

Celebrated Cinematographer Gordon Willis Screens *The Paper Chase*, Discusses Career

by Mary Bowen

When Woody Allen battled a stampede of ornery lobsters in *Annie Hall*, Gordon Willis was there. When Allen paid tribute to New York's swankiest borough, Manhattan, Gordon Willis was there. Then when Allen explored the instability of identity in *Zelig* – yes, once again, Gordon Willis was there. And without a doubt, when the crowds flocked to BU Cinematheque's screening of *The Paper Chase* this past March, it was because Gordon Willis was there.

The March 25th event capped off two days of presentations at BU by the acclaimed cinematographer. In addition to his numerous collaborations with Allen, Willis filmed all three installments of Coppola's *The Godfather* saga and many other era-defining films of the seventies like *Klute*, *All the President's Men*, and the evening's Cinematheque feature, *The Paper Chase*.

Willis introduced James Bridge's 1973 portrait of a man's first year at Harvard Law School with the simple directive that it is a good film for aspiring cinematographers to study because his camera work always aids the story.

A dynamic and inspired Q&A session followed the screening, with Willis providing thoughtful answers to students' queries about his technical background, the creative and technical challenges a cinematographer faces, and his years as an industry insider.

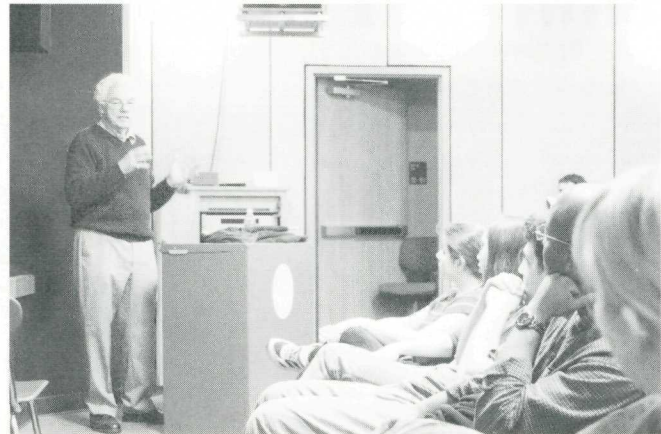


Photo by Bob Demers

Gordon Willis speaks before the Cinematheque crowd in the site of many a Cinematheque, well-worn Room B-05.

Peppered with pithy observations of his years in "the biz" – like, "Probably the easiest days on the set were with Allen. Working with Woody was like working with your hands in your pockets" – Willis' comments still emphasized the years of struggle it took to reach the top of his profession. Not one to mince words, he warned students that success takes both hard work and a little luck and they better be ready when their big opportunity comes.

"Meeting Gordon Willis for me was like meeting Vermeer or Rembrandt," said first year Film Production Grad Ban Ali. "He paints with light as masterfully as any of the great painters. It truly was a privilege to meet a person who has contributed so much to the visual language of film."

autobiographical explorations. In this brisk, very funny odyssey through today's South, McElwee, camera on his shoulder, meets all varieties of eccentric characters and takes on the American tobacco industry. The filmmaker shared a sneak preview of the film prior to its summer 2004 theatrical release, which has already been selected for the Cannes, Toronto, and Rotterdam Film Festivals.

MARCH

March 4

An Evening with Sam Green: San Francisco-based co-director Sam Green screened *The Weather Underground*, the 2004 Oscar nominee for Best Documentary, which looks at the most revolutionary of all American protestors of the Vietnam War. *The*

Weather Underground cadre were as sexy and charismatic as they were politically explosive, fighting government violence overseas with their own violence at home, then hiding out for decades "underground" from the police and FBI. Now they have surfaced and, decades later, they talk freely to Green's camera in this film called "the Year's Best Documentary" by the *Boston Phoenix*.

March 25

An Evening with Gordon Willis: See inset story.

APRIL

April 2

An Evening with Stephen And Kae Geller: The BU Cinematheque concluded its

ten-evening Spring 2004 season with an in-house program: The much-anticipated world premiere screening of *Mother's Little Helpers*, a new narrative film described by its writer and filmmaker, Stephen Geller, head of BU's screenwriting program, as "about magic, the Sacred Feminine, and commitment." Made by a cast and crew of BU students and faculty (including, prominently, Kae Geller), *Mother's Little Helpers* is an independently financed work by Stephen Geller, famous for his brilliant screenplays for, among other movies, *The Valachi Papers* and *Slaughterhouse 5*.

Synopses called from the lively announcements of BU Cinematheque curator and Boston Phoenix film critic Gerald Peary.

