

IN APPRECIATION OF...

FILM

STORY BY BRET SCHULTE

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT HANEY

Make it more than just a Blockbuster night. In an era of multimillion-dollar movie productions and a powerful handful of studios, being told to view film as an art form might make you choke on your popcorn.

"Film is an art, but it's also a business," said Wheeler Winston Dixon, chairman of the film studies department. "That's the major problem with it, and the films that would be considered art don't make it out to Nebraska usually."

Film as an art form is still controversial to some people, said Gwendolyn Foster, an assistant English professor and Film Studies instructor.

"For some people the idea of an art film is pretty revolutionary," she said. "It's not recognized as an art form because it is so consumer driven. Once you get over that obstacle people open their minds to the different things film can do."

The power of film and its impact on our society cannot be easily ignored. Films spawn rapid changes in fashion, alter perceptions of history and expose scandals and injustices.

The enormous success of "Titanic" has regenerated interest in the tragic sinking and has launched scores of documentaries and interest in the subject, as well as piquing interest in other epic films.

While the success of "Titanic" is largely financial, many directors continue to pursue low-budget and avant-garde productions that push the boundaries of plot and production.

Like any art form, film builds on a rich and diverse history, one that is important to understand if you want to get the most out of a par-

ticular work.

"I think the most important thing is a thorough grounding in film history," Dixon said. "You also have to look outside the canon. Look outside the conventional limits and try to get as much film history as you possibly can."

Dixon said it is difficult to gain a true understanding of the art living in Nebraska. Film as a culture really only occurs in major urban centers, a phenomenon that began in France in the 1940s.

A decade later, the French New Wave, con-

sisting of such modern greats as Jean-Luc Godard, developed the auteur theory, which established the director as the primary artistic force behind a film production while emphasizing a strong knowledge of film history.

Filmmakers around the world responded, and the impact of the auteur theory is especially apparent among modern directors.

"You need to go to a major (film center) and immerse yourself in it for like three months," Dixon said. "All the major directors of the time, Quentin Tarantino, Kevin Smith, have done that. And you need to stay current."

"If you really want to get a true understanding of cinema you can't do it by renting cassettes."

Born in the late 1890s, the initial film revolution was largely spearheaded for years by French inventors and avant-garde artists.

to a halt in a Paris depot sent people screaming from the parlor where it was shown.

Ever since, directors of all nationalities and eras have used the breathtaking, lifelike capabilities of film to impress, awe and educate audiences.

"Many people go to films simply to be entertained, but they also go to films because they want to learn and experience things about our lives that they can't get anywhere else," said Dan Ladely, director of the Mary Riepma Ross Theatre.

Filmmaking enjoyed a golden age in the early half of the century when studios owned famous directors and actors, and movies were actually more like dreams. In 1946, more than 85 percent of Americans went to the movies at

least once a week, Dixon said.

The advent of television in 1950 caused the collapse of the studio system, creating a rift between the older generation, which was comfortable staying at home, and the younger, which still enjoyed going to the theater.

Today the demographics remain pretty much the same, with most studio releases aimed at the 16-21 age group.

Reproducing reality is a passion that a group of young directors is currently pursuing with zeal.

People like Richard Linklater ("Slacker"), Kevin Smith ("Clerks") and Roberto Rodriguez ("El Mariachi") have made a name for themselves in Hollywood by starting out with small, low-budget independent films - a growing trend, according to Dixon.

"The problem is that the small directors get co-opted and they make huge big-budget films and then they get compromised," he said.

Foster agreed. "Hollywood sucks up the ideas of independent filmmakers and regurgitates them in a more palatable consumer-driven form," she said.

Despite the struggle for free rein and creative expression by directors, and the power of big studios, films remain the most potent medium of human expression today.

Of course, it is questionable if Hollywood is reproducing reality.

So when you are searching for a film or just looking for something new - don't make it a Blockbuster night. Make it much more.

**"IF YOU REALLY WANT TO GET A TRUE UNDERSTANDING OF CINEMA, YOU CAN'T DO IT BY RENTING CASSETTES."**

- WHEELER WINSTON DIXON

CHAIRMAN OF UNL FILM STUDIES DEPARTMENT

TIMELINE

The complete history of the creation of the film medium is much more complex, but this thumbnail sketch offers a brief overview of major events and breakthroughs in film history.

- 1894 - Lumiere brothers invent the first motion picture camera.
- 1895 - Lumieres show first public viewing of a motion picture.
- 1896 - Alice Guy makes first film with plot.
- 1898 - Alice Guy directs first film with sound.
- 1900 - Alice Guy produces hand-stencilled color films.
- 1900 - Georges Milies, a former stage musician, introduces earliest special effects: fades, super-impositions, mattes, slow motion, reverse motion.
- 1903 - First Western is produced: "The Great Train Robbery," directed by Edwin S. Porter.
- 1909 - Early colorization of films using blues and greens, called two-strip Technicolor.
- 1923 - Lee DeForest invents the vacuum tube, the television picture tube and the process called Optical Sound in his garage, a process which would eventually revolutionize the film industry.
- 1926 - Fritz Lang directs "Metropolis," the first international science fiction hit. Creates idea of dystopian science fiction leading to films like "Blade Runner."
- 1931 - Gangster film comes of age with "Public Enemy" and "Scarface"
- 1933 - "King Kong" introduces large-scale special effects to the screen.
- 1933 - Musicals become hits fueled by competition between Warner Brothers and the Estaire-Rogers productions of RKO studios.
- 1934 - First three-strip Technicolor film "La Cucaracha" - a huge advancement in color quality.
- 1939 - "Gone With the Wind" and "Wizard of Oz" released, both directed by Victor Fleming. Beginning of the modern motion picture epic.
- 1940 - CinemaScope, first seen in Disney classic "Fantasia," beckons in the era of stereo sound.
- 1941 - Orson Welles creates "Citizen Kane," introduces deep-focus photography.
- 1945 - Neo-Realist cinema starts in Italy, shot entirely on location using non-actors. American studios begin using real locations in motion pictures.
- 1946 - Biggest audience ever. Eighty-five percent of the American public went to movies weekly.
- 1946 - Post-war disillusion creates Film Noir genre.
- 1950 - Three-strip Technicolor is replaced by Monopack Eastman Kodak film.
- 1950 - Television is introduced. The motion picture industry experiences enormous decline.
- 1950 - Television opens, studio system collapses. Film stars are now free agents.
- 1953 - Called Natural Vision at the time, 3-D films sweep cinema houses.
- 1959 - International cinema comes of age with the New Wave in France. Takes Cannes by storm.
- 1960 - Hitchcock directs "Psycho," which contains the first use of graphic violence on screen.
- 1965 - Black and white fades from general production use. Last Academy Award is given to black-and-white film for "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"
- 1969 - First X-rated movie ("Midnight Cowboy" directed by John Schlesinger) wins an Oscar.
- 1977 - Dolby Stereo is introduced with "Star Wars," along with

sequel films. The special effects raise production standards to new heights.

1980 - VHS cassettes become omnipresent. Leads to collapse of double features.

1980s - Digitization of motion pictures becomes pervasive. Films are now downloaded onto disks and cut on computers. "Teen Wolf Too" is first movie cut on a computer.

Third-World cinema is internationally recognized. More women filmmakers return to the fold after being almost entirely removed from the directing process for about 60 years.

Black filmmakers Spike Lee, John Singleton and Julie Dash introduce African-American films to mainstream culture.

1992 - First digital effects appear on screen with "Jurassic Park" - the special-effects genius Phil Tippett revolutionizes film industry.

1997 - First fully realized digital special-effects movie is made. "Titanic" becomes first movie with every frame digitally enhanced and/or processed.

DIRECTORS

The following are lists of 10 directors, from the United States and abroad, whose contributions to the art of cinema have helped advance the medium to higher artistic and technological heights. It is not intended as a comprehensive list and admittedly excludes many important contributors to the world of film. Included is a film for which each director is most noted, as well as the year it was made.

- U.S. Directors:**
- D.W. Griffith: "The Birth of a Nation" (1915)
- Orson Welles: "Citizen Kane" (1941)
- Julie Dash: "Daughters of the Dust" (1992)
- Howard Hawks: "Scarface" (1932)
- Alfred Hitchcock: "Psycho" (1960)
- Lois Weber: "The Blot" (1921)
- John Huston: "The Maltese Falcon" (1941)
- Andy Warhol: "Vinyl" (1965)
- Su Friedrich: "The Ties That Bind" (1984)
- Buster Keaton: "The General" (1927)
- Foreign Directors:**
- Fritz Lang - Germany: "Metropolis" (1926)
- Louis Buñuel - Spain: "Un Chien Andalou" (1929)
- Alice Guy (Blaché) - France: "Tarnished Reputations" (1920)
- Jean-Luc Godard - France: "Weekend" (1968)
- Sergei Eisenstein - Russia: "Battleship Potemkin" (1925)
- Trinh T. Minh - Vietnam: "Rassemblement" (1982)
- Agnes Varda - France: "Cleo From 5 to 7" (1961)
- Jean Renoir - France: "Boudu Saved from Drowning" (1932)
- F.W. Murnau - Germany: "The Last Laugh" (1924)
- Carl Theodore Dreyer - Sweden: "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (1928)

PRINTED MATTER

"The Film Encyclopedia" by Ephraim Katz is one of the most comprehensive sources available, with information on hundreds of films, directors and stars spanning the decades.

The best source for film information usually appears in journals.

"The Village Voice" regularly offers the best contemporary film criticism available anywhere. Other industry magazines include "Cinema Journal," "Film Criticism," "The Independent" and "Film Quarterly." These publications offer advice for filmmaking, carry industry information and offer criticism on all types of films.

The Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>) is the most comprehensive film database the World Wide Web has to offer. You can search for information under name, title or keyword. The database will almost certainly have something. Another site to check out is MovieWeb (<http://movieweb.com/movie/movie.html>), which gives film tidbits and lets you search by year. The site carries mostly current films.

