



Harry Gross and Alice Blanchard help William Cadbury (center) during recent Acme-Bijou film showing.

Photo by Art Sullivan

Film on campus: an interview with William Cadbury

Where is film on this campus headed? That is the basic question with which I approached Professor William Cadbury, who teaches the English Department's two major film courses, Great Films and Film as Literature. I thought I might get a nice, rich column out of his thoughts. I was wrong. I got three.

The interview covered three general areas: film exhibition on campus, the development of a coherent film studies program, and the current state of film art itself. This column will deal with the first of these areas, and the others will be covered at later dates.

We began our talk by looking at the fact that University films cannot be advertised or announced off campus, due to contractual restrictions, while theater, sports and music events are announced regularly, even though they, too, may compete with professional groups or exhibitions. The treatment of film as a commercial rather than a cultural enterprise by many film-showing groups on campus as well as by commercial theaters and distributors makes it even more difficult to convince administrators and policy-makers that film has a legitimate place in the artistic life of the University community. Cadbury proposed an alternative to the present situation, an alternative which could work to stress the cultural aspects of film over the commercial:

Cadbury: I myself believe that the only logical solution to the whole thing is to show movies from a central fund and have every penny go into the central fund and be used exclusively for the showing of movies. This is the natural economic relationship between movies and the movie-going public. You can't do it just on a "free library" basis because the movies cost too much, so you can't support them in that way. Seeing a movie is closer to getting a book out of the library than it is to going to a dance at the EMU. That's my belief, because you're getting long-term cultural understanding, rather than simply doing something for enjoyment. Seeing a movie and reading a book seem to me to be virtually indistinguishable.

Dunn: So the commercial function should remain with the downtown theaters, and it should be a purely non-commercial, cultural kind of—

Cadbury: Right. As far as the University goes, my belief is that film showing should be basically a library matter, on the University campus. That is, that there is a history of film, it's hard for students to get at, there are lots of people interested in getting at it, and consequently those people should be encouraged to show as many films as they possibly can, organized in as creative and positive a way as possibly can be done, so as to get film history out there in the world.

Dunn: As long as those films aren't shown for the purpose of making money, they are really—

Cadbury: There's very little motive for showing them in some sort of devious way, or just to be commercially motivated. The motivation here, then, would be to get the range as broad as you can. You know, Gosta Berling hasn't been on the campus ever, because I haven't done the Scandinavians, and nobody else is going to lose their shirt on it. Well, if there were a general fund for movies where all the hundreds of dollars made on *Yellow Submarine* had gone back into the fund, and were then available, you see, not to support some club or some group, but rather to support other film-showing outfits, then it would make perfect sense to bring *Gosta Berling*. Anybody who wanted to who said, "It's been too long since we've seen any of those classic Scandinavian silent films," would then say so, and somebody'd apply, and we could get it. It's not so simple as I make it sound, of course. There would be matters of organization and so on.

Fighting the distributors

Cadbury's desire for a less commercial approach to film-showing on campus is also frustrated by the 16mm distributors. Cadbury feels on the one hand that the distributors are right in raising their

minimum rentals on movies with great current appeal, which can draw huge crowds on Friday and Saturday nights, since these distributors "have been widely, widely ripped off over the years" by groups using low rentals coupled with incomplete reports of their grosses to line their own organizational pockets. On the other hand, the price rise is affecting even the marginally popular movies that Cadbury's classes are interested in for aesthetic reasons.

One solution to this squeeze is to subsidize the class showings, but the amount of subsidy necessary to make such an idea even worth discussing is impractical under the University's present financial conditions.

Another solution would be to try to increase the awareness of the distributors toward the aesthetic value of their products, so that they would discriminate between the merely popular films shown on Fridays and Saturdays, and the seriously studied films shown to smaller week-night audiences. When I suggested an official University boycott of distributors failing to make such distinctions in their rental policies, Cadbury had the following to say:

"I think that the film distribution business is too big for a single school to exert much pressure like that. One of my plans, one of my programs, is in fact to start being more nationally in touch with people who are doing the same thing, and seeing if we can't start bringing general nationwide pressure on these people. Because obviously, the quality of prints is just abysmal, and you never know what you're going to get, and the prices are too high, and when the prices are not too high you get ripped off. For instance, we showed *The Masque of the Red Death*, which is a very interesting, and I think visually very distinguished, Roger Corman movie, and about five minutes in I suddenly realized I'm feeling claustrophobic and visually tied down in a way which is not part of the theme of this movie. Of course, I realized then what had happened to me. It was another one of those unannounced CinemaScope prints which had simply been scanned, and you got only two thirds of the screen area which Corman had taken his pictures of. In a movie which almost exclusively rides on its visual effect, that's just debilitating. We only paid \$27.50 for that movie, so it's really a cheapie, and somebody would say, 'Well, what are you complaining about? Heck, you've made a lot of money on this. You get your 30 people and you've got a profit there, to back up all your losses on the \$300 wonders that they charge you.' And yet, I would rather have paid \$100 and seen the film in 'Scope. But the current state of understanding of film is such that the distributors, probably rightly, don't think that many people would have that preference. They think, and I think they're correct, that there are two basic sources of an audience nationwide. They are the audience which wants some culture and which will go to movies, preferably foreign, preferably recent (that is, the 1960s), or very, very old. That is, you can get a big audience for *Metropolis*, you can get a big audience even for *Birth of a Nation*, because they have a historical interest which every klutz knows about. People will go to those movies, they figure, and then they figure that people will go to movies for some sort of special reason—*Yellow Submarine* to see the Beatles, *Dracula* to see Bela Lugosi, and also because it's *Dracula* and you do it for some sort of campy reason. But the idea that there might be film aesthetics value to a Roger Corman version of *The Masque of the Red Death*...the distributors don't think that people see that value, and I think they're right to think that people don't see that value. Nonetheless, the value is there, and serious film students all know it. Everybody writes in all the journals perfectly seriously about Roger Corman and his camera work and his mise-en-scene. How we're going to break through that kind of thing I have no idea, but I would think that it would be through national organizations which did support accurate versions of all the movies."

Cadbury concluded his remarks in this area by pointing to the fact that there are few films which are profitable enough for distributors to lavish care on—one example is the current Chaplin series. A retrospective of Fritz Lang's American films would not be so profitable, and the result is that only a few bad prints are in circulation. Lang's first color film, *Western Union*, is only available in black and white; and his 'Scope film, *Moonfleet*, is available in one lone standard format print, since it is looked at as "only a pirate movie." It will take widespread acceptance of the auteur theory, Cadbury argues, before the minor works even of major directors are treated with the respect they deserve.

How this school will help improve audience awareness of these problems and the need for their solutions will be discussed in the second installment of this interview, to be published in this column in the near future.

Coming Soon

What may be Orson Welles' greatest screen performance gives the last greasily authentic twitch to his minor classic of nasty suspense, the 1958 *Touch of Evil*. The film couples a prophetic version of 1960s cinema verite griminess with the desperate darkness of the film noir of the 1940s to come up with an "Evil Touch" that is practically too tactile. Acme-Bijou shows the film next Monday night at 8 in 180 PLC.

Pierre G. Dunn

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