

## INTRODUCTION

Leonard Maltin starts his book *Behind the Camera: The Cinematographer's Art*, published in 1971, with the reflection that since film itself was only about 70 years old, film studies were still in their infancy at that time. This, he writes, is the reason why some aspects of film, for example cinematography, had been ignored or poorly treated until then. However, Maltin (1971, pp. 7-8) adds optimistically: "Now as we enter the enlightened '70s, however, a welcome breeze of rationality is drifting into film study. Some of the auteur theorists are mellowing and beginning to admit that other people were involved in their favourite films, more time is being devoted to other people behind the scenes. Best of all, recognition is finally coming to the cinematographer". Unfortunately, during those enlightened times this breeze of rationality was not sustained and recognition for cinematographers proved to be wishful thinking.

Sixteen years later, Anna Kate Sterling (1987, p. vii) in *Cinematographers on the Art and Craft of Cinematography*, argued that cinematography is the lifeblood of motion pictures but "despite this the cinematographer has never received anything approaching the recognition given to the director or screenwriter, or, for that matter, even the art director". Sterling also claims that without cinematographers there could be no film. So, she asks, why is that so, why don't the cinematographers receive their due?

She found an answer partly in the theory put forward by Laurence Stallings in the October 1937 edition of *The Stage* that the cameraman is associated with the labouring classes, the technicians; he wields tools and thus belongs to the working class. He is not a white-collar worker and is therefore several notches below the director, the writer and the art director. "He is not perceived of as belonging to the intelligentsia—as is the director or the screenwriter—and, therefore, his work is not deserving of similar study or praise" (Sterling, 1987, p. ix). The artistic authorship is

then given solely to the screenwriter or the director for the film (Sarris, 1968). The cinematographers and other film crew are thus technicians working in a complex hierarchical system doing their duty. This is exactly where part of the cinematographer's problem about their neglect in film studies lies. Patrick Keating (2014, p. 1) noted in 2014 that cinematographers see themselves as artists. "For decades, cinematographers have insisted on the artistic nature of their craft". But he then dismisses this qualification as a romantic notion, and proceeds to call cinematography a craft. Cinematographers have been called many names, such as technicians, craftsmen, artisans, cameramen or practitioners, amongst others. This does not reflect how these people see themselves (Neubauer, 2012). Christopher Beach also aims to rectify the neglect of film studies on the topic of cinematography in 2015. Identifying the problem of auteurism as a mode of filmic analysis, he seeks to set the role of the cinematographer in the foreground of film production and to challenge the idea of the director as the sole author of a film. However, he also cannot bring himself to identify the cinematographer as a co-author or artist "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" (Beach, 2015, p. 1). Again, the director is recognized as the creator, and the cinematographer as the sidekick, the technician, the craftsman and side lined with visual technologies. This highlights a general misconception that cinematography can be filed away with the rules, technique and conventions of movie making. The idea that cinematography is a technical job that comes with instructions and rules that govern the cinematographic expression may lead to the false conclusion that cinematographers produce images according to certain standards. However, that is not the essence of cinematography. As John Bailey points out: "... the essence of cinematography is nothing more than *intense observation* and the *sensitive use* of appropriate tools to capture the truth of the drama" (italics added) (Bailey in Bergery, 2002, p. xxx). So, technique is just a means to an end: the cinematographic expression changes according the dramatic necessity of a film. To file cinematography away with the label *technique* or *craft* or any other designation seems a waste of a source of knowledge developed over more than 100 years of filmmaking.

The discussion around the art versus the craft of cinematography, in other words whether the cinematographer is a co-author or a craftsman, has wider implications than often assumed. I will argue that two notions are necessary to validate the attribution of cinematography to the narration of a fiction film and thus for the cinematographer to be recognized as a co-author. The first argument is that filmic technique enables part of the cinematographic discourse of a film and is not just governed by rules, but also by the cinematographic expression of the cinematographer (Roizman, 2011). Secondly, that film is and always was a collaborative effort by many talented people (Bailey, 2011). Cinematographers are writers of light, Vittorio Storaro explains, and thus authors, because cinematographers design and create the images to “describe the story of the film through the visualization, the photography, so that the viewer can feel and understand, consciously and unconsciously, what the story is about” (Storaro in Gentry, 1994, p. 4). This underlines his opinion that cinematographers are not technicians but creators. Cinematographers know the importance of the filmic tools but emphasize again and again that their use is solely to serve the story. Bailey calls it a fundamental truth “no matter what techniques, in or out camera, that the feature film cinematographer develops, his fundamental purpose is to support and enhance the dramatic and narrative flow of the film” (Bailey in Bergery, 2002, p. vii). The central argument of my research is that cinematographers create storytelling images and are thus co-authors of a feature film, a collaborative medium. The matter at hand is not that cinematographers want the status of artists; some do not even see themselves as artists (Lenoir, 2011) or as co-authors of a film (Bailey, 2011). They all agree, however, that the images they create need to have storytelling capacities (Laskus, 2011).

In that way, it means that images have to tell, to narrate with visual form and in so doing engage the viewer. Jacek Laskus (2011) further explains that it is this quality of the images that the viewers perceive but very few people understand: “I think the lack of understanding of what the image can bring, is the first kind of problem in the communication”. My aim with the theory of the perception of cinematography, developed in this work, is to help to understand what images can bring, to demystify the capacities of images.

The limitations on researching cinematography are numerous, starting with the fact that literature on this topic is extremely limited. The collection of evidence and research on cinematography is in its infancy. This situation requires a novel approach, which is exciting because it acquires new evidence and develops new theoretical models. This seeking for new knowledge promises an opening up of new pathways and the development of novel ways of doing research. With this work I propose an alternative area of investigation in the field of film studies: the contribution of cinematography to narrative film. Essentially, it intends to reveal the relevance of the study of cinematography to the field of film studies. It provides a pivotal opportunity: analysing cinematography as an expressive art, a property that adds meaning. It will provide a precise terminology for naming the visual aspects of fiction films. Cinematography research has also significance beyond the academic field and is committed to generate knowledge that matters. In our mediated social world, the hunger about how to create emotion-evoking images, and how they are perceived, is becoming more and more relevant. To better understand cinematography is a worthwhile goal, “a medium like film is a tool that modern society uses to organize itself, and that to function efficiently and productively, people should know how to accurately interpret media” (Young, 2012, p. 179).

## The role of the cinematographer

From the very beginning of narrative film the aim was always to create expressive images. Throughout film history many cinematographers have acknowledged the importance of the expressiveness of their work. Also, cinematographers were at all times very well aware of their role in the film production, as told by the pioneer cinematographer Curt Courant in 1933: “The word ‘cameraman’ is unfortunate. The suggestion it conveys is too limited, too technical. ‘Chief artistic collaborator,’ were the phrase not so clumsy, would then be less misleading” (Courant in E. Dyer, 1935, p. 83). Courant further explains that he is also the leader of a team of specialists. He describes his team: first and second assistant camera, the team of studio electricians and so on. Significantly he does not describe his assistants as workers but as specialists. The team do not regard their role as

labourers but as specialists, a function that requires experimentation and experience.

When Courant was asked in 1935 if he considered himself a creative artist he made a good argument:

Consider, a camera is a machine, a vehicle for the film; the lens is a piece of dead glass; a lamp is a lamp; the film itself a chemical product; the projector another machine, another vehicle. The man who can visualize a scene in terms of dead things and from them create a work of living beauty, he is a creative artist.  
(Courant in E. Dyer, 1935, p. 86)

Virgil E. Miller (1930, p. 39) posited that a good movie needed to be built on three values, namely “Story, Direction and if I may use the word, Presentation”. His responsibility as a cinematographer is the third leg. He further explained that without cinematography the other two pillars, the efforts of the writer and the director, would be wasted. This theme remains to be pursued in subsequent chapters. As we move forward in the history of film studies, the assumption to identify a film with an author has been “based more on desire than on fact”. Kolker (2000, p. 12) explains: “The simple reality is that the classical American studio cinema productions were and are rarely the products of an individual imagination”.

The argument for tapping into the knowledge of cinematographers lies in the simple fact that since the existence of cinema, cinematographers, or cameramen as they were first known, were always there. “Cinematographers have been there since the inception of the motion picture. Without them, there could be no film” (Sterling, 1987, p. vii). They experimented, invented, learned and discovered the possibilities of visual storytelling. This knowledge, as we will see, was well beyond the purely technical expertise they acquired.

From the point of view of a cinematographer, the experiential knowledge is so rich that the blindness of film studies is almost shocking. It is our duty to reach out and bridge this gap between film practice and film studies. To show how we can see what we are looking at when watching a film.