

film on TV celluloid

There is really no longer any point in disputing the importance of the Western's place in American and world cinema, and even less reason to argue the preeminence of John Ford in this fundamental genre.

Andrew Sarris has stated that Ford's Stagecoach signalled the birth of the modern American cinema. With this film, Ford proved that the formerly unfashionable Western no longer had to be limited to grade-B cowboys and Indians grist for a crass entertainment mill. American film has never been the same since. Even such a *bona fide* "respectable" American director as Orson Welles freely acknowledges his debt to Ford's art. Today, the cinema is still haunted by the spirit of Ford's vision. The singing of "Gather at the River" in Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* and Sidney Pollack's *Jeremiah Johnson* is not mere accident and coincidence. These are conscious references to the West that Ford made his own with a visual mastery and overwhelmingly compassionate sensibility. Ford's images, themes, characters and social structures have entered into the realm of legend—appropriate, indeed, considering his constant use of legend and tradition throughout his career.

Of particular interest to me, an unabashed, worshipful devotee of the man, is the latter part of Ford's career. Having created an artistic world of his own, having written the history of its people and progress, Ford seems to sit back and meditate on what he has wrought. He is a man of the past facing the present, preparing for the future and his films, from 1960's *Sergeant Rutledge* to 1967's *Seven Women*, are a vital chapter in his and the entire cinema's art.

Two Rode Together, a 1961 film, marks the first appearance of James Stewart and Richard Widmark in Ford's films. This has a special significance considering that the leading characters of most of Ford's earlier important works were portrayed either by Henry Fonda or John Wayne. This new casting reflects the shift of focus of Ford's later career. Stewart is a more cynical and self-interested version of the unshakably stoic Wayne while Widmark is a more pragmatic and resigned counterpart to the idealistic Fonda character. *Two Rode Together* is, at times, an uncharacteristically bitter re-evaluation of Ford's own vision of people and societies. The likeable bumpkin played by Ken Curtis in *The Searchers* (an excellent film for comparison) is now a demented religious fanatic and the crowds of honest settlers of Ford's earlier films are capable of degenerating to the level of the lynch mob. Ford is dealing with issues of racism, religious intolerance, corruption and hatred; themes rarely encountered with such intensity in his more optimistic earlier days. It is a tribute to his artistic courage that Ford calls into question so many of the basic issues that form the artistic backbone of his career. From the opening shot, with its visual reference to the sunny sensibility of his masterpiece *My Darling Clementine*, *Two Rode Together* represents a self-imposed challenge of all that the artist has done before. It will be shown Monday on Channel 12 at 1 p.m.

If Ford isn't enough for one day, Monday morning offers the opportunity of seeing Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief*, again with issues of guilt and the pursuit of salvation and self-understanding, the film stars Cary Grant as a retired cat-burglar suddenly suspected of being behind a rash of second-story jewel robberies on the Riviera. The police, as usual in Hitchcock's films, are unable to do more than make threatening noises and harass the presently innocent Grant, making it necessary that he revert to his former ways to snare his criminal heir. Grace Kelly, as a spoiled, rich, potential victim of the thief does her part in complicating matters with her suspicions and arrogant teasing. As with any Hitchcock production this is a textbook of visual technique and an eminently enjoyable way to spend a morning. It's shown Monday at 9:30 a.m. on Channel 9.

Blake Edwards is represented by three films this week: *Wild Rovers* tonight at 9 on Channels 5 and 6; *The Perfect Furlough*, Saturday at 3 p.m. on Channel 6 and *Experiment in Terror*, Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. on Channel 12.

Lynn Couch

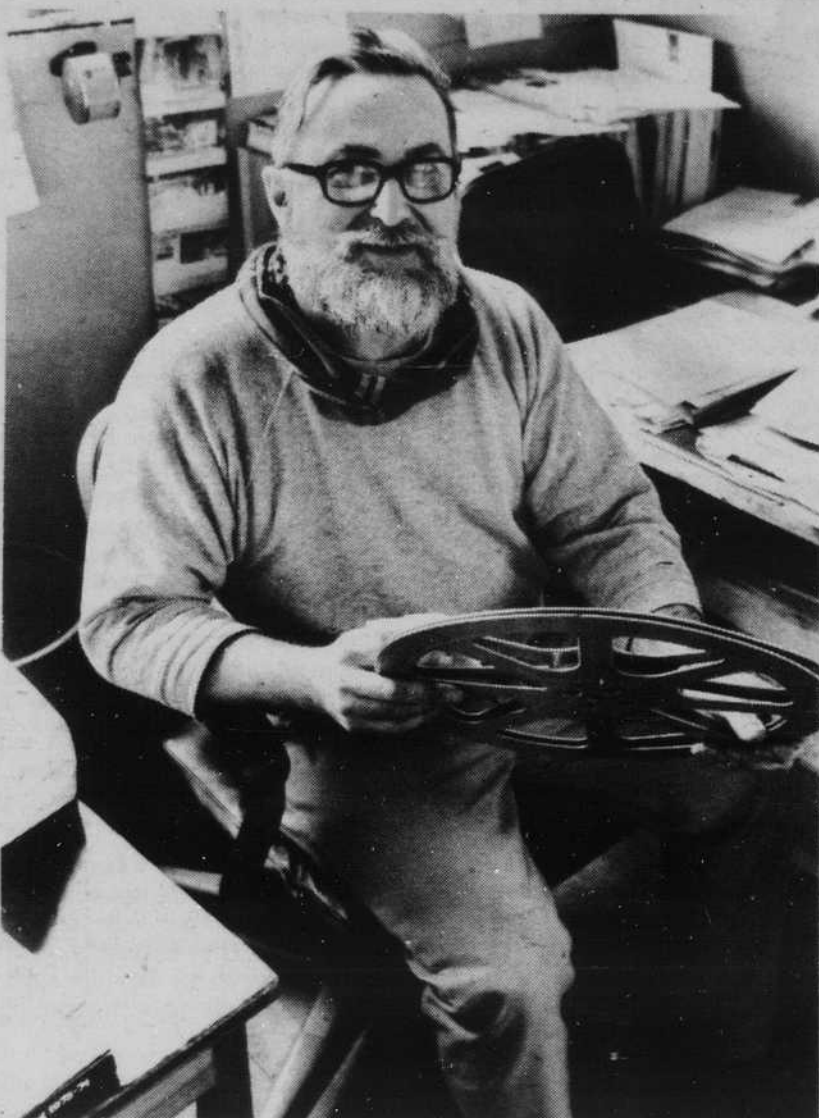


Photo by Steve Twedt

Dave Foster

Dave Foster-part one

"The road to success is strewn with failure. I think it's part of the way. People shouldn't be discouraged by it. They are—and understandably. I think that when you develop an understanding of growth, and learning, and change, you then have to really accept failure as part of the working situation, and use it, and understand it. Then you begin to get a little humility, you back off a bit, and see things clearly. Otherwise you're feeling totally dispossessed if you don't buzz out of here in four years and get some top-notch job right off the bat. That's what the abstract character of education leads a person to expect. You're in no contact with reality. We've had people leave with no degrees, nothing resolved, emotional basket cases, and they go out and get right into it. And do fairly well. Really shock themselves. They have learned something, but never realized it, because they were too busy trying to win. They were busy trying to be successful, but were learning, you see, in spite of themselves. They thought they were total failures. This is the thing that we have that really is tough to deal with, and that's because most everybody thinks of art as the beautiful, superior thing. That isn't my idea of education—that isn't the process, as I see it. It's being able to crawl out of just a huge mountain of failures and walk off with a thing that makes sense. Now, that's what I call scholarship—being able to digest a hell of a lot of experience, sorting out what you can use, passing the rest of it, and moving toward a little understanding."

This conception of education as a process of self-discovery rests squarely behind Cinemagraphics instructor David Foster's approach to art. It could also be said just as accurately that David Foster's conception of art as a process of self-discovery lies behind his approach to education. The distinction between the attitude toward film education which Foster holds and that held by William Cadbury of the English department is basically the same as the distinction which Foster draws between the art school and the rest of the University. Cadbury sees films from a critic's standpoint, as objects consisting of distinguishable parts which, when related to each other, convey a meaning to the audience; Foster, on the other hand, comes to film as an artist, for whom film is a tool with which he can come to grips with his own ideas.

Foster's position on film education is in line with his basic feeling that the studio approach is an important addition to the learning experience which the rest of the University would do well to borrow from the art school. Working with the entire process of film-making, from the birth of the idea to its presentation on the screen, the student (or artist) can learn as much through error as he or she can, in a different sense, from books.

Foster's emphasis on process rather than produce was nicely exemplified on one occasion when he was invited to exhibit some recent work. He came up with an inspired notion that served to display his approach as well as his drawings: gathering a number of blackboards, he set them up in the gallery and proceeded to execute his drawings on the spot. In this way he gave the exhibition hall his latest work, beyond question. At the same time, by making his drawings readily erasable, he made clear that it was the drawing process itself, as well as the individual artworks, that had value. But if it is the creation of the work that is important, where does the audience fit in?

First and foremost among the audience members, to Foster's way of thinking, is the artist himself. The artist examines his own ideas by giving them artistic form.

"We don't listen to ourselves. I think that to find out whether you have something to communicate, you have to begin to communicate. There has to be feedback. You have to get it out—begin to form it—and therefore, you become your first audience. Many students can't read their own work. They've been so busy, getting ready for the audience—the audience being the teacher, the school system, or whatever—that they cease to listen to themselves or read their own work. They're trampling all the daisies, looking for the marigolds."

Because the artist creates primarily to understand and clarify his own thoughts, this does not mean no one else can comprehend his work—all people share the same perceptual equipment, as Foster points out—nor does it mean on the other hand that the work must be universally comprehensible. The audience for a given work consists, for Foster, of those who "are in sympathy and understanding with what you're doing, or curious about it, or even who challenge it—and hopefully you will be able to include yourself in that grouping. At any rate, those people who would respond to it, and not necessarily the first batch that rolls up against the stop light out here on any given day."

When I asked him if he felt that first-hand experience with the medium was necessary for full appreciation of the movies, Foster quickly corrected me:

"If you want to appreciate a film, it certainly is possible to appreciate it without having made one. I think there are people who will respond and read the experience sensitively. In the first place, what is the film? It's an experience you're going to have. You're an authority on your own experiences. If there were 40 people in the theater, there can be 40 different versions of what happened, and 40 legitimate feelings about it. If anybody's moved by it, they appreciate it. In that sense, it worked for them. Understanding of what the guy had done, as a process, could be greatly enhanced by having some contact with the film process. I think people also read, and really, some of the books they read are deep emotional experiences. I would call that great and meaningful appreciation of the man's writing. But you might not even be able to spell, you might not have knowledge of grammar at all, you might be absolutely ignorant of that. So if you're going to say, 'You really don't appreciate this until you really know what it is to write a book yourself,' well, that puts most of us behind the eight ball."

Foster had much more to say about film and film education, but the rest will be saved for another time. And even so, there will never be room in a column like this to do justice to the "processing" of an eager mind like David Foster's.

Coming Soon

Those people at the Oakway pulled a fast one on me. True, they only held *Don't Look Now* for a week, just as they said they would, but they have since moved it into the Mayflower, closer to the audience that can appreciate it best. I have to say that if I were to make a list of the 10 best films put out in 1973, that film would have to be on it.

Coming on campus this weekend are two golden masterpieces, a rarity by a third master, and a disaster by a fourth. Renoir's *The Golden Coach* (1954), being shown by Bijou-Dream tonight at 8 in 180 PLC, takes the film-maker out of simpler realism into the fiction-within-a-fiction format, with a film that stands grandly somewhere between Ophüls' *Lola Montes* and Fellini's *8½*. On Friday and Saturday nights, the Film Society will show Chaplin's classic *The Gold Rush* (1925), along with a newly rereleased short, *Payday* (1922), at 7 and 9 both nights in 150 Science.

The rarity is the late John Ford's last film, *Seven Women* (1966), which has been both lauded and condemned by those few lucky enough to have seen it. The Ford film series brings the film to 177 Lawrence at 8 on Monday night. And the disaster is Fellini's *Roma* (1972), which the Cultural Forum treats us to (if that is the word) on Sunday at 6:30 and 9 in the EMU Ballroom. I am glad I had the chance to mention Fellini's *8½*, one of the very greatest films ever made, in this column, since I felt compelled to mention *Roma*, in which he bottoms out.

Pierre G. Dunn

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