

Response to Nora Gardner's "Acknowledging the Great Divide" by Gerald Saul

In the 1970s and 1980s, film professor Jean Oser taught film studies from a creator/historian perspective to help us appreciate many of the great masters and masterpieces of cinema. Through his force of personality, he inspired a generation (or two) of filmmakers in Regina. As Nora suggests, this humanist-based film appreciation has given way to more scholarly-based film theory in university film programs.

Having been educated within both milieus, I must disagree with many of Nora's assertions. Challenging students to see beyond the surface of a film does not spoil the "truth" or "beauty" of that film. The uphill climb of first learning to *dissect* a film may create some frustration, as all educational hurdles have potential to do. However, reading beyond "beauty" (don't get me started about "truth") is more fulfilling to a lifelong cinefile. New words and new ideas create new ways of thinking. It is another language and as such, the learning of it teaches you more than just vocabulary. It positions you such that you have a new perspective and you come to look at films in new ways. However, such a transition in ones ability to read can distance one from those who do not. Thus a student cannot always be expected to enlighten her father.

On the occasions that I am on the set of a commercial film, I am accosted from every side by UofR alumni. They don't all have our department name stencilled onto their foreheads, nor do they stand around dissecting Bergman by the craft services table (although they very well may be doing so silently to themselves, who knows what lurks in the hearts ...?). A large number of our graduates gain work in the industry. University programs such as ours do not tend to train specialists, this often falls on the production companies to fulfill with on-the-job training (and why shouldn't it, they gain the benefits of the training). Universities guide students to a generalist approach, preparing them for a lifetime of learning. Our program attempts to balance production and studies, as suggested by our name. It is our hope that our students will become creators and leaders. While I certainly do not wish to knock those who gain their livelihood from the film industry, it is certainly unrealistic to expect to progress from a technical craft area to become a writer or director. There are ceilings and most aren't even glass. Jean Oser inspired us to go out and make things and while current teaching materials have changed, our teaching philosophy has not.

Graduates such as Ian Toews (*Landscape as Muse*) and Dennis Jackson (*Wapos Bay*) are currently producing and directing sophisticated, internationally successful television series that draw from the skills developed here at the UofR. The balance of film production and film theory has given them the confidence to create, and the writing skills to convince funders to let them create. They have also both been strong supporters of this program, hiring graduates for the diverse skill and knowledge sets they bring. They are only two examples from many.

Our film program promotes the development of cooperation and trust between students. Most of our students bond with their colleagues, establishing work relationships that may continue for years after graduation. The changes in technology, with affordable high-definition cameras and editing systems, are increasingly favourable to adaptable producers with a generalist approach to media creation. The ability for an individual or a small team to create professional level production on a modest budget is here. While certainly not for everyone, I strongly believe that university film programs are essential if we hope to give a voice to our region and to create innovative local cinema.