ONE-HIT WONDERS:
WHY SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WORKS
OF MODERN ART ARE NOT BY IMPORTANT ARTISTS

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One Hit Wonders: Why Some of the Most Important Works of Art are Not by Important Artists
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NBER Working Paper No. 10885
November 2004
JEL No. J0, J4

ABSTRACT

How can minor artists produce major works of art? This paper considers 13 modern visual artists, each of whom produced a single masterpiece that dominates the artist's career. The artists include painters, sculptors, and architects, and their masterpieces include works as prominent as the painting American Gothic, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C. In each case, these isolated achievements were the products of innovative ideas that the artists formulated early in their careers, and fully embodied in individual works. The phenomenon of the artistic one-hit wonder highlights the nature of conceptual innovation, in which radical new approaches based on new ideas are introduced suddenly by young practitioners.

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The history of popular music is haunted by the ghosts of scores of singers and groups who made a single hit song and were never heard from again. Periodically radio stations that specialize in classic rock will devote a weekend to these one-hit wonders, and once again we hear the Penguins singing "Earth Angel," the Teddy Bears singing "To Know Him is to Love Him," Doris Troy singing "Just One Look," and a host of other nostalgic selections from this curious set of isolated achievements.

Yet well over a century before the Murmaids recorded "Popsicles, Icicles," the phenomenon of the one-hit wonder had appeared in dramatic form in the visual arts. Looking back over the modern era, we can in fact see a series of artists, each of whom produced a single landmark work that dominated his or her career. Although each case is eminently familiar to art historians, humanists are loath to undertake studies that involve systematic generalization, and consequently the one-hit wonders of modern art have never been analyzed as a class. This paper will examine thirteen instances in which a single major work was produced by an otherwise minor artist. Even a brief survey of the characteristics of these works and their makers is sufficient to establish that they share a strong common basis. Understanding this common basis furthermore produces a general conclusion about the causes of one-hit wonders that appears to have implications for a range of intellectual activities that extends far beyond modern art.

Measurement

A one-hit wonder occurs when an important work of art is created by an otherwise unimportant artist. It will be valuable to study this phenomenon only if it can be identified with confidence, and to do this it is necessary to be able to measure importance in art in a reasonable and objective way. Most art historians would deny that this is possible, but they are mistaken in

this belief. As the critic Clement Greenberg observed years ago, quality in art is not simply a

matter of individual taste, but rather "There is a *consensus* of taste. The best taste is that of the

people who, in each generation, spend the most time and trouble on art, and this best taste has

always turned out to be unanimous, within certain limits."[1] This study will base its measurements

of importance on a systematic survey of the judgements of a group of the experts Greenberg had

in mind. Throughout the study, importance both of artists and of individual works of art will be

determined by the amount of attention they receive in art historians' narratives of the history of

the modern era. In practice, this will be measured by the frequency with which reproductions of

particular works of art appear as illustrations in published surveys of the history of modern art.

Three quantitative criteria will be used to identify one-hit wonders. First, to be of interest

the hit in question must be a big one. In practice, the requirement will be that the hit must be

illustrated more often than any single work by much more important artists of the same period

(with the importance of the artists measured by the total illustrations of all the works of each).

Second, the artist who made the single great hit obviously must have had no other hits. In

quantitative terms, the hit must have many more illustrations than any other work by the artist.

And although less central to the definition of the phenomenon, a third criterion will involve the

drama of the single hit. The most startling one-hit wonders will be those artists who did not

produce a large body of works judged worthy of notice by scholars, even if no other one clearly

stood out: the most striking one-hit wonders will be those whose careers are dominated by the

single hit. In practice, the hit will be required to account for at least half of the artist's total

illustrations.

Masters and Masterpieces

Earlier research has shown that the greatest individual works of art, as defined here by the probability of appearance in surveys of art history, are typically made by conceptual artists. The innovations of conceptual artists are the product of new ideas, and because these can arrive suddenly and completely, they are often be discretely embodied in individual works that stand thereafter as the first and consequently most important expression of the particular new idea. In contrast, the innovations of experimental artists involve new ways of representing perceptions, and are arrived at only gradually and slowly. They are typically embodied piecemeal in larger bodies of work, and consequently no single work is the obvious and complete demonstration of the innovation. This analysis has explained why great experimental artists - Cézanne, Degas, Monet, Renoir - failed to produce individual paintings that art historians' textbooks reveal to be as important as specific paintings by great conceptual artists - Picasso, Manet, Seurat, Duchamp.[2]

The same research may explain the phenomenon of the one-hit wonder. Specifically a conceptual artist may produce one new idea, and never again make a significant innovation. That single new idea may be completely embodied in a specific work of art. If the idea is an important one, the work that announces it may become an important part of the narrative of art history, and that single work will dominate the artist's career from the vantage point of the textbooks.

If this analysis is correct, and one-hit wonders are typically conceptual artists, earlier research on artists' life cycles suggests another prediction concerning the timing of the single hits within the careers of their makers. Specifically, the hits should occur early in those careers. Because important conceptual innovations depend on radical new approaches , and typically on extreme simplifications, they tend to occur before an artist has become accustomed to using the established rules of his discipline, and before he has become immersed in the details and complexity of the discipline.[3] If one-hit wonders are in fact conceptual artists, their single great innovations should therefore tend to occur early in their careers.

<u>Théodore Géricault</u>

Tables 1 and 2 were produced by searching 27 textbooks published in English since 1970 for all the illustrations of the work of five Romantic painters of the early 19th century. An obvious puzzle is posed by Théodore Géricault's place in the two tables. Although he ranks only fourth among the artists in Table 1 in overall importance, with fewer total illustrations of his work than J .A. D. Ingres, Eugène Delacroix, or J. M. W.Turner, Géricault's painting of *The Raft of the Medusa* dominates Table 2, with twice as many illustrations as any single painting by Ingres or Turner, and more than 50% more than any painting by Delacroix. Comparing Tables 1 and 2 shows that the *Medusa* accounts for half of Géricault's total illustrations. *Medusa* appears in 22 texts while no other painting by Géricault appears in more than four.

Géricault's masterpiece was occasioned by a tragedy that had become a political scandal. The frigate *Medusa* had run aground in 1816 off the West African coast, due to the incompetence of the royalist aristocrat who commanded the ship. The ship's lifeboats were inadequate for all the passengers, and the captain chose to use the boats to save himself and the ship's senior

officers, leaving 149 people adrift on an improvised raft. After an ordeal of 13 days, 15 survivors

were rescued by a search vessel. Two of the survivors published an account of the horrors of the

voyage, that included famine, thirst, insanity, mutiny, and cannibalism. The ensuing public

outrage prompted a number of changes in government policies, including the removal of the

minister of the marine. [4]

Géricault seized on this event as the basis for a major work. He immersed himself in the

details of the voyage, befriending a number of the survivors, and interviewing and drawing them.

He had a model of the raft built in his studio in Paris, and travelled to Le Havre to study the

action of ocean waves. He visited hospitals and morgues to study the expressions of the dying

and the dead.[5] From first sketch to completion of the final work, Géricault devoted 16 months to

his masterpiece. He made hundreds of sketches and drawings of a number of different episodes

in the narrative before settling on the moment when the survivors first sighted the rescue ship. At

least 49 drawings and paintings directly connected with *The Raft of the Medusa* survive,

including a series of studies of individual figures, several oil sketches of the full composition,

and the enormous final painting, which measures more than 375 square feet in size.[6]

Kenneth Clark observed that the nature of the painting evolved as Géricault planned it:

"The composition grew more academic as it went on." The image of the painting ultimately owed

more to the study of earlier art than to direct visual observation:

> In the end it is this studio work, rather than the studies of corpses
> and hospitals inmates, which is evident in the picture. To our eyes
> *The Raft of the Medusa* is a highly artificial performance made up
> of elements from Michelangelo, Caravaggio and Pierre Guérin,
> who had been Géricault's master; the pointing figures even remind
> one of Raphael's *Transfiguration*.[7]

The innovation of the *Medusa* lay in Géricault's novel use of these traditional means. In the

earlier practice of French history painting, ideal forms and compositions were used to celebrate the actions of classical military heroes. Géricault subverted this tradition, by using these academic forms instead to give tragic status to helpless and unknown victims. In Walter Friedlaender's conclusion, "Géricault does not represent heroes, but heroism, the heroic endurance of the anonymous, suffering at the hands of fate and their fellow men; he lends them a pathos and passion attained neither by his predecessors nor by his contemporaries... Géricault's *Medusa* splits wide open not merely the form of classicism, but its content and its feeling."[8]

Géricault exhibited the *Medusa* at the Salon of 1819. He had hoped that the enormous effort he had devoted to celebrating this event as a catalyst for political reform would be rewarded by an enthusiastic public reception and the purchase of the painting by the government, and when neither of these occurred he became deeply depressed. In the next few years his style and subject matter changed sharply, as he abandoned tragic motifs and grandiose treatments in favor of detailed observation of everyday reality. He never again carried out a project on a scale approaching that of the *Medusa*.[9]

Géricault died prematurely, just five years after completing the *Medusa*. Kenneth Clark concluded that "he carried through one major work into which he put the whole of himself."[10] Commenting on that one work, Thomas Crow stressed that "It is crucial to recognize that the painting communicates its subject matter as an idea rather than anything resembling reportage."[11] Géricault's exhaustive preparations for an innovative master work that used images and forms taken from art history to make an ideological statement clearly identify him as a conceptual artist. That he executed his greatest work at the age of 28 is also consistent with the pattern that conceptual innovators typically produce their major work early in their careers.

Antoine-Jean Gros

Tables 1 and 2 also identify a second one-hit wonder. Antoine-Jean Gros was an older

artist whose work was a major influence on Géricault. Although in total Gros' work received

barely more than a third as many illustrations as that of Turner, and just over a quarter as many as

that of Ingres, his portrayal of Napoleon's visit to the plague house in Jaffa was illustrated as

many times in the books surveyed for this study as any single painting by either of those much

greater artists. That painting clearly dominates Gros' career from the vantage point of the texts,

for it accounts for nearly two-thirds of the total illustrations of his work, and is reproduced more

than five times as frequently as any other painting he made.

Gros idolized Napoleon. The consul had befriended the painter as early as 1796, and Gros

painted several large works that celebrated Napoleon's heroism in battle. In 1804, Napoleon

commissioned Gros to make an important painting for purposes of public relations. In 1799, the

French army had occupied the Palestinian city of Jaffa under a negotiated surrender in which they

agreed to spare the lives of the Turkish soldiers stationed there. Napoleon had promptly reneged

on the agreement, and executed more than 2,500 Turkish soldiers. When the French army in Jaffa

was then struck by the bubonic plague, Napoleon ordered his surgeon to poison the ailing French

soldiers instead of taking them along on the army's retreat to Cairo. The surgeon refused, and a

few soldiers who survived the plague were captured by the English troops who arrived in Jaffa.

Their accounts of the French atrocities in the city were widely publicized by the English press.[12]

Napoleon in the Plague House at Jaffa was commissioned in response to this damaging

publicity. The painting commemorated a visit the general had made to the plague hospital on

March 11, 1799. Gros systematically deviated from eyewitness accounts of the episode in an

obvious mythmaking effort. He portrayed Napoleon fearlessly touching the sore of a plague

victim, implying not only that the general was immune to disease but also that he had miraculous

powers of healing, suggesting parallels with Christ as well as associating Napoleon with the

traditional divine touch of the kings. In 1804, these remarkable additions to Napoleon's pedigree

served to strengthen his qualifications for the imperial throne he would soon claim. Gros

heightened the visual drama of the scene by taking it out of the small hospital room where it had

actually occurred and placing it instead in an exotic Near Eastern setting, in the courtyard of a

mosque overlooked by a walled city. A French flag flying triumphantly over the city reinforces

the suggestion that the French had come to bring civilization to the Holy Land.[13]

Gros' painting of the plague house drew on the traditions of French history painting to

emphasize the importance of the event in several ways. One was its great size, of more than 390

square feet. Another was its composition. Thomas Crow has pointed out that in arranging the

figures in the *Plague House* Gros directly appropriated the composition of *Lictors Returning to

Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789) by Jacques-Louis David, thus associating his painting with a

famous work by the greatest painter of the previous generation, who had also been Gros' teacher.

But Gros also innovated in departing from these traditions, by using conventional forms and

compositions to celebrate a modern hero rather than one from classical times. History painting

was thus now used not to celebrate past heroes, but to glorify a present one.[14]

Gros later painted other tributes to Napoleon, and after Napoleon's fall he attached

himself to the Bourbons. But his work is generally considered to have deteriorated badly after he

executed the *Plague House*. Although he was made a Baron and became president of the

government's Academy of Fine Arts, Gros became dissatisfied with both his own work and that

of the next generation of French artists. Overshadowed first by Géricault and later by Delacroix,

he ultimately committed suicide. Kenneth Clark attributed Gros' decline to the fall of Napoleon:

"Without a hero he was lost, and he never again painted a picture that moves us."[15] Yet the loss

of his hero may not have been the sole cause of Gros' inability to match or surpass the success of

Napoleon in the Plague House, whether during the decade of Napoleon's life that remained after

1804 or the two decades that remained to Gros after Napoleon's fall. Gros' skillful use of art

history in producing his great symbolic work, including the direct use of a composition by David,

identifies him as a conceptual artist. That his greatest contribution was completed by the age of

33, when he showed his masterpiece at the Salon of 1804, suggests that his career was typical of

conceptual innovators, whose best new ideas generally arrive early in their careers.

Gustave Caillebotte

Table 3 is based on a survey of 36 textbooks published during the past four decades in

English, French, German, and Italian. Gustave Caillebotte's work is illustrated overall only one-

eighth as often as that of Paul Cézanne, less than one-sixth as often as that of Edgar Degas, and

less than one-quarter as often as that of Auguste Renoir. Table 4, however, shows that

Caillebotte's *Paris Street*; *Rainy Weather* appears in 11 of the books, or more than any individual

work by Cézanne, Degas, or Renoir. *Rainy Weather* accounts for more than 60% of Caillebotte's

total reproductions in the books, and appears in more than three times as many books as any

other painting by him.

Gustave Caillebotte inherited a considerable fortune, and he used his wealth to become

one of the first patrons of the Impressionists. The paintings by Degas, Manet, Cézanne, Monet,

Renoir, Sisley, and Pissarro that he bequeathed to the French state form the core of the Musée

D'Orsay's collection of these painters today.[16] But Caillebotte was also a painter, and he exhibited his work in five of the Impressionist group shows held during 1876-1882; *Rainy Weather* appeared in the third group show, in 1877.

Caillebotte's friendship with the Impressionists, and his participation in their exhibitions, might appear to signal that he violates the prediction made earlier, that one-hit wonders should be conceptual artists, for Impressionism was quintessentially an experimental movement. The group was led by Monet, who devoted his career to an effort to capture the visual appearance of nature, with its constantly changing effects of light and atmosphere; he believed that this could only be done by working outdoors in front of the motif, painting directly on the canvas, without preparatory studies. Monet and his Impressionist colleagues established the forms of their paintings as they worked, and made frequent changes as their motif, or their perception of it, changed over time.[17] That Caillebotte's paintings did not fit this Impressionist model in either appearance or practice, however, was commented on as early as 1877, when an anonymous critic remarked that "Monsieur Caillebotte is an Impressionist in name only. He knows how to draw and paints more seriously than his colleagues."[18]

Kirk Varnedoe and Peter Galassi believe that Caillebotte often began his meticulous preparations for his paintings by tracing the major contours of the motif from a camera image - either from a photograph or from an image on a camera's groundglass - then using these lines as the basis for construction of a complete perspective drawing, made with the aid of a straight-edge and mathematical calculations.[19] Caillebotte made at least 19 preparatory works for *Rainy Weather*, including three perspective studies, three oil studies, and a full compositional oil sketch. Interestingly, Varnedoe recognized not only that Caillebotte's practice contrasted sharply

with the experimental approach of the Impressionists, but that it resembled that of the conceptual painter Georges Seurat. Thus Varnedoe commented of *Rainy Weather* that "Its scale, method, and structure stand outside the Impressionism of the 1870s and relate more closely to the principles of Neo-Impressionism. Indeed, the relation between the *Temps de pluie* [*Rainy Weather*] and Georges Seurat's *Un Dimanche après-midi sur l'île de la Grande Jatte* seems quite striking."[20]

Had Varnedoe been interested in artists' life cycles, he might have noticed an additional similarity between these works, for both were made by young artists: Seurat completed the *Grande Jatte* at 27, and Caillebotte executed *Rainy Weather* at 29. Caillebotte's innovation was not nearly as great as that of Seurat, and *Rainy Weather* is a much less important work than the *Grande Jatte*. Yet in *Rainy Weather* Caillebotte used the newly renovated neighborhood he had grown up in to make a subtle but powerful statement about the isolation of the residents of the modern city as they walked through its great empty spaces. The conceptual discipline of the process Caillebotte followed in making the painting is reflected in its precisely structured shapes, for instead of the boisterous and bustling Parisian streets that appear in the Impressionist paintings of Monet and Pissarro, *Rainy Weather* offers a more disturbing representation of the alienation of the residents of the modern city.

Paul Sérusier

Tables 5 and 6 are based on a survey of 31 textbooks published in French since 1963. Table 5 shows that these books contain 14 illustrations of paintings by Paul Sérusier, or less than one-fifth as many as they contain of the work of four great artists of the late 19th century who are also listed in the table. Remarkably, however, Table 6 shows that Sérusier's *The Talisman*

appears in these books more often than any single painting by Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, Renoir, or Degas. *The Talisman* accounts for nearly 80% of all the illustrations of Sérusier's paintings, and it is illustrated more than three times as often as the only other painting by Sérusier that appears in the books.

Late in the summer of 1888 in the Breton artists' colony of Pont Aven, the 25-year-old art student Paul Sérusier introduced himself to Paul Gauguin, who was generally recognized as the leading Symbolist painter. Sérusier then spent a morning painting with the older artist at the edge of a small forest. Gauguin told Sérusier not to hesitate to use pure colors to express the intensity of his feelings for the landscape: "'How do you see this tree,' Gauguin had said... 'Is it really green? Use green then, the most beautiful green on your palette. And that shadow, rather blue? Don't be afraid to paint it as blue as possible.'"[21]

Upon Sérusier's return to Paris, the small painting of the *Bois d'Amour* that he had made under Gauguin's supervision excited a group of his fellow students, including Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, and Edouard Vuillard. The students renamed Sérusier's little landscape *The Talisman* in recognition of its inspiration for their art, gave themselves the collective name of the Nabis, from the Hebrew word for prophet, and began to hold meetings at which they discussed Gauguin's ideas and the Symbolist movement in art.

Denis later recalled that "the extremely philosophical intellect of Sérusier very quickly transformed the least words of Gauguin into a scientific doctrine, which made a decisive impact on us."[22] *The Talisman* was more abstract and less carefully planned than Gauguin's paintings, yet it clearly illustrated Gauguin's message that the artist should not merely record what he saw, but should express his feelings by exaggerating his perceptions. The simplicity of *The Talisman*

appears also to have led to Sérusier's development of the doctrine that the new Symbolist art

should privilege naiveté and sincerity over craftsmanship, and the belief that the expression of

the artist's feelings could be heightened by cruder renderings of the subject, as clumsy execution

revealed an emotional truth that was hidden by more polished technique.[23]

The meetings of the Nabis led not only to changes in the styles of the young painters, but

to one of the most far-reaching statements in the history of art. In 1890 Denis, who was then 20

years old, published under a pseudonym an article that began with the declaration that "It is well

to remember that a picture - before being a battle horse, a nude women, or some anecdote - is

essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order."[24] Although Denis

was not advocating abstraction in art - he stated that a painting is an arrangement of colors *before*

it is a motif, not *instead* of a motif - his formulation was a critical starting point for the doctrine

that would develop in the course of the twentieth century that a painting could in fact legitimately

be an arrangement of colors without any explicit subject.[25] Three years later, on the occasion of

Gauguin's death, Denis explained that the concept of the painting as a plane surface had been

introduced to him and his fellow students for the first time by *The Talisman*, which had taught

them clearly "that every work of art was a transposition, a caricature, the passionate equivalent of

a sensation received."[26]The opening declaration of Denis' 1890 article has become famous in art

history, but another prophetic statement appeared later in the same article: "'Be sincere: it is

sufficient to be sincere to paint well. Be naive. Make crudely that which one sees.'"[27] This

statement foreshadowed innumerable debates of the following century, in the course of which a

progressive abandonment of skillful execution in favor of naive or crude technique would lead to

bitter arguments over the purposes of art, and even over whether particular works could be

considered art. Although Denis did not explain why this statement was given within quotation

marks, it is possible that this was his acknowledgment that its formulation was also due initially

to Sérusier.

The Talisman was the work of just a few hours, and it measured less than 90 square

inches in size. But in the Nabis it gave rise to one of the leading movements of advanced art of

the 1890s, and through Denis' article it led to the development of a revolutionary doctrine of the

autonomy of the work of art. The fame of The Talisman, and the lack of fame of its maker, are

direct consequences of the conceptual nature of the painting: The Talisman communicated

Gauguin's novel conceptual aesthetic to Denis and the other Nabis, and Sérusier was the

messenger who recorded and transmitted the revelation. Although Sérusier subsequently devoted

himself to developing the new Symbolist aesthetic, his role was perceived as elaborating and

clarifying a doctrine that had originated with Gauguin.[28] Sérusier's failure to make other

paintings that most art historians consider worthy of notice in the nearly 40 years that remained

to him after producing The Talisman at 25 testifies to his failure subsequently to produce other

new ideas comparable in importance to those he had expressed in that painting.

Vladimir Tatlin

Tables 7 and 8 are based on surveys of 25 textbooks published in English since 1980. The

leading sculptors in Table 7 - Auguste Rodin, Constantin Brancusi, Alberto Giacometti, and

Henry Moore - are among the most important sculptors of the modern era. Vladimir Tatlin's 19

total illustrations represent less than a third as many as those of works by Rodin, less than half as

many as those of works by Brancusi and Giacometti, and not much more than half as many as

those of works by Moore. Remarkably, however, Table 8 shows that Tatlin's Monument to the

Third International is illustrated more often than any sculpture by Rodin, the greatest modern

sculptor, and more than twice as often as any sculpture by Brancusi, Giacometti, or Moore. The

Monument accounts for nearly 80% of Tatlin's total illustrations, and appears in three times as

many textbooks as his next most frequently reproduced work.

Vladimir Tatlin was a young Russian sculptor whose artistic goals were fundamentally

changed by the Revolution. He became a leader of the new Constructivist movement, which was

dedicated to the belief that art must have a social purpose, and that artists should join engineers

and scientists in creating new forms, using new materials, that would be appropriate for new

social organizations. In 1919, the Soviet government commissioned Tatlin to design a monument

for the Third International, which Lenin had recently founded to promote global revolution.

Tatlin responded by creating a model of a tower. It is this model, and reconstructions of it that

were made after the original was lost, that are illustrated in the textbooks surveyed.[29]

Tatlin's *Monument* was actually designed as a building that would house the Third

International. Its intended height of 1300 feet would have made it the tallest structure in the

world. Tatlin's conceptual approach to art was reflected in the many layers of symbolism

embodied in his plan.[30] The tower appeared to lean forward, befitting a progressive new form of

government. The spiral shapes incorporated into the design symbolized rising aspirations and

triumph; the intertwining of two spirals represented the process of dialectical argument and its

resolution. Unlike earlier, static governments, which were housed in heavy, immobile structures,

the dynamic new communist government should have a mobile and active architecture, so the

Monument was supposed to move. The lowest level of the tower, where the congresses of the

International would meet, would rotate completely on its axis once in the course of a year; the

second level, which would house the International's administrative offices, would revolve once a

month; and the highest, third level, which would house the information offices of the

International, would revolve daily. The diminishing size of the higher floors reflected the

progression of power, up from the large hall of the assembly to the smaller and more

authoritative bodies at higher levels.

Tatlin was not an architect or an engineer, and his design for the tower was highly

impractical. As John Milner observed, "It was the idea and not the mechanistic realities which

were his prime concern: as engineering, the tower is utopian."[31] The tower, which was to straddle

the Neva River in Petrograd, was never built. Yet photographs of the model were widely

reproduced in pamphlets and books from an early date, for the design's embodiment of the idea

that advanced art could serve the purposes of modern society. This was of course strictly an idea,

for as Robert Hughes observed, the *Monument* "remains the most influential non-existent object

of the twentieth century, and one of the most paradoxical - an unworkable, probably unbuildable

metaphor of practicality."[32]

Tatlin subsequently pursued the logic of Constructivism in a variety of other activities,

including the design of costumes and sets for theatrical productions, and the design of textiles

and ceramics. He devoted several years to an attempt to design a flying machine that would allow

individuals to glide: like all his works, it was intended for everyday use by the Soviet masses.[33]

The diversity of his activities is typical of conceptual artists, as is the fact that his later work

lacked the innovativeness of the ambitious project he designed early in his career.

Meret Oppenheim

Tables 7 and 8 also identify a second one-hit wonder. Meret Oppenheim ranks last in

Table 7, as the 25 books surveyed contain only seven illustrations of her work - less than one seventh as many as they have of Brancusi's work, less than one fifth as many as Giacometti's, and just over one fifth as many as Moore's. Yet Table 8 shows that all seven of Oppenheim's illustrations are of a single work, *Le Déjeuner en fourrure*, which places it in a tie with Brancusi's single most reproduced sculpture, and ahead of any sculpture by either Moore or Giacometti. Remarkably, the only sculpture by Meret Oppenheim that appears in any of the textbooks is thus reproduced at least as often as any single work by three of the greatest sculptors of the twentieth century.

Meret Oppenheim was born in Germany, grew up in Switzerland, and went to Paris to study art at the age of 19. She worked under the informal guidance of several Surrealist artists she met there, including Alberto Giacometti and Max Ernst. Oppenheim considered her art to be the direct embodiment of ideas: "Every idea is born with its forms. I carry out ideas the way they enter my head. Where inspiration comes from is anybody's guess but it comes with its form; it comes dressed, like Athena who sprang from the head of Zeus in helmet and breastplate."[34]

To support herself Oppenheim began designing clothing and jewelry, using the same conceptual approach as in her painting and sculpture. One day in 1936 she was sitting in the Café de Flore with her friends Dora Maar and Pablo Picasso when Picasso became intrigued with a bracelet Oppenheim had made by covering metal tubing with fur. Picasso joked that one could cover anything with fur, and Oppenheim replied, "Even this cup and saucer..." Shortly thereafter André Breton invited Oppenheim to contribute to an exhibition of Surrealist objects. Recalling her conversation with Picasso, Oppenheim bought a large cup and saucer with spoon at a department store, and covered the three objects with the fur of a Chinese gazelle. Breton named

the work *Déjeuner en fourrure* (*Luncheon in Fur*), which echoed Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*.

Later the same year, Alfred Barr bought the work for the collection of his recently established

Museum of Modern Art in New York.[35]

Meret Oppenheim continued to make art past the age of 70; a catalogue raisonné of her

work includes approximately 1,500 paintings, drawings, and sculptures.[36] Yet the textbooks

surveyed for this study demonstrate that she never became an important artist. Those textbooks

also demonstrate, however, that *Déjeuner en fourrure* became a famous work of art.

Oppenheim's sculpture was a striking embodiment of two central aspects of Surrealist art: it was

an object with symbolic meaning, lacking in aesthetic quality and craftsmanship, and its

symbolism placed it squarely in a line of Surrealist works that represented sexual freedom. Thus

Robert Hughes described the *Déjeuner* as "the most intense and abrupt image of lesbian sex in

the history of art."[37] A sculpture made by a 23-year-old artist as a result of a chance conversation

in a Paris café became an emblem of Surrealism, and both the fame of the work and the lack of

fame of its young maker stem from the fact that *Déjeuner en fourrure* not only dramatically but

fully expressed a single innovative idea.

Grant Wood

Tables 9 and 10 were produced by searching 49 textbooks published since 1968 for all the

reproductions of paintings by five American artists of the early 20th century. Grant Wood ranks

last in Table 9, with less than 60% as many total illustrations as Edward Hopper and Georgia

O'Keeffe, and less than 70% as many as Charles Sheeler and Stuart Davis. Yet the positions are

reversed in Table 10, as Wood's *American Gothic* is reproduced in 24 of the books, 50% more

often than Hopper's *Nighthawks*, and more than twice as often as any painting by Sheeler, Davis,

or O'Keeffe. *American Gothic* accounts for two-thirds of the total illustrations of Wood's

paintings, and appears in eight times as many books as *Daughters of Revolution* (1932) and

Parson Weems' Fable (1939), the other two of Wood's paintings that are most frequently

reproduced.

Grant Wood was a largely self-taught artist. He lived in Iowa throughout his life, but early

in his career he made several trips to France. This influenced his artistic development, as for

nearly two decades he painted landscapes in a style derived from Impressionism, and such later

artists as Bonnard and Vuillard. In this early period he worked visually in front of his subject,

with an emphasis on an appearance of spontaneity and avoidance of smooth finish.

Wood's art was changed by a commission he received in 1927, when he was 36, to create

a stained-glass window for the Veterans Memorial Building in Cedar Rapids. He had previously

begun his small oils by working directly on the canvas, but making an image for a surface that

would measure 24' x 20' clearly required more careful planning. He began with preliminary

sketches, and eventually made a full-scale working drawing of the entire design. In 1928 Wood

went to Germany to supervise the work of the Munich glass company that was to stain and

assemble the window. Working with the German craftsmen gave him a new appreciation for the

careful design of individual parts that would fit together to create a unified whole, and for the

precision of fine craftsmanship. This new respect for an art based on careful preparation and

execution was reinforced by the opportunity in Munich to study the paintings of Flemish and

German masters of the 15th and 16th centuries. Wood was particularly struck by these artists' use

of visual elements drawn from the everyday life of their own locales.[38]

Wood's style and subject matter changed when he returned from Germany, as he set out

to create his own distinctive regionalist art under the inspiration of Northern Europe's Old Masters: "to my great joy, I discovered that in the very commonplace, in my native surroundings, were decorative adventures and that my only difficulty had been in taking them too much for granted."[39] In 1930, a year after his return, Wood painted his masterpiece. *American Gothic* began with an oil sketch Wood made of a house he saw in Eldon, Iowa; in keeping with his new systematic approach, he also had a friend photograph the house. The selection of the house was done with care, as Wood observed that "I know now that our cardboard frame houses on Iowa farms have a distinct American quality and are very paintable. To me their hard edges are especially suggestive of the Middle West civilization."[40] Wood then made a full sketch of his sitters with the house behind them, and squared the sketch for transfer to his canvas. That Wood's intentions for his painting were not merely visual is indicated by the fact that he changed the house, stretching it vertically by heightening the porch, and elongating a front window. He also changed his sitters, by elongating and thinning their unsmiling faces: "Any northern town old enough to have some buildings dating back to the Civil War is liable to have a house or church in the American Gothic style. I simply invented some American Gothic people to stand in front of a house of this type."[41] The thin, vertical forms of the building and the two figures are furthermore echoed in the three long prongs of the pitchfork that the farmer holds. Wood took the sitters' clothing from 19th-century photographs, and their stiff poses mimic those of early long-exposure photographs. In total, the painting is carefully planned to give a visual representation of a particular set of rural Midwestern values, including rigidity, austerity, religiosity, and provinciality.[42] When Wood completed *American Gothic* he submitted it to the annual exhibition of American paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago. It was awarded a prize, and was promptly

purchased by the Art Institute. It was an immediate success with the public, and quickly became

an American icon, as the solemn couple has fascinated generations of viewers.

American Gothic was one of the first paintings Wood made with the elaborate preparatory

procedure he would follow for the remainder of his career, methodically working up his images

from preliminary sketches to full preparatory cartoons before beginning to paint them. His

compositions were carefully measured and arranged according to a formula he called "the

principle of thirds," as he divided his surfaces into nine equal rectangles, then drew diagonals

through the perpendicular intersections to serve as directional guides for all principal contour

lines. [43] He regretted the years he had spent painting spontaneously, and late in his life he

dismissed his early paintings as mere "wrist work," due to their lack of planning and thought. He

told a friend that he had "really found himself" in the early 1930s.[44]

Most painters arrive at their mature styles early in their careers. Grant Wood did not

arrive at his trademark style until he was in his late 30s. Yet once he recognized the attractions of

a conceptual approach, with careful planning and execution of images that would carry symbolic

meanings, he produced the major work of his career almost immediately, as he used his

knowledge of midwestern history and culture to create one of the most famous images in the

history of American art.

<u>Richard Hamilton</u>

Table 11 shows that in a survey of 36 textbooks published since 1980, Richard

Hamilton's work was illustrated less than half as often as that of four leading American artists of

the 1950s and the '60s, and slightly less than that of his countryman David Hockney. Yet Table

12 shows that Hamilton's *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*

appears in 21 of those texts, more than one and a half times as many as any single work by

Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, or Andy Warhol, more than twice as many as any

painting by Jasper Johns, and more than two and half times as any work by Hockney. *Just what is

it?* accounts for four-fifths of Hamilton's total illustrations, and four times as many as *he*, the

only other of his works that appears in any of the books.

In London during the early 1950s Richard Hamilton was a member of the Independent

Group, made up of young artists who met informally to discuss their interest in mass culture.

They shared a fascination with American advertising and graphic design, and wanted to create an

art that would have the same kind of popular appeal. They also wanted this art to bridge the

growing gap between the humanities and modern science and technology.[45] In 1956 the

Independent Group organized a joint exhibition, "This is Tomorrow," which was designed to

examine the interrelationships between art and architecture. Hamilton agreed to create an image

that could be used as a poster for the show. The result was a small collage titled *Just what is it*

that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?

Hamilton began the work by making a list of subjects, that included Man, Woman,

History, Food, Cinema, TV, Newspapers, Cinema, TV, Telephone, Comics, Cars, Domestic

appliances, and Space, among other categories. Hamilton, his wife, and another artist then

searched through magazines, cutting out illustrations that could represent the categories on

Hamilton's list. Hamilton then selected one image for each category, choosing them according to

how they would fit into the imaginary living space he was constructing. Among its component

images, *Just what is it*? contains a male body-builder, a female pin-up, a comic book cover, an

insignia for Ford automobiles, and even the word "Pop" on a large Tootsie pop held up by the

body-builder. The work's title was itself the caption from a discarded photograph.[46]

In 1956, years before Andy Warhol would reproduce photographic images or Roy Lichtenstein would mimic comic books, a 34-year-old English artist had combined these techniques in a single work. In recognition of this Marco Livingstone has declared *Just what is it?* to be "an extraordinary prophecy of the iconography of Pop." [47] And appropriately for a prototype for a movement that would celebrate commercial culture, *Just what is it?* was not only made from advertisements, but was itself made to be an advertisement. *Just what is it?* differed considerably from the work Hamilton did before it and after; Livingstone noted that it has become an icon of early Pop art "in spite of being completely uncharacteristic of [Hamilton's] work at that time."[48] Yet this quality was in itself a characteristic of Hamilton's work, for abrupt changes are common among conceptual artists, who often adopt new styles in order to express new ideas: Edward Lucie-Smith recognized this when he observed that Hamilton's "productions tend to differ radically from one another because each is the embodiment of an idea, and the idea itself has been allowed to dominate the material form."[49]

Richard Hamilton has had a long career as a painter and art teacher. He is considered to have been a leading figure in British Pop art, and he has been honored by three retrospective exhibitions at London's Tate Gallery.[50] Yet, as Table 11 emphasizes, he has never achieved nearly the same level of fame or critical attention as a number of American Pop artists of his cohort. His only celebrated work, *Just what is it?*, was an isolated conceptual innovation. The rise of Pop art did not make Hamilton a famous artist, but it did give *Just what is it?* a place in the canon of contemporary art for its role as a forerunner of the dominant advanced art movement of the early 1960s.

Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers

Based on a survey of 24 textbooks published since 1990, Table 13 shows that for their total achievement Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers rank far below several of the greatest modern architects, as both have less than half as many illustrations of their buildings in the texts as Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and less than three quarters as many as Walter Gropius. Yet remarkably Table 14 shows that the Pompidou Center in Paris, designed by Piano and Rogers, is illustrated in 22 of the 24 textbooks, or more than any single building designed by Le Corbusier, Mies, or Gropius. The Pompidou accounts for more than 60% of Piano's total illustrations, and more than three times as many as any of his other buildings, while it accounts for almost 70% of Roger's total illustrations, and nearly three times as many as any of his other designs.

In 1971, the commission to design a new Parisian cultural center that would house a museum of modern art, a public lending library, a center for visual research, several cinemas, and several restaurants was awarded to the partnership of Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. The two young architects, aged 34 and 38, respectively, were awarded the commission in an international competition that attracted more than 650 entries. The building opened in 1977, and quickly became one of Paris' most popular tourist destinations.

The Pompidou Center was the first large-scale realization of an idea that had been widely discussed during the 1960s, that since buildings can change functions over time in unpredictable ways, they should be made as flexible as possible.[51] As Piano stressed, "constructing a building for culture at the beginning of the Seventies was an incredibly confused undertaking: the only thing to be done was to aim at convertibility."[52] The theory held that buildings should be like

machines, in that for ease of production and later maintenance and alterations they should be made from standardized parts. Large interior spaces would allow temporary subdivision for specific purposes, that could easily be changed; services - including even the movement of people - should be placed on the outside of the building, where they could easily be altered or replaced, and where they would not reduce the flexibility of the open interior spaces. In this approach architecture provided a structural framework, and supplied a set of services, but it eliminated all specificity of place or use.[53]

The Pompidou is striking both because of its great size and its industrial appearance. It has been a great success as a cultural center, but it has in fact not served many of the innovative purposes Piano and Rogers had intended. Thus it was never extended over a larger area, its parts have not become standard in other buildings, and it did not become a prototype for other arts centers. Its great popularity has stemmed not from its flexibility, but instead from the novelty of its image.[54] The Pompidou was a bold design by two daring young architects, and it attracted considerable criticism for its failure to blend into the surrounding Marais district. Piano later acknowledged that he and Rogers made mistakes; he regretted that the Pompidou had required the demolition of so many houses, and that it consequently was not linked as firmly to the neighborhood as he would have liked. Yet he observed of the Pompidou overall that "more than a mistake, it was a huge joke, a kind of face pulled at the cultural establishment."[55]

Piano and Rogers dissolved their partnership after completing the Pompidou, and both have gone on to very successful careers, with major commissions and impressive awards. Both are known for their high-tech designs and their enthusiasm for new materials and technologies. But although both have produced a large body of work, neither has come close to designing

another building as innovative as the Pompidou, or as novel an embodiment of a general architectural theory.

Gerrit Rietveld

Tables 13 and 14 also identify a second one-hit wonder. In Table 13, Gerrit Rietveld stands well below Louis Kahn, with barely more than half as many total illustrations. Kahn is widely considered to have been one of the most influential architects of the second half of the twentieth century.[56] Yet Table 14 shows that Rietveld's Schröder House appears in more than twice as many books as either of Kahn's most frequently illustrated buildings. The dominant position of the Schröder House in Rietveld's career is clear, for it accounts for all but one of the illustrations of his architecture in the textbooks.

Gerrit Rietveld grew up working in his father's cabinetmaking shop, and he had begun to make original designs for furniture by the age of 11. He spent the next two decades working as a craftsman, designing furniture and jewelry. In 1919 he joined the Dutch art movement De Stijl, but already the year before he had created the celebrated Red-Blue Chair, which effectively applied their aesthetic concerns to design.[57]

In 1919 Rietveld remodelled a jewelry shop, and this eventually led a Utrecht couple to hire him to design their new house. Rietveld would later design scores of other buildings in a long and distinguished career as an architect, but the Schröder House, built in 1924 when he was 36 years old, was his first house, and by far his most innovative. Rietveld wanted to make buildings, like furniture, from mass-produced, standardized, and elementary components, and the Schröder House is visibly assembled from separate parts.[58] It became celebrated almost immediately as the architectural embodiment of the De Stijl movement's philosophy, and is

typically cast in that role by art historians even today. So for example Reyner Banham observed

that "The surfaces are... as smooth and as neutral as those of a Mondriaan painting, in similar

colors." The aggressive sparseness and simplicity of the design made the Schröder House the

precursor of much of later modern architecture: Banham saw that "Here for the first time in 1924,

the aesthetic possibilities of the hard school of modern architecture were uncompromisingly and

brilliantly revealed... Machine aesthetic; rectangular space play; the bare minimum of the modern

architecture that was to be."[59]

Rietveld became one of the leading Dutch architects of his time, and applied his ideas to

designing large-scale housing and factories as well as individual family houses. Yet although he

worked for another 40 years after designing the Schröder House, his aesthetic did not

subsequently change in any basic way, and his designs became much less startling in later years

as more and more architects emulated the new forms he had created for the first house he ever

designed.

Judy Chicago

Table 15 shows that 40 textbooks published since 1990 contain more than five times as

many illustrations of the work of Jasper Johns as of that of Judy Chicago. In total Chicago's work

is also illustrated less than half as often as that of Frank Stella, Cindy Sherman, or Bruce

Nauman. Remarkably, however, Table 16 shows that Chicago's *Dinner Party* appears in nearly

50% more textbooks than any single work by Johns, and in more than twice as many texts as any

single work by Stella, Sherman, or Nauman. Together Tables 15 and 16 clearly identify Chicago

as a one-hit wonder, for *The Dinner Party* accounts for 90% of Chicago's total illustrations; only

two of Chicago's other works appear in any of the books, and each of those appears only one

time.

 To symbolize the neglect of women's achievements by historians, Judy Chicago decided to create a work that would reinterpret the Last Supper from the point of view of women. When she found she was unable to reduce the number of guests to 13, she redesigned the table as a triangle, and tripled that number. For these places at the table Chicago selected women who represented particular historical epochs, whose lives embodied a significant achievement, and who had worked to improve conditions for women.[60]

 The Dinner Party was a complex conceptual work, with symbolism at many levels. The sequential placement of the women around the table provided a historical narrative: "Beginning with pre-patriarchal society, *The Dinner Party* demonstrates the development of goddess worship, which represents a time when women had social and political control... The piece then suggests the gradual destruction of these female-oriented societies and the eventual domination of women by men, tracing the institutionalizing of that oppression and women's response to it."[61] The material form of the work was symbolic. Chicago used decorated plates to represent the guests: "Since plates are associated with eating, I thought images on plates would convey the fact that the women I planned to represent had been swallowed up and obscured by history instead of being recognized and honored."[62] Chicago's study of history made her realize that women's achievements were not made by isolated individuals, so the placement of the table on a floor inscribed with the names of other women symbolized the fact that the women at the table had risen from a foundation created by other women; each guest was chosen not only for the significance of her own achievement, but to represent the tradition from which she came. The arts used to make the work were also symbolic, as Chicago chose china painting and embroidery

because they were genres traditionally used by women that had often been ignored by the men

who wrote the history of art.[63]

Chicago planned the work, then assembled a team of people to help her produce it. In all

more than 400 people - most, but not all, women - worked on *The Dinner Party* over a period of

five years. The final work was large and intricate:

> A triangular table, forty-eight feet per side, is arranged with thirty-
> nine commemorative settings in which sculptural ceramic plate
> forms, with napkins, knives, forks, spoons, and goblets, sit on
> individualized needlework cloth runners... The whole is
> complemented by the additional 999 names of women penned
> across the 2,300 lustrous triangular tiles that comprise the raised
> floor on which the table sits. *The Dinner Party* thus images a
> collaboration that is a collective or combined history of 1,038
> women, through a process that was itself collaborative.[64]

In spite of the enormous effort and complex organization involved in the undertaking,

Chicago had no doubt that the production of the work was not its most significant message: "I am

often asked whether the process of creating *The Dinner Party* was even more important than the

final work of art, and my answer has always been no." Her answer was a reflection of the

conceptual nature of the work, which proved serendipitous from another point of view. *The

Dinner Party* drew large crowds when it was presented as a temporary exhibit at a series of

museums, but for many years Chicago was frustrated by its failure to find a permanent home in a

major museum. Because of its conceptual nature, however, she discovered that its message could

be communicated even if the work was not displayed: "It was extremely fortuitous that *The

Dinner Party* was structured so that the information it embodied was able to enter the culture in

several forms. Consequently, when the work of art was blocked by the art system, the book [that

Chicago wrote about the work] brought the concept of the piece to what turned out to be an

extremely receptive audience."[65]

Maya Lin

Tables 15 and 16 also identify Maya Lin as a one-hit wonder. Although her total of 16 illustrations in Table 15 represents less than 15% as many illustrations as the textbooks contain of the work of Jasper Johns, less than a quarter as many as that of Frank Stella, and less than half as many as that of Cindy Sherman or Bruce Nauman, Table 16 shows that her *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* appears in more books than any single work by those artists. Lin's illustrations total barely one third as many of those of the work of the sculptor Richard Serra, but the *Memorial* ties Serra's *Tilted Arc* for the distinction of being the single work made by any American artist during the 1980s that is most often reproduced in the textbooks surveyed.[66] The *Memorial* is moreover the only work of Lin's that appears in any of the 40 textbooks.

Lin chose to major in architecture in college because she saw it as a way to combine art and science.[67] During her senior year she took a seminar on funereal architecture, in which her interest in the psychology of architecture led to a clash with her teacher. For a class project to design a memorial for World War III, she designed a tomblike underground structure that was intended to frustrate the viewer:

> I remember the professor of the class, Andrus Burr, coming up to me afterward saying quite angrily, "If I had a brother who died in that war, I would never want to visit this memorial." I was somewhat puzzled that he didn't quite understand World War III would be of such devastation that none of us would be around to visit any memorial, and that my design was instead a prewar commentary. In asking myself what a memorial to a third world war would be, I came up with a political statement that was meant as a deterrent.[68]

The incident heightened Lin's awareness that memorials are highly charged politically, and

reinforced her belief that memorials constitute a separate genre: "They're on the boundary between function and symbolism, because their function is a symbolic one. They're hybrids, in between art and architecture. Not sculpture either. In a separate category."[69]

At the time there was a national design competition for a Vietnam veterans memorial, and Lin's class took this task as its final project. Lin and a few friends traveled to Washington to see the intended site for the memorial. She later recalled that "it was at the site that the idea for the design took shape":

> I had a simple impulse to cut into the earth.
> I imagined taking a knife and cutting into the earth, opening
> it up, an initial violence and pain that in time would heal.

When Lin returned to Yale she made a sketch of her idea, and was initially concerned that it was too simple. She soon realized, however, that complicating the design would weaken it: "The image was so simple that anything added to it began to detract from it."[70]

After completing the seminar requirement, Lin submitted her design to the national competition, and the jury selected it as the winner. Although the choice occasioned a bitter debate, in the course of which race and gender were raised as objections to Lin's selection, the *Memorial* was in fact built according to Lin's original design. It was a radical innovation in memorial architecture, for its non-representational form owed a greater debt to Minimalist sculpture than to any previous memorials. In spite of the simplicity of its form, the *Memorial* incorporated a number of symbolic meanings. So for example Lin made one of its walls point to the Washington Monument, and the other to the Lincoln Memorial, thus creating sight lines that symbolically unify the country's past and present. The black of the *Memorial's* granite is the color of mourning. And instead of the traditional vertical form with which many memorials

triumphantly dominate the landscape, the horizontality of the *Memorial*, embedded in the ground, suggests a humbler commemoration of the soldiers who died in a war that was not a triumph.

The *Memorial* was dedicated in the fall of 1982, just 18 months after Lin graduated from college. It quickly became recognized as a moving tribute to the soldiers who had died in Vietnam, and at the age of 22 Lin had become a famous architect. In a memoir published in 2000, she confessed that "I used to dread it whenever some large-scale disaster would happen because I inevitably would get a fax about whether I could design a memorial to... which I would politely decline."[71] Although Lin has now executed commissions from such institutions as the University of Michigan, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and even her alma mater, Yale, none of these works appears in the textbooks surveyed for this study. Lin's first significant project dominates perceptions of her work, just as it dominates the current understanding of memorial architecture. So for example when the eight final designs under consideration for the memorial to the victims of the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center were announced by the five-member jury - of which Lin was a member - the *New Yorker*'s architecture critic explained the disappointment of both critics and the public by observing that "in the post - Vietnam-memorial age, we may have come to expect too much of a memorial... Lin's Vietnam memorial set the bar very high."[72]

The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* "was born of an instantaneous idea to cut open the earth." Its sudden origin was no more accidental than the radical innovation it embodied, or the fact that it was produced by a college student with no professional experience as an architect. All of these can be seen as consequences of Lin's conceptual approach to her enterprise: "In my art, a simple clear idea or moment of inspiration is the soul of the piece."[73]

Conclusion

There are many fewer one-hit wonders in the visual arts than in popular music. Yet this study has shown that one-hit wonders have played a significant role in modern art, and that it is useful to consider them as a group. The 13 artists considered here may not represent all the significant one-hit wonders of the modern era, but it is unlikely that there are many more cases of comparable importance, and it is even more unlikely that any additional cases would significantly change the basic profile that emerges from this survey.

The 13 artists examined here were motivated by a variety of goals. Some were motivated by social concerns, ranging from protests against injustices to the pursuit of better forms of government; the three architects were concerned with creating more efficient public and private buildings; and some had more purely artistic goals. But regardless of their specific motivations, all 13 worked conceptually: their innovations expressed ideas, often by applying general principles, and many had expressly symbolic aims. The painters in the group generally planned their works carefully, and executed them methodically.

For conceptual artists, creative life clearly does not begin at 40. Of the 13 artists considered here, only Judy Chicago had not completed her masterwork before celebrating her 40th birthday, and she finished her *Dinner Party* before she reached 41. Five of the 13 made their greatest works before the age of 30, and three produced their hits by the age of 25.

One of the most puzzling features of the careers of conceptual innovators in general is the decline in their creativity that often begins at a surprisingly early age. I believe that a principal reason for this is the loss of clarity that occurs as the accumulation of professional experience makes them increasingly aware of the complexity of their disciplines, and progressively robs

them of the ability to formulate bold and simple new approaches. Although conceptual

innovators may continue to innovate as they grow older, there is a tendency for their innovations

to become narrower in scope and application as their awareness of the complexity of their

disciplines increases. The evidence of the one-hit wonders is suggestive in this context. Three of

the very simplest ideas in this sample - Sérusier's painting *The Talisman*, Oppenheim's design of

Luncheon in Fur, and Lin's design of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* - were produced by the

three youngest innovators in the group. In contrast, one of the most complex projects, Chicago's

Dinner Party, was produced by the oldest innovator in the sample. *The Talisman* was produced

in one morning, while both the *Luncheon* and the *Memorial* were virtually fully designed in a

single moment of inspiration, whereas the idea of the *Dinner Party* required extended adaptation

and change before taking its final form.

Although the phenomenon of the one-hit wonder has not received systematic study, it also

appears to exist in other intellectual activities. A number of writers, for example, have produced

one important novel that dominates the other works they have written: even a partial list might

include Mary Shelley, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Bram Stoker, Margaret Mitchell, Henry Roth,

Malcolm Lowry, William Burroughs, Ralph Ellison, J. D. Salinger, Jack Kerouac, and Joseph

Heller. We are aware that these writers were one-hit wonders because of the large amount of

critical attention that is devoted to novels and novelists, but the same phenomenon probably also

exists in the other arts, and in most, if not all, scholarly disciplines.[74]

The analysis used in this study appears to have several implications for the phenomenon

of the one-hit wonder wherever it occurs. As is the case for the 13 artists discussed above, it

appears that practitioners of any discipline who produce a single isolated masterpiece are likely

to be conceptual innovators, theorists who think and work deductively, rather than experimental innovators, empiricists who work inductively. And related to this prediction is a second: as is also the case for the artists studied here, one-hit wonders in all disciplines are likely to execute their single major work early in their careers.

In view of the enormous importance of innovation, it is to be hoped that the success of the analysis used in this study in understanding the conceptual basis of the achievements of one-hit wonders in the visual arts will prompt more scholars to examine this phenomenon in other disciplines. One result may be convincing explanations of career patterns of creativity that have previously been considered immune to systematic analysis. Another, even greater result may be an improved understanding of human creativity in general, that may lead to an ability to increase individual creativity. Why do some conceptual innovators make a single, early innovation, and fail to produce any other significant work, while others go on to produce a series of important contributions? The answer to this question may now be within reach, through the use of case studies like the ones presented above, with research projects designed to compare the one-hit wonders with their peers who make a number of innovations.

In the past, economists have generally been unwilling to study the careers of individuals, just as humanists have been unwilling to carry out systematic comparisons of the careers of significant numbers of individuals. Yet now the possibility of increasing the contributions of some of the most innovative members of our society, through knowledge gained from systematic studies of limited numbers of innovators, may be sufficiently great to induce both economists and humanists to overcome whatever methodological objections have prevented these studies in the past, and to expand their research agenda to the systematic study of the careers of innovators.

Footnotes

1.   Greenberg 1993, p. 118.

2.   E. g. see Galenson 2002a, 2002b.

3.   E. g. see Galenson 2004b.

4.   Rosenblum and Janson 1984, pp. 120-21; Eisenman 1994, pp. 64-66; Crow 1995, pp. 288-92.

5.   Berger 1955, p. 18.

6.   Berger 1955, pp. 17, 26, 79.

7.   Clark 1973, p. 185.

8.   Friedlaender 1952, pp. 101-02.

9.   Crow 1995, p. 194; Berger 1955, p. 55.

10.   Clark 1973, p. 177.

11.   Eisenman 1994, p. 66.

12.   Porterfield 1998, pp. 47-55.

13.   Porterfield 1998, pp. 56-61; Rosenblum and Janson 1984, pp. 70-71.

14.   Crow 1995, p. 244.

15.   Clark 1973, p. 178.

16.   For a listing see Varnedoe 1987, pp. 203-04.

17.   Galenson 2004a.

18.   Varnedoe 1987, p. 188.

19.   Varnedoe 1987, Chapters 3-4.

20.   Varnedoe 1987, pp. 88-95.

21.   Chipp 1968, p. 101.

22.   Chipp 1968, p. 102.

23.   Mauner 1967, pp. 5, 31.

24.   Chipp 1968, p. 94.

25.   Mauner 1967, p. 38.

26.   Chipp 1968, p. 101.

27.   Chipp 1968, p. 97; Denis 1920, p. 4.

28.   Denis, 1920 p. 147.

29.   The *Monument* could have been treated as a building here, and compared to works by architects. Yet because of Tatlin's training as a sculptor, and the impracticality of his design as a building, the *Monument* is treated as a sculptor.

30.   Milner 1983, Chapter 8.

31.   Milner 1983, p. 170.

32.   Hughes 1982, p. 92.

33.   Milner 1983, Chapters 9-10.

34.   Curiger 1989, pp. 20-21.

35.   Curiger 1989, p. 39.

36.   Curiger 1989, pp. 134-263.

37.   Hughes 1982, p. 243.

38.   Dennis 1986, pp. 67-78.

39.   Dennis 1986, p. 75.

40.   Dennis 1986, p. 80.

41.   Dennis 1986, pp. 80-85.

42.   Corn 1983, pp. 129-33.

43.   Dennis 1986, p. 222.

44. Corn 1983, p. 33.

45. Livingstone 1990, pp. 33-36.

46. Morphet 1992, p. 149; Hamilton 1982, pp. 22-24.

47. Livingstone 1990, p. 36.

48. Livingstone 1990. p. 34.

49. Stangos 1994, p. 230.

50. Livingstone 1990, p. 33.

51. Cruickshank 2000, p. 290; Donin 1982, p. 9.

52. Donin 1982, p. 23.

53. Cruickshank 2000, p. 290.

54. Cruickshank 2000, p. 290; Donin 1982, p. 23.

55. Donin 1982, p. 27.

56. E.g. Doordan 2002, p. 206; Moffett, Fazio, and Wodehouse 2004, p. 541; Scully 2002, pp. 298-99.

57. The Red-Blue Chair is illustrated in a number of textbooks of architecture. Those illustrations are not tabulated in Table 13 because they do not involve the design of buildings.

58. Brown 1958, pp. 21, 29, 41.

59. Banham 1975, p. 68.

60. Chicago 1979, pp. 11-12.

61. Chicago 1979, p. 53.

62. Chicago 1979, p. 8.

63. Chicago 1979, pp. 13-15.

64. Sackler 2002, pp. 118-19.

65. Chicago 1996, pp. 57, 78.

66.   Galenson 2003, Table 3.

67.   Munro 2000, p. 481.

68.   Lin 2000, p. 4:08.

69.   Munro 2000, p. 482.

70.   Lin 2000, pp. 4:10-11.

71.   Lin 2000, p. 12:03.

72.   Goldberg 2003, p. 50.

73.   Lin 2000, pp. 4:44-45.

74.   One-hit wonders have not been systematically studied in other arts, or in academic disciplines, but the existence of both conceptual and experimental innovators has been documented in arts other than painting - e.g. see Galenson 2004b - and in economics - see Galenson and Weinberg 2004. The prediction in the text is based on the proposition that among conceptual innovators in any intellectual activity there are likely to be some who produce a single important innovation, generally early in their careers, that is not followed by other contributions of comparable importance.

Table 1: Total Illustrations of Paintings by Five Romantic Artists in 27 Textbooks

Artist	Illustrations
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867)	61
Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863)	58
Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)	47
Théodore Géricault (1791-1824)	44
Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835)	17

Source: Hamilton 1970; Cleaver 1972; Picon 1974; Ruskin 1974; Spencer 1975; Cornell 1983; Britsch and Britsch 1984; Rosenblum and Janson 1984; Sporre 1984; Feldman 1985; Hartt 1989; Wood, Cole and Gealt 1989; de la Croix, Tansey, and Kirkpatrick 1991; Sprocatti 1992; Strickland and Boswell 1992; Adams 1994; Eisenman 1994; Janson and Janson 1995; Stokstad 1995; Grieder 1996; Norman 1997; Wilkins, Schultz, and Linduff 1997; Freeman 1998; Gebhardt 1998; Gilbert 1998; Honour and Fleming 1999; Kemp 2000.

Table 2: Single Most Frequently Reproduced Painting by Each of Artists Listed in Table 1

Artist, painting	Illustrations
Géricault, *The Raft of the Medusa*, 1819	22
Delacroix, *The Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827	14
Ingres, *Large Odalisque*, 1814	11
Turner, *Rain, Steam, and Speed - The Great Western Railway*, 1844	11
Gros, *Napoleon in the Plague House of Jaffa*, 1804	11

Source: see Table 1

Table 3: Total Illustrations of Works by Four Late Nineteenth-Century Painters in 36 Textbooks

Artist	Illustrations
Paul Cézanne (1839-1906)	144
Edgar Degas (1834-1917)	114
Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)	78
Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894)	18

Source: Jensen 2004, Table 2.

Table 4: Single Most Frequently Reproduced Work by Each of Artists Listed in Table 3

Artist, title	Illustrations
Caillebotte, *Paris Street; Rainy Weather*, 1877	11
Cézanne, *The Large Bathers*, 1906	10
Degas, *Little Dancer of Fourteen*, 1881	10
Renoir, *The Boating Party*, 1881	10

Source: Jensen 2004, Table 3.

Table 5: Total Illustrations of Paintings by Five Late Nineteenth-Century Painters in 31
Textbooks

Artist	Illustrations
Paul Cézanne (1839-1906)	120
Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)	101
Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)	75
Edgar Degas (1834-1917)	74
Paul Sérusier (1863-1927)	14

Source: Galenson 2002a, pp. 83-85.

Table 6: Single Most Frequently Reproduced Painting by Each of Artists Listed in Table 3

Artist, painting	Illustrations
Sérusier, *Le Bois d'Amour (The Talisman)*, 1888	11
Cézanne, *The Large Bathers*, 1906	9
Renoir, *Le Moulin de la Galette*, 1876	9
van Gogh, *Père Tanguy*, 1887	7
Degas, *L'Absinthe*, 1876	5

Source: see Table 5.

Table 7: Total Illustrations of Sculptures by Six Modern Sculptors in 25 Textbooks

Sculptor	Illustrations
Auguste Rodin (1840-1917)	65
Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957)	51
Alberto Giacometti (1901-66)	39
Henry Moore (1898-1986)	34
Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1956)	19
Meret Oppenheim (1913-85)	7

Source: Hughes 1982; Cornell 1983; Britsch and Britsch 1984; Sporre 1984; Feldman 1985; Arnason and Wheeler 1986; Honour and Fleming 1986; Hartt 1989; Wood, Cole, and Gealt 1989; Varnedoe 1990; de la Croix, Tansey, and Kirkpatrick 1991; Hunter and Jacobus 1992; Sprocatti 1992; Strickland and Boswell 1992; Adams 1994; Fleming 1995; Stokstad 1995; Wilkins, Schultz, and Linduff 1997; Freeman 1998; Gilbert 1998; Bocola 1999; Britt 1999; Bell 2000; Kemp 2000; Dempsey 2002.

Table 8: Single Most Frequently reproduced Sculpture by Each of Artists Listed in Table 7

Sculptor, title	Illustrations
Tatlin, *Monument to the Third International*, 1920	15
Rodin, *Monument to Balzac*, 1898	12
Brancusi, *Bird in Space*, 1928	7
Oppenheim, *Le Déjeuner en fourrure*, 1936	7
Moore, *Reclining Figure*, 1939	5
Giacometti, *Man Pointing*, 1947	4
Giacometti, *City Square*, 1948	4

Source: see Table 7

Table 9: Total Illustrations of Paintings by Five American Artists in 49 Textbooks

Artist	Illustrations
Edward Hopper (1882-1967)	67
Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)	61
Charles Sheeler (1883-1965)	53
Stuart Davis (1894-1964)	52
Grant Wood (1892-1942)	36

Source: Haftmann 1965; Green 1966; McLanathan 1968; Novak 1969; Rose 1969; Hamilton 1970; McCoubrey et. al. 1970; Mendelowitz 1970; Myron and Sundell 1971; Cleaver 1972; McLanathan 1973; Picon 1974; Spencer 1975; Davidson 1979; Taylor 1979; Lynton 1980; Russell 1981; Hughes 1982; Britsch and Britsch 1984; Sporre 1984; Arnason and Wheeler 1986; Honour and Fleming 1986; Hartt 1989; Wood, Cole, and Gealt 1989; de la Croix, Tansey, and Kirkpatrick 1991; Tamplin 1991; Hunter and Jacobus 1992; Strickland 1992; Silver 1993; Adams 1994; Craven 1994; Fleming 1995; Stokstad 1995; Baigell 1996; Hughes 1997; Lucie-Smith 1997; Wilkins, Schultz, and Linduff 1997; Gebhardt 1998; Gilbert 1998; Lucie-Smith 1999; Preble, Preble, and Frank 1999; Tobler 1999; Kemp 2000; McCoubrey 2000; Prendeville 2000; Bjelajac 2001; Dempsey 2002; Doss 2002; Pohl 2002.

Table 10: Single Most Frequently Reproduced Painting by Each of Artists Listed in Table 9

Artist, painting	Illustrations
Wood, *American Gothic*, 1930	24
Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942	16
Sheeler, *American Landscape*, 1930	11
Davis, *Lucky Strike*, 1921	9
O'Keeffe, *Black Iris III*, 1926	9

Source: see Table 9.

Table 11: Total Illustrations of Works by Six Contemporary Painters in 36 Textbooks

Painter	Illustrations
Andy Warhol (1928-87)	68
Robert Rauschenberg (1925-)	67
Jasper Johns (1930-)	63
Roy Lichtenstein (1923-97)	54
David Hockney (1937-)	30
Richard Hamilton (1922-)	26

Source: Russell 1981; Hughes 1982; Cornell 1983; Britsch and Britsch 1984; Sporre 1984; Feldman 1985; Arnason and Wheeler 1986; Honour and Fleming 1986; Hartt 1989; Wood, Cole, and Gealt 1989; de la Croix, Tansey, and Kirkpatrick 1991; Tamplin 1991; Wheeler 1991; Hunter and Jacobus 1992; Sprocatti 1992; Strickland and Boswell 1992; Adams 1994; Stangos 1994; Wood, et. al. 1994; Janson and Janson 1995; Stokstad 1995; Dawtrey, et. al. 1996; Lucie-Smith 1997; Wilkins, Schultz, and Linduff 1997; Freeman 1998; Gebhardt 1998; Gilbert 1998; Britt 1999; Bell 2000; Hopkins 2000; Kemp 2000; Blistène 2001; Lucie-Smith 2001; Richter 2001; Dempsey 2002; Preble, Preble, and Frank 2002.

Table 12: Single Most Frequently Reproduced Work by Each of Artists Listed in Table 11

Artist, title	Illustrations
Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, 1956	21
Rauschenberg, *Monogram*, 1959	13
Lichtenstein, *Whaam!*, 1963	12
Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe Diptych*, 1962	11
Johns, *Flag*, 1955	10
Hockney, *A Bigger Splash*, 1967	8

Source: see Table 11.

Table 13: Total Illustrations of Buildings by Seven Modern Architects in 24 Textbooks

Architect	Illustrations
Le Corbusier (1887-1965)	94
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969)	71
Walter Gropius (1883-1969)	48
Renzo Piano (1937-)	35
Louis Kahn (1901-74)	32
Richard Rogers (1933-)	32
Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964)	17

Source: de la Croix, Tansey, and Kirkpatrick 1991; Tamplin 1991; Hunter and Jacobus 1992; Kulterman 1993; Adams 1994; Fleming 1995; Janson and Janson 1995; Stokstad 1995; Cruickshank 1996; Grieder 1996; Lucie-Smith 1997; Wilkins, Schultz, and Linduff 1997; Gilbert 1998; Glancey 1998; Theil-Siling 1998; Sutton 1999; Cruickshank 2000; Kemp 2000; Watkin 2000; Trachtenberg and Hyman 2001; Doordan 2002; Glancey 2003; Moffett, Fazio, and Woodhouse 2004; Sennott 2004.

Table 14: Single Most Frequently Reproduced Building by Each of Architects Listed in Table 13

Architect, Building	Illustrations
Piano and Rogers, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 1971-77	22
Gropius, Bauhaus, Dessau, Germany, 1926	20
Le Corbusier, Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, France 1950-54	19
Mies van der Rohe, Seagram Building, New York, 1958	18
Rietveld, Rietveld Schröder House, Utrecht, 1924	16
Kahn, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, 1966-72	7
Kahn, Jonas Salk Institute for Biological Sciences, La Jolla, 1959-65	7

Source: see Table 13.

Table 15: Total Illustrations of Works by Eight Contemporary American Artists in 40 Textbooks

Artist	Illustrations
Jasper Johns (1930-)	108
Frank Stella (1936-)	73
Cindy Sherman (1954-)	46
Richard Serra (1939-)	44
Bruce Nauman (1941-)	43
Eva Hesse (1936-70)	36
Judy Chicago (1939-)	21
Maya Lin (1960-)	16

Source: Galenson 2003, Table 2.

Table 16: Single Most Frequently Reproduced Work by Each of Artists Listed in Table 15

Artist, title	Illustrations
Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1979	19
Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, 1982	16
Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981	16
Johns, *Three Flags*, 1958	13
Nauman, *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, 1970	8
Hesse, *Hang-Up*, 1966	7
Stella, *Die Fahne Hoch*, 1959	7
Sherman, *Untitled Film Still*, 1979	6

Source: Galenson 2003, Table 3.

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