on my camera and we'll pan back and forth as we want. If the director would like something different, he comes and communicates it to us, but basically it's just us playing with the camera.

I tried to make *Searching for Bobby Fischer* interesting the same way that basketball is interesting—it's fast break, slam dunk. I'm finding out more and more that the stories I choose have got to engage me on several levels. It's got to get to me on an emotional, and intellectual, and spiritual level. I've got to see something in the story I want to help communicate. So I'm careful about choosing stories now. Unless my heart, mind, and soul are engaged, I don't want to be involved. It's hard work to tell a story. It's not work at all once you have a wonderful story to tell. I call it play—I mean that in a very serious way. You can't wait to get to work. You can't wait to tell the story. You can't wait to see how it's received, because it's all about communicating and it's not just to tell yourself a story—it's to communicate what the writer put down into cinema.

Q: What legacy do you feel you and your work have left for other filmmakers?

A: Originality. A freedom of expression. The legacy I would like to be remembered by is the passion I gave to that endeavor, the joyous passion of being allowed to tell stories, being infused with the desire to communicate, and to make movies be more fun to do than anything else in life.