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INNOVATORS: FILMMAKERS

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ABSTRACT

John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock were experimental filmmakers: both believed images were more important to movies than words, and considered movies a form of entertainment. Their styles developed gradually over long careers, and both made the films that are generally considered their greatest during their late 50s and 60s. In contrast, Orson Welles and Jean-Luc Godard were conceptual filmmakers: both believed words were more important to their films than images, and both wanted to use film to educate their audiences. Their greatest innovations came in their first films, as Welles made the revolutionary Citizen Kane when he was 26, and Godard made the equally revolutionary Breathless when he was 30. Film thus provides yet another example of an art in which the most important practitioners have had radically different goals and methods, and have followed sharply contrasting life cycles of creativity.

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The division between experimental and conceptual filmmakers can be traced back to the earliest practitioners of the new art. A short history of French film began with the observation that "Louis Lumière (1864-1948) has as strong a claim as anyone to the title of inventor of the cinema." Shortly thereafter, the volume continued:

> The second great figure in the French cinema, Georges Méliès (1861-1938), forms such a striking contrast to Lumière that their names are often used to define two major tendencies in the cinema. Where Lumière is concerned to portray life as it really is, Méliès deals with fantasy and imagination. He replaced his predecessor's sober concern for everyday reality with his own taste for spectacle.[1]

Similarly, Gerald Mast and Bruce Kawin later wrote that

> If Lumière documented the world, Méliès transformed it. If Lumière established that the camera could record a factual record of an event, Méliès proved that the camera could create an event that never happened. Lumière set the pattern for realism; Méliès opened the door to the impossible. Méliès gave the cinema the tools of fantasy, illusion, and distortion.[2]

Interestingly, when the conceptual Orson Welles made a genealogical chart to trace the major branches of cinema, he identified as his ancestors Méliès and two later great conceptual directors, D.W. Griffith and Sergei Eisenstein.[3]

A number of tendencies have separated directors who pursued reality from those who favored fantasy and imagination. Since the introduction of sound in the 1920s, the relative importance of images and words has become one of these. Experimental directors have been more likely to believe that film should be primarily a visual art. In contrast, conceptual directors tend to privilege words, because language is a more precise means of expressing ideas and emotions.

John Ford (1894-1973)

> Pictures, not words, should tell the story.
>
> John Ford[4]

John Martin Feeney was born in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, the son of immigrants from County Galway, Ireland. Over the years he would convince more than a few interviewers that he had been baptized Sean Aloysius O'Fearna, though the records of St. Dominic's Church in Portland reveal that to have been, in the words of a biographer, "a load of Fordian blarney."[5] Yet he never lost his pride in his Irish heritage, or the identification with the less privileged that came from his childhood as the son of an immigrant saloonkeeper. Late in his life, he declared, "I am of the proletariat. My people were peasants." But he also never lost the belief in the American dream that he gained from his family's experience, as he continued, "They came here, were educated. They served this country well. I love America"[6]

As a boy, John was fascinated by nickelodeons, and the glamour of the movies. After graduating from high school, instead of attending college he went to Hollywood, where his older brother Francis, who had earlier run off to join the circus, had become a successful movie actor and director. Francis had taken the surname Ford, and John followed him. Sponsored by his brother, John worked in a number of different jobs, including stuntman, actor, property man, cameraman, and assistant director. In 1917, just three years after his arrival in Hollywood, Ford began directing his own films – mostly low-budget Westerns, starring Harry Carey.

Ford and Carey became good friends, and made more than two dozen Westerns together during the next five years. Their movies were based on a number of elements that Ford would develop into a distinctive experimental style. He preferred images to words: "Scripts are dialogue, and I don't like all that *talk*. I've always tried to get things across visually."[7] Action was the best way to accomplish this: "When a motion picture is at its best, it is long on action and short on dialogue. When it tells its story and reveals its characters in a series of simple, beautiful, active pictures, and does it with as little talk as possible, then the motion picture medium is being

used to its fullest advantage." His favorite genre best fitted this approach: "I don't know any subject on earth better suited to such a presentation than a Western."[8] He always preferred to leave the studio, and film outdoors in rugged and picturesque settings; the dramatic buttes and mesas of Monument Valley later became important in creating atmosphere in his films, and Ford believed "the real star of my Westerns has always been the land."[9] Ford defined technique as "what you don't see on the screen," and he disliked any method that called attention to itself, such as camera movement: "It says, 'This is a motion picture. This isn't real.' I like to have the audience feel that this is the real thing. I don't like to have the audience interested in the camera."[10] Alfred Hitchcock paid tribute to Ford's success in this regard: "A John Ford picture was a visual gratification – his method of shooting, eloquent in its clarity and apparent simplicity."[11]

What mattered most to Ford was the actors: "After all, you've got to tell your story through the people who portray it. You can have a weak, utterly bad script – and a good cast will turn it into a good picture."[12] He used many of the same actors in one film after another: "Well, it's natural to use people whose capabilities one knows and also they know my method of work."[13] The critic and director Peter Bogdanovich observed that this was just one of the elements of continuity in Ford's films: "Every Ford movie is filled with reverberations from another – which makes his use of the same players from year to year, decade to decade, so much more than just building 'a stock company' – and one film of his cannot really be looked at as separate from the rest."[14]

As early as 1920, an interviewer reported that "'In everything I want realism' is Ford's continual cry," and this remained central to his films; Orson Welles observed that "With Ford at his best, you feel that the movie has lived and breathed in a real world."[15] Striking testimony to

Ford's realism came from the novelist John Steinbeck. In 1938, Steinbeck travelled through migrant camps in California, and the next year he published *The Grapes of Wrath* to dramatize the tragedy of the victims of the Dust Bowl. When the novel became a best seller, the producer Darryl Zanuck purchased the film rights, and offered it to Ford, who accepted: "The whole thing appealed to me – being about simple people – and the story was similar to the famine in Ireland."[16] Steinbeck was apprehensive, fearing a Hollywood studio would weaken the novel's harsh indictment of the exploitation of the migrants in California. Yet when he was given a pre-release screening in December, 1939, he wrote to his agent in amazement, describing the film as "a hard, straight picture in which the actors are submerged so completely that it looks and feels like a documentary film and certainly it has a hard, truthful ring."[17]

Contemporaries recognized that Ford's work gained in power as he grew older. So for example he won Oscars as best director for *The Informer*, which he made at the age of 41, *The Grapes of Wrath* (46), *How Green Was My Valley* (47), and *The Quiet Man* (58). Conspicuously absent from this list, however, were Ford's Westerns. He considered these his greatest achievement – two years before his death he declared that "I want to be remembered as 'John Ford – a guy that made Westerns'" — but he believed they were unfairly slighted by critics out of snobbery.[18] Time has corrected this injustice. In a 2002 poll taken by *Sight and Sound*, the journal of the British Film Institute, in which an international panel of critics were each asked to list the 10 best movies ever made, the three of Ford's films that received the most votes were all Westerns: *The Searchers* ranked first, followed in order by *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* and *Stagecoach*.[19] These were made when Ford was 62, 68, and 45, respectively, and all three starred John Wayne.

These three great Ford Westerns shared several themes that reflected Ford's beliefs about American history. In each, civilization ultimately triumphed over chaos and lawlessness. Yet in no case was this a simple tale of conquest of good over evil. In each instance the victory of civilization was made possible only by the actions of a "good bad man" – played by Wayne – who violated the rules of civilized society, taking the law into his own hands, to eliminate an evil that stood in the way of the establishment of a society based on law. And in each case, Wayne's actions disqualified him from a place in the society he had brought into existence: ironically, his very conquest of anarchy had made his own values obsolete, and unacceptable, in a civilized world.[20]

Ford's great Westerns were thus not simple morality tales, for in each some degree of irony undercut the simple opposition between good and evil. This reflected Ford's belief that "Westerns have been most inaccurate in overglamorizing and overdramatizing the heroes and villains of the period . . . [I]t is true that much of the conversion to law and order was accomplished by reformed criminals . . . It is equally wrong for the heroes to have been made out to be pure Sir Galahads in so many cases, which is nonsense."[21] Nonetheless, in Ford's last major reflection on the West, a frontier newspaper editor chose to suppress the truth of the heroism and magnanimity of John Wayne's good bad man, and in so doing to perpetuate the lie by which Wayne had allowed Jimmy Stewart to take the credit, and reap the rewards, for being the man who had civilized his territory by killing the outlaw Liberty Valance. The movie was presented as a flashback: Stewart had returned from Washington, D.C., where he was a senator, for the funeral of Wayne, who had died in obscurity and poverty. After listening to Stewart's retrospective account of the true story, the editor tore up the notes of Stewart's confession, famously declaring "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."[22] Ford explained that he

agreed with the editor's decision, "because it's good for the country. We've had a lot of people who were supposed to be great heroes, and you know damn well they weren't. But it's good for the country to have heroes to look up to."[23] Yet the irony of Ford's statement in defense of myth lies in the fact that his film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* told precisely the story the editor had chosen to suppress. Confronted with the judgment that his obvious sympathy for Wayne's character over Stewart's reflected a tendency for his Westerns to have become sadder over time, Ford grudgingly conceded, "Possibly – I don't know – I'm not a psychologist . . . Maybe I'm getting older."[24]

The great popularity of Ford's films spread his influence widely into popular culture. In one example, Buddy Holly saw *The Searchers* in Lubbock, Texas, in 1956, and seized on the ironic catch phrase of John Wayne's character as the title for a new song. *That'll Be the Day* became the breakthrough hit for Buddy Holly and the Crickets, as it rose to number one in both the US and Britain the following year.[25] Ford's simple and powerful visual technique influenced many younger movie directors. So for example Akira Kurosawa openly acknowledged Ford as the greatest influence on his own movies, and Orson Welles declared that at the beginning of his film career, *Stagecoach* was his "movie textbook."[26] Welles recalled that "Every night for more than a month, I would screen [*Stagecoach*] with a different technician from RKO and ask him questions all through the movie."[27] What Welles wanted was not a message, but a language: "I didn't need to learn from somebody who had something to say, but from somebody who would show me how to say what I had in mind; and John Ford is perfect for that."[28] Later filmmakers responded not only to Ford's technique, but also to the irony and darkness of his late Westerns. So for example Martin Scorsese included a clip from *The Searchers* in *Mean Streets* (1973), and the plot of *Taxi Driver* (1976) parallels that of *The Searchers*, as Robert DeNiro's obsessional

quest to destroy the pimp who corrupted a young girl is a contemporary urban version of John Wayne's search for the Comanche chief who massacred his brother's family and kidnapped his niece.[29] The experimental Scorsese wanted to capture the look and feel of Times Square as authentically as his predecessor had captured Monument Valley; thus Scorsese declared that "John Ford made Westerns. We make street movies."[30]

Ford disdained pretension, and characteristically he told Bogdanovich that "I have never thought about what I was doing in terms of art . . . To me, it was always a job of work – which I enjoyed immensely – and that's it."[31] Shortly before his death, he remarked that "I do think there is an art to the making of a motion picture. There are some great artists in the business. I am not one of them."[32] The critic and director François Truffaut understood Ford's humility, writing that "Ford was an artist who never said the word 'art.'" Truffaut explained his admiration for Ford's experimental art: "His camera is invisible; his staging is perfect; he maintains a smoothness of surface in which no scene is allowed to become more important than any other. Such mastery is possible only after one has made an enormous number of films."[33]

Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980)

> It is no use telling people; they have got to SEE.
>
> Alfred Hitchcock[34]

Growing up in east London, Alfred Hitchcock loved the theater and movies. He was also an avid reader, and at 16 he found the works of Edgar Allan Poe. He never forgot a discovery he made while reading "The Murders in the Rue Morgue": "Fear, you see, is a feeling that people like to feel, when they are certain of being in safety." This had a lasting effect on him:

> Without wanting to seem immodest, I can't help but compare what I try to put in my films with what Poe put in his stories: a perfectly unbelievable story recounted to readers with such a hallucinatory logic that one has the impression that this

> same story can happen to you tomorrow. And that's the rule of the game if one wants the reader or spectator to subconsciously substitute himself for the hero.[35]

Hitchcock got a job in the movie industry in 1920, when a company in London hired him to design title-cards for silent movies. He worked his way up through a series of technical jobs, learning all the details of how movies were made, and by 1925 he had begun directing. In 1929 he made the first English film with sound. During the next decade he directed a number of popular thrillers, and he came to be considered the leading director in England. In 1939 he moved to Hollywood, where he became an immediate success, as his first American film, *Rebecca*, won an Oscar for best movie. He continued to make movies in Hollywood for the rest of his life. In 1972, he explained his devotion to the industry, in terms that echoed his early excitement: "I've always believed in film as the newest art of the twentieth century because of its ability to communicate with the mass audiences of the world."[36]

Throughout his career, Hitchcock presented a consistent vision of his goals and philosophy. Late in his life, he stressed that "you have to remember that as well as being a creative person I am a very technical person. The actual exercise of technique is very important to me."[37] Skillful technique was to be used to accomplish the goal of "getting audiences on the edge of their seats" through the creation of suspense.[38] This required involving the audience: "Watching a well-made film, we don't sit by as spectators; we participate."[39]

Even after the introduction of sound, Hitchcock maintained that "films must still be primarily a medium for telling a story in pictures."[40] Accordingly, he praised montage – the juxtaposition of images to create emotions or ideas – as "pure film," and scoffed at "photographs of people talking" as irrelevant to film.[41] Hitchcock believed that "in all artistic domains we attempt to create an emotion. The importance of a work of art, no matter what sort, is to evoke a reaction."[42] The story of a film was not of primary importance, for in his opinion the power of

movies – what made them most effective in evoking a reaction, and creating emotion – was "the manner and style of telling the story." This was the director's job: "what gives an effect of life to a picture [is] the feeling that when you see it on the screen you are watching something that has been conceived and brought to birth directly in visual terms."[43] Hitchcock considered this his strength: "my craft is that I handle the camera."[44]

Hitchcock valued images over words, and form over content. Tellingly, the great experimental director compared himself to a great experimental painter: "Cézanne is one of the precursors of the modern movement in art and . . . the most important thing for him was to translate visual sensations. Similarly for me, when I take on a screenplay I feel the same needs."[45] This parallel explained Hitchcock's exasperation at the frequent criticism of his films for their unimportant subjects, which he likened to "looking at a painting of a still life, say by Cézanne, and wondering whether the apples on the plate are sweet or sour. Who cares? It's the way they're painted."[46]

Over time, Hitchcock developed a set of practices that collectively constituted his trademark style. He often spoke of "building up a picture," and these components were effectively fitted together to achieve his primary goal of creating suspense. He believed that the best technique was unobtrusive – "beauty, the virtuosity of the camera, everything must be sacrificed or compromised when it gets in the way of a story."[47] He frequently used "subjective treatment" – close-ups of a character and point-of-view shots of what the character saw – to increase the audience's identification with the character.[48] He favored simple, clear narratives that "hold the attention of any audience and won't puzzle them."[49] His films often featured the pursuit of an innocent man, who was falsely accused, because he believed it gave the audience a greater sense of danger: "It's easier for them to identify with him than with a guilty man on the

run."[50] He sought realism in behavior – "When characters are unbelievable you never get real suspense" – and in settings – "looking so natural that the audience gets involved and believes, for the time being, what's going on up there on the screen."[51]

Hitchcock considered that "the whole art of the motion picture is a succession of composed images, rapidly going through a machine," and his virtuosity in creating these sequences produced many individual scenes famous for their visual impact. Prominent examples include Cary Grant being chased across a Midwestern prairie by a crop-dusting plane in *North by Northwest*, Jimmy Stewart struggling to control his vision – and mind – in the staircase of a tower in *Vertigo*, and Janet Leigh being stabbed and killed in the shower in *Psycho*.[52] Leigh's murder occupied only 45 seconds in the completed film, but used 78 separate cuts, and required seven days to film.[53] (Hitchcock was proud that his bold use of montage in the scene created an illusion so vivid that it actually made audiences scream, and for this called *Psycho* "one of the most cinematic pictures I've ever made."[54]) The tower sequence in *Vertigo*, in which Hitchcock created a visual representation of dizziness by having a camera simultaneously track away from the staircase and zoom in on it, drew on years of deliberation:

> I always remember one night at the Chelsea Arts Ball at Albert Hall in London when I got terribly drunk and I had the sensation that everything was going far away from me. I tried to get that into *Rebecca*, but they couldn't do it . . . I thought about the problem for fifteen years. By the time we got to *Vertigo*, we solved it by using the dolly and zoom simultaneously.

When he was told that the heavy machinery needed to lift the camera at the top of the stairs would cost $50,000, Hitchcock pointed out that since there were no characters in the scene, they could use a model of the stairway, laid on its side. The scene was filmed in this way, with the camera tracking on the ground, at a cost of less than $20,000.[55]

For much of his career, most critics regarded Hitchcock as a commercially successful director whose work had no artistic merit; in a typical judgment, in 1949 the English critic and director Lindsay Anderson remarked that "Hitchcock has never been a 'serious' director. His films are interesting neither for their ideas nor for their characters."[56] This perception changed during the 1950s, with the reevaluation of Hitchcock by a group of young French critics who later became important directors. François Truffaut named Hitchcock as a filmmaker *auteur*, whose work was worthy of serious artistic analysis.[57] In 1957, Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol published a monograph on Hitchcock's films, in which they called him "one of the greatest inventors of form in the entire history of cinema."[58] Jean-Luc Godard later eliminated the qualification, calling Hitchcock "the greatest creator of forms of the twentieth century."[59]

Truffaut identified a key reason for Hitchcock's importance, noting that "In Hitchcock's work a film-maker is bound to find the answer to many of his own problems, including the most fundamental question of all: how to express oneself by purely visual means."[60] The instructional value of his films helped to spread Hitchcock's influence from Paris to Hollywood. So for example a childhood friend of Steven Spielberg recalled that the director the young Spielberg most revered was Hitchcock, whom he called "the Master" in recognition of his technical excellence. Yet Spielberg also admired Hitchcock for his success in reaching a mass audience: "[Spielberg] said, 'The movies reach out and grab you.' That's what he thought was great about Alfred Hitchcock."[61] Martin Scorsese recalled that *Vertigo* had been an early inspiration to him and many of his contemporaries: "For such a personal work with such a uniquely disturbing vision of the world to come out of the studio system when it did [1958] was not just unusual – it was nearly unthinkable."[62] In 2004, a panel of experts polled by *Movie Maker* magazine ranked

Hitchcock as the most influential director in history. The magazine observed that Hitchcock was "inarguably the most imitated motion picture artist of all time."[63]

In the 2002 *Sight and Sound* poll of critics, the Hitchcock film that received the most votes was *Vertigo*, with *Psycho* ranked second. Hitchcock directed these films at the ages of 59 and 61, respectively. He would not have been surprised at the appreciation of his late work, for he considered his career a steady process of improvement. So in 1962 he told Truffaut that "your evolution does follow a systematic pattern of consistent amelioration from film to film. If you're not sure an idea has been properly carried out in one picture, you'll work it out in the next one." [64] In comparing the version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* he had made in England in 1934 with the second version of the same film he made in Hollywood in 1956, Hitchcock commented, "the first version is the work of a talented amateur and the second was made by a professional."[65] Hitchcock believed that "Style in directing develops slowly and naturally as it does in everything else." It could not be produced deliberately, but had to evolve from experience: "It must be the result of growth and patient experimentation with the materials of the trade, the style itself emerging eventually almost unconsciously."[66] What was true of a film was also true of a career: "It takes so long, and so much work, to achieve simplicity." [67]

Truffaut wrote of Hitchcock that "In examining his films, it was obvious that he had given more thought to the potential of his art than any of his colleagues."[68] Hitchcock entered the movie industry in its infancy, and saw it grow enormously during his five decades as a director. In 1963, he commented that "I believe we still have in our hands the most powerful instrument, cinema, that's been known." He marveled at the fact that with film, unlike any other medium, "different audiences of different nationalities can be shocked at the same moment at the same

thing." This created a unique opportunity, and carried with it a responsibility: "I enjoy the fact that we can cause, internationally, audiences to emote. And I think this is our job."[69]

Orson Welles (1915-1985)

> I know that in theory the word is secondary in cinema but the secret of my work is that everything is based on the word. I do not make silent films.
>
> Orson Welles[70]

Orson Welles joked that "The word *genius* was whispered into my ear the first thing I ever heard while I was still mewling in my crib, so it never occurred to me that I wasn't until middle age!"[71] Welles was the extremely precocious son of a prosperous family in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and his mother's desire to give him an artistic upbringing included having him make his stage debut in the Chicago Opera at the age of three. When Orson was 10, a Madison newspaper became the first to publish the epithet that would follow him throughout his life, as an article titled "Cartoonist, Actor, Poet and Only 10," referred to his "apparent genius."[72] Welles recognized that his family's encouragement had a major effect on his development: "I never heard a discouraging word for years, you see . . . And there just seemed to me no limit to what I could do."[73]

In high school Welles devoted most of his time to theater, directing as well as acting. He was not interested in college, and at 16 he set out on a walking tour of Ireland. Running low on cash, in Dublin he auditioned for the Gate Theatre, a repertory company. The theater's co-director, Michéal MacLiammóir, later wrote that Welles' audition was "wrong from beginning to end but with all the qualities of fine acting tearing their way through a chaos of inexperience." Even at first encounter, MacLiammóir saw that Welles had "some ageless and superb inner confidence that no one could blow out. That was his secret. He knew that he was precisely what he himself would have chosen to be had God consulted him on the subject at birth."[74] Welles'

first professional performance at the Gate was praised by the *New York Times* as "amazingly fine."[75] He remained there less than a year, but the Gate had a lasting influence on Welles, for his exposure to the theories of Hilton Edwards, the theater's other co-director. Edwards believed that the theater should not conceal its artifice: his directing was designed never to allow the audience to forget that they were in a *theater*, where *actors* were *performing*. As a director himself just a few years later, Welles would emulate Edwards's antinaturalistic approach to the theater, and not long thereafter he would extend Edwards' theory to a different art, and apply the same theatricality and stylization to film.[76]

By the age of 20, Welles became established in New York as one of the most successful actors on radio; he was in so many shows that he often commuted from one to another by ambulance.[77] In 1935 he joined the theater division of the Federal WPA as a director, and made an immediate sensation with the "Voodoo *Macbeth*," an all-black version of the play, staged in Harlem, with its action transposed from Scotland to Haiti. A study of Welles' early theatrical productions concluded that foremost among his qualities was his "delight in sharing not only illusion but the mechanics of illusion with his audience;" Welles himself wrote in this period that the director's job was "to make his playhouse a kind of magic trick in which something impossible comes to be."[78] Welles' growing fame as a director and actor landed him on the cover of *Time* magazine in May of 1938. Later that year, his adaptation of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* caused mass hysteria, and became perhaps the most famous of all radio broadcasts. Newspaper headlines identifying Welles as the source of a hoax that panicked America increased his celebrity, and greatly raised his value to Hollywood.[79] The next year Welles agreed to make two movies for RKO, and his contract received extensive publicity both for his large salary and for the unusual artistic freedom he would enjoy, as writer, producer, director, and actor.[80]

Welles' lucrative contract and his reputation as a boy wonder made many in Hollywood hostile to the newcomer. F. Scott Fitzgerald published a short story in *Esquire*, "Pat Hobby and Orson Welles," in which an unemployed screenwriter bitterly warned a studio executive that "Orson Welles is the biggest menace that's come to Hollywood for years. He gets a hundred and fifty grand a picture and I wouldn't be surprised if he was so radical that you had to have all new equipment and start all over again like you did with sound in 1928."[81] François Truffaut later contended that Hollywood's hostility posed a challenge: "Welles in 1939 must have felt that it was necessary to offer the public not only *a good film*, but *the* film, one that would summarize forty years of cinema while taking the opposite course to everything that had been done . . . a declaration of war on traditional cinema and a declaration of love for the medium."[82] Welles' careful preparation for *Citizen Kane* attests to his ambitious goals. So for example both his chief cameraman, Gregg Toland, and the film's composer, Bernard Herrmann, later wrote of the considerable time they were given to plan their novel contributions before filming began, contrary to standard Hollywood practice.[83]

Welles deliberately set out to create a masterpiece, and there is remarkably widespread agreement that he did — and at the age of 26 created the greatest movie ever made. So for example *Citizen Kane* has ranked first in each of the five decennial polls of film critics *Sight and Sound* has taken since 1962.[84] *Kane* also placed first in a poll taken by the American Film Institute in 1997, and again when the AFI repeated its poll 10 years later. Decades after he made *Kane*, when Welles was asked if he had been aware of creating such an important film, he replied, "I never doubted it for a single instant."[85] Despite his youth and inexperience, he gave no sign of being intimidated: shortly after arriving in Hollywood, he described the RKO studio as "the greatest railroad train a boy ever had."[86] He later recalled that he had recognized no constraints

— "I thought you could do anything with a camera, you know, that the eye and the imagination could do" — so he made radical innovations "Simply by not knowing that they were impossible, or theoretically impossible." His lack of expertise didn't faze him: "You know, the great mystery that requires 20 years doesn't exist in any field. Certainly not in a camera."[87] And he was encouraged in this attitude by Toland, one of Hollywood's best cinematographers, who assured Welles he could teach him all he needed to know in a few days, "So we spent the next weekend together and he showed me the inside of that bag of tricks, and like all good magic, the secrets are ridiculously simple."[88]

Citizen Kane startled the film world with innovations in both sight and sound. Among the most celebrated visual effects was what Toland called "human-eye focus," with wide-angle lenses that gave much greater depth of field than movies normally afforded, so action could occur simultaneously at different distances from the camera.[89] In sound, *Kane* used what Herrmann called "radio scoring" — musical bridges to foreshadow transitions — and overlapping dialogue tracks that mimicked the interruptions of real conversation.[90] Truffaut observed that these and other *Kane* trademarks, including the low camera angles that showed the action to viewers as if they were seated in the front of a theater for a play, were imported from Welles' earlier artistic activities: "Welles' thoughts as he embarked on the cinema could be summed up as follows: I'm going to make a film that will present all the advantages of radio and theatre without their disadvantages, with the result that my film will be unlike any other that has been made."[91]

One of *Kane's* most striking achievements was its powerful marriage of form and content. Jorge Luis Borges explained that the film's subject was "the discovery of the secret soul of a man," and observed that "In astonishing and endlessly varied ways, Orson Welles exhibits the fragments of the life of the man, Charles Foster Kane, and invites us to combine and reconstruct

them. Shapes of multiplicity and diversity abound in the film."[92] The film's conspicuous fragmentation of both images and sounds echoed and underscored the fragmentation of the portrait of Kane that emerged from the divergent accounts of him given by a series of different witnesses. Welles' prominent use of stage tricks was not universally applauded: detractors have criticized his technique as heavy-handed, as for example Jean-Paul Sartre contended that "all too often, in *Citizen Kane*, one has the feeling that the image is too much in love with itself . . . Just like a novel whose style keeps forcing itself into the foreground and in which we keep forgetting the characters."[93]

In tribute to *Citizen Kane*, Truffaut declared that "This film has inspired more vocations to cinema throughout the world than any other."[94] He loved the film's exuberance and the freedom of Welles' imagination, and compared the director to the film's protagonist: "When Thatcher challenges him, 'So, that's really how you think a newspaper should be run?,' the young Kane answers, 'I have absolutely no experience in running a newspaper, Mr. Thatcher. I just try out all the ideas that come into my head."[95] The scholar David Bordwell traced *Kane's* influence through the greatest conceptual movie directors of the following decades: "As the ancestor of the works of Godard, Bergman, Fellini, Bresson, and Antonioni, *Kane* is a monument in the modern cinema, the cinema of consciousness."[96] Even more simply, the conceptual Truffaut wrote in 1972 that "everything that matters in cinema since 1940 has been influenced by *Citizen Kane*."[97]

Welles relished discussing his artistic philosophy. He believed movies should make personal statements: "I have a passion for films that . . . are made of opinions, the expression of the personality and ideas of the director."[98] Directors should be artists: "A film is never really good unless the camera is an eye in the head of a poet."[99] Movies were magic: "A film is a ribbon of dreams."[100] Judging films by their visual impact alone was a mistake, "like judging a novel

only by the quality of its prose."[101] Directors should consequently control both content and form: "I don't recognize a film as being completely a man's work unless he's also its author."[102] This was the only way Welles could work: "I'm sure I can't make good films unless I also write the screenplay."[103] Language was primary: "I always begin with the dialogue. And I do not understand how one dares to write action before dialogue . . . I must know what [the characters] say before seeing them do what they do."[104] For Welles, what mattered most was concepts: "I am a man of ideas . . . above all else."[105]

The focus of virtually all analyses of Welles' career has been his failure to surpass, or equal, *Citizen Kane* in the more than four decades that remained in his life: as the critic Andrew Sarris succinctly observed, "The conventional American diagnosis of his career is decline, pure and simple."[106] Many of Welles' admirers have blamed Hollywood: *Kane* failed to make money, and Welles never again enjoyed the full support of a major studio, forcing him to take acting roles and make television commercials to raise money for his own films. Late in his life, Welles himself reflected that "I think I made essentially a mistake in staying in movies," and lamented his lost time and effort: "I've wasted a greater part of my life looking for money and trying to get along, trying to make my work from this terribly expensive paintbox which is a movie."[107]

Yet Welles did direct films of high quality after *Kane*.[108] What haunted him was that he could no longer make films that were as abundantly and conspicuously innovative. In 1960, when an interviewer asked how he had had the confidence to make *Kane* at such an early age, Welles replied, "Ignorance, ignorance, sheer ignorance — you know there's no confidence to equal it. It's only when you know something about a profession, I think, that you're timid or careful."[109] Welles claimed that directors did their best work both early and late in their lives — before thirty and after seventy — but in fact it is likely that he understood that his youthful ignorance, and with

it his boundless confidence and creativity, had been irretrievably lost to the inevitable accumulation of experience. His true feelings about old age were probably reflected in a comment he made more than once late in his life: "'Old age,' said Charles de Gaulle, 'old age is a shipwreck' — and he knew whereof he spoke."[110]

Many who knew Welles agreed with Ingrid Bergman's judgment that "it must have been a great burden for him to have made a masterpiece when he was twenty-five years old. And it must have been very hard to live up to it all those years."[111] Yet at 25 Welles had changed the cinema: as Jean-Luc Godard declared in 1963, "All of us will always owe him everything."[112]

Jean-Luc Godard (1930 -)

> To me, especially since talking pictures were invented, the film is no longer a visual art.
>
> Jean-Luc Godard[113]

In June of 1950, while registered as an anthropology student at Paris' Sorbonne, Jean-Luc Godard began to write for a small magazine, *La Gazette du cinema*, that would survive for less than a full year. Godard wrote under a pseudonym, in order not to interfere with his loftier ambition of eventually publishing a novel with a prestigious publisher.[114] Yet these articles betrayed Godard's true destiny. In a review of an obscure documentary, he declared that "At the cinema we do not think, we are thought."[115] Godard thus revealed that he had already been captured by film, because of his conviction that it could guide not only the vision of its audience, but also their thought.[116]

Godard soon joined a group of young cinephiles who became famous initially as critics for a much more successful new journal, *Cahiers du cinéma*, that was founded in 1951. Under the inspiration of the older critic André Bazin, these younger writers — notably François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Jaques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer in addition to Godard — dedicated themselves

both to improving cinema by raising the quality of criticism, and to establishing film as an art form as respectable as painting or literature. Their success was remarkable: in 1959, Godard could justly declare that “We won the day in having it acknowledged in principle that a film by Hitchcock, for example, is as important as a book by [the poet Louis] Aragon. Film *auteurs*, thanks to us, have finally entered the history of art.”[117]

Having revolutionized film criticism, in the late ‘50s the young Turks set out to revolutionize film itself. In 1957, Truffaut had predicted a new kind of cinema: “The film of tomorrow appears to me as even more personal than an individual and autobiographical novel, like a confession, or a diary.”[118] In 1959 he fulfilled his own prophecy, with the autobiographical *Les Quatre cents coups*. The film became the first hit for what quickly became known as the Nouvelle Vague — New Wave — film directors. In 1960, Godard took over leadership of the movement with his own first feature film. To Godard, the transition from critic to director was a natural one: “I think of myself as an essayist . . . only instead of writing, I film them . . . For there is a clear continuity between all forms of expression.”[119] Decades later, Godard recognized that the whole movement had been a conceptual one: “The New Wave was a relationship with the imaginary.”[120]

Godard’s first feature, *A bout de souffle* (*Breathless*), was a sensation even before it opened in Paris early in 1960. Its reputation sprang primarily from technical innovations that made a radical break from basic Hollywood conventions. One of these was its “faux raccords” — false matching shots — that violated normal continuity and narrative development: characters might wear different clothes in successive shots within a single scene, and sudden exaggerated shifts in angles of vision called attention to the camera. Another conspicuous device was its many jump cuts, which abruptly advanced the action while disrupting the logic of the plot.[121] Susan

Sontag compared Godard's violation of such established film rules as the unobtrusive cut, consistency of point of view, and clarity of story line to the challenge of the Cubists to realistic figuration and three-dimensional pictorial space, and Godard stressed that the magnitude of the challenge was deliberate, explaining that "What I wanted was to take a conventional story and remake, but differently, everything the cinema had done. I also wanted to give the feeling that the techniques of film-making had just been discovered or experienced for the first time."[122] Godard's revolution was immediately embraced by the next generation. So for example the Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci, who was 19 in 1960, recalled that "I saw *A bout de souffle* during the early summer of 1960 in Paris, and I had the feeling that something was starting from zero there, that all the films I had seen up to then constituted the cinema before *A bout de souffle*."[123]

Although *Breathless* became famous for its technical innovations, it was in fact the first in a series of remarkable films in which Godard displayed his fundamentally new conception of cinema. In the 2002 *Sight and Sound* poll of critics, six films by Godard received two or more votes, and all were made within a span of seven years, from *Breathless* in 1960, through *My Life to Live* (1962), *Contempt* (1963), and *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) to *Masculine/Feminine* and *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* (both 1966).[124] The three of Godard's films that were ranked among the 100 "most beautiful films in the world" in a poll of French experts published by *Cahiers du cinéma* in 2008 — *Breathless*, *Contempt*, and *Pierrot* — were a subset of this same group.[125] Godard's films of this period constitute the most important statement of his complex philosophy of film.

A cornerstone of Godard's philosophy was a conception of montage far more encompassing than the usual definition of the term as a sequence of separate images. Early in his

career, Godard explained why he had given up literature for film:

> I wrote, "The weather is nice. The train enters the station," and I sat there for hours wondering why I couldn't just as well have written the opposite: "The train enters the station. The weather is nice" or "it is raining." In the cinema, it's simpler. There is something ineluctable about it.[126]

For Godard, this simultaneity of film's recording of disparate elements made cinema both unique and superior to literature.[127] The camera also recorded the passage of time, and therefore life: "The cinema is the only art which, as Cocteau says . . .'films death at work.' Whoever one films is growing older and will die. So one is filming a moment of death at work. Painting is static: the cinema is interesting because it seizes life and the mortal side of life."[128]

Godard in fact believed that film alone among the arts not only recorded life, but was in effect life itself: "Cinema is not a dream or fantasy. It is life. I see no difference between the movies and life. They are the same."[129] The cinema was privileged by the camera's automatic recording of reality: "Art is not only a mirror. There is not only the reality and then the mirror-camera . . . I discovered you can't separate the mirror from the reality."[130] For Godard, there was consequently no division between filming and other activities: "I make my films not only when I'm shooting but as I dream, eat, read, talk."[131] For him everything was cinema: "I want to include everything . . . Everything should be put into a film."[132]

Godard believed movies should be personal: "I only like films which resemble their creators."[133] His films expressed his ideas: "What I have to say, I don't say myself but I have my characters say it and that's why they talk abundantly."[134] Plots were therefore merely vehicles: "I don't really like telling a story. I prefer to use a kind of tapestry, a background on which I can embroider my own ideas."[135] It was not important for audiences to suspend their disbelief: "I think it's good to say to the audience . . . 'This is a movie.'"[136] A friend of Godard's, the

philosopher Youssef Ishaghpour, compared Godard's conceptual vision to that of Andy Warhol: "for Godard, as for the Pop painters, reality was already image."[137]

Godard's cinema has always drawn heavily on earlier art. He noted that at the start of his career this was inevitable: "I knew nothing of life except through the cinema, and my first efforts were 'films de cinéphile' . . . I didn't see things in relation to the world, to life or history, but in relation to the cinema."[138] He had intended *Breathless* to be a gangster film, but later realized it wasn't: "I thought it was a realistic film, but now it seems like *Alice in Wonderland*, a completely unreal, surrealistic world."[139] Godard's films are filled with countless references not only to earlier movies, but also to the other arts: the critic Peter Wollen commented that "Godard treated Hollywood as a kind of conceptual property store from which he could serendipitously loot ideas for scenes, shots, and moods," and a collaborator of Godard's, Jean-Pierre Gorin, summarized Godard's entire career as "an assault on the notion of intellectual property."[140] Godard did not dispute the characterization, explaining that "It's very good to steal things. Bertolt Brecht said art is made from plagiarism."[141]

Writing has played a large role in Godard's films. A biographer observed that for Godard, "writing is the privileged element which breaks the classic unity of the cinema . . . Writing is used to comment on the action and to distance the viewer from the immediacy of the image."[142] Godard traces this to the primacy of expressing ideas: "I'm someone whose real country is language, and whose territory is movies."[143]

Godard's films have always highlighted the accidental. In 1963, he made a short movie he called an "Action-Film," and the cameraman recalled that to achieve spontaneity, "I filmed it like a real event, as if it were a piece of documentary reality." An artist in the film made what he called "action sculpture" — "I take pieces of metal, I throw them, and the way they fall, I weld

them."[144] Godard's use of spontaneity prompted comparisons of his art to the action painting of the Abstract Expressionists.[145] Yet Godard did not use chance like Jackson Pollock, as a point of departure, but instead as an end in itself. Like the sculptor in his film, for Godard chance occurrences were final products, and in this he resembled not the experimental Abstract Expressionists, but rather the earlier conceptual Dada painters and poets, who used chance as a means of eliminating style.[146] Like the Dadas, Godard rejected consistency: "I have no 'style,' I just want to make films."[147] As early as 1968, the critic Manny Farber commented on the protean nature of Godard's art: "Each Godard film is of itself widely varied in persona as well as quality . . . At the end of this director's career, there will probably be a hundred films, each one a bizarrely different species . . . [T]he form and manner of execution changes totally with each film."[148] Three decades and 50 films later, Peter Wollen observed that "just as Farber predicted, each film seems to be *sui generis*, quite unlike any of his previous work, the same only in being so unpredictably, inconsistently different."[149]

In 1967, Godard concluded the movie *Weekend* with two title cards: the first read "End of Film," and the second "End of Cinema."[150] He participated in the student protests of May 1968, and subsequently continued to make films, promoting such causes as Maoism and anti-Semitism.[151] But as noted above, his influential work ended in the 1960s. In 2008, a biographer complained that Godard's later work had been unduly neglected: "Godard is an artist as dominant, as crucial, as protean, and as influential as Picasso, but he is a Picasso who vanished from public consciousness and from the encyclopedias after the first heady flourish of Cubism."[152] In assessing the biography, however, a *New York Times* reviewer declared that "Now we know how one of the greatest of all filmmakers — the man who so radically changed cinema in 1959 with his debut feature, *Breathless* — became an intolerable gasbag."[153]

Godard's films of the 1960s spearheaded a conceptual revolution in film. Not surprisingly, his innovations were not embraced by his elders. Orson Welles, for example, conceded that Godard was "the definitive influence" of the '60s, but objected that "I just can't take him very seriously as a *thinker*."[154] But scores of younger filmmakers followed Godard's lead. The German director Volker Schlöndorff recalled that "The older generation said that Godard didn't know how to edit pictures, but . . . today nearly every film is edited in the way that Godard cut *A bout de souffle*."[155] Quentin Tarantino, who named his production company in honor of his favorite Godard movie, reflected that "Godard did to movies what Bob Dylan did to music: they both revolutionized the forms."[156]

In a classic description of conceptual innovation, Peter Wollen observed that "Godard's films showed a contradictory reverence for the art of the past and a delinquent refusal to obey any of its rules."[157] Godard attributed the urgency of *Breathless* to his early insecurities: "Adolescence, youth, fear, despair, solitude." But he admitted that it also displayed the brashness of youth: "We barged into the cinema like cavemen into the Versailles of Louis the Fifteenth."[158]

<u>Directors and Audiences</u>

Ford's attitude toward making movies was pragmatic: "This is a business. If we can give the public what it wants, then it is a good business and makes money. The audience is happy and we're happy."[159] He didn't consider it dishonorable to make popular movies: "I've got a whole lot of respect for the people who go to see motion pictures. I think we ought to make pictures in their language."[160] Ford didn't feel superior to his viewers — "I am a peasant, and my pride is to remain one" — so he saw no conflict between his taste and that of his audience: "I like, as a director and as a spectator, simple, direct, frank films. Nothing disgusts me more than snobbism, mannerism, technical gratuity (that the spectators pay for) and, most of all, intellectualism."[161]

His criterion for accomplishment was straightforward: "For me, a film is a success if the spectators leave the theater satisfied, if they identify with the characters, if they get joy or energy."[162]

Ford's films were consistently profitable, but Hitchcock's were even more so. Hitchcock was a shrewd businessman, and by adding the production of a popular television show to his movies he became the wealthiest director of his generation.[163] In view of this, it is not surprising that he believed that "in the world of films and film production it is the public's appetite that must first be appeased."[164] His work was made for his viewers: "I'm a professional. I don't put my personal feelings into my pictures. I don't indulge myself — I don't make pictures to please me. I make them to please audiences."[165]

Unlike Ford, Hitchcock believed that the need for commercial success acted as a constraint on art, as he told one interviewer that "it is harder to make a film that has both integrity and wide audience appeal than it is to make one that merely satisfies one's own artistic conscience." Satisfying his own conscience while fulfilling his responsibility to his employers made Hitchcock consider his job "a kind of constant tight-rope walking."[166] Hitchcock also acknowledged that his trademark genre identification had an economic source: "If I were to make films for my own satisfaction they would certainly be very different from those you see . . . The reason why I have specialized, so to speak, in suspense is strictly commercial."[167] Hitchcock vowed never to preach to his audience: "People don't go to the movies to listen to sermons. If that were the case, then instead of buying a ticket they'd put a coin in the collection plate and make the sign of the cross before taking a seat in the stalls."[168] He never forgot why he made movies: "I never think of the films I make as being *my* films. I'm not that vain or egotistical."[169]

Welles disagreed with Ford and Hitchcock on the purpose of making movies. In a speech at the Edinburgh Festival in 1953, he contended that the quality of movies was deteriorating because directors were expected to reach mass audiences. Welles declared that "The biggest mistake we have made is to consider that films are primarily a form of entertainment. The film is the greatest medium since the invention of movable type for exchanging ideas and information, and it is no more at its best in light entertainment than literature is at its best in the light novel."[170] Late in his life, Welles insisted that "I would *love* to have a mass audience," and claimed that he had actively pursued that goal: "You're looking at a man who's been searching for a mass audience."[171] Yet this effort apparently did not extend to his choice of subjects: in Edinburgh he had observed that one way of escaping from banality was to return to the classics, and his projects in later years included Kafka's *The Trial*, adaptations of Shakespeare including *Falstaff* and *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Don Quixote*.[172] Welles' true feelings toward compromising to increase the size of his audience may in fact be revealed by the advice he gave a friend who was an independent filmmaker: "never make a movie for anyone else, or on some idea of what other people will like. Make it *yours*, and hope that there will be others who will understand. But never compromise to *make* them understand . . . Make the movies you want to make. On your own. And be free."[173]

Even early in his career as a director, Godard's attitude toward the popularity of films was closer to that of his fellow conceptual innovator Welles than to those of the experimental Ford and Hitchcock. Thus in a 1961 interview, he commented that "There is certainly no reason why the films I make should not displease some people," and declared that "I no longer believe that cinema should be aimed at the masses."[174] The next year, he distinguished his practice from that of Hitchcock in moderate terms: "If Hitchcock . . . thinks that people will not understand

something, he will not do it. At the same time I feel that one must sometimes go ahead — light may dawn in a few years time."[175]

By the pivotal year of 1968, Godard's moderation had vanished. Thus he told an audience that his goal of creating an art that was both popular and intellectual would not be easily achieved: "We have to fight the audience."[176] Effectively making himself an heir of Sergei Eisenstein and other conceptual directors who had believed film should be devoted to propaganda, Godard declared that "We should abandon drama and psychology and go in more for politics." Defending his recent work against the charge that he had abandoned emotion for tedious intellectual exposition of ideas, Godard explained that he had no interest in telling a love story in *La Chinoise* (1967): "What's important is to know what Marxism-Leninism is and how it helps them in their love." He admitted that "I don't want people to come see my movies the way they go to see other movies. This has to be changed." When he was asked if he was trying to change the audience, Godard replied, "I am trying to change the world."[177] Later in his career, Godard echoed Welles' objection to the use of film as entertainment. In 1995 he described cinema as "a tool that we've misused," and explained that "In the beginning, it was thought that cinema would impose itself as a new instrument of knowledge, like a microscope or a telescope, but very quickly it was prevented from playing its role and was turned into a toy. Cinema has not played its role as an instrument of thought."[178] The contrast is stark: the experimental Ford and Hitchcock loved film for its ability to entertain, whereas the conceptual Welles and Godard valued it as a means of creating and disseminating knowledge.

Footnotes

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44. Gottlieb, *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, p. 298.

45. Hitchcock, *Interviews*, p. 121.

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93. Ronald Gottesman, ed., *Perspectives on "Citizen Kane"* (New York: G.K.Hall, 1996), p. 59.

94. Truffaut, *The Films in My Life*, p. 279.

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97. Bazin, *Orson Welles*, p. 2.

98. Welles, *Interviews*, p. 37.

99. Peter Cowie, *A Ribbon of Dreams* (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes, 1973), p. 13.

100. Cowie, *A Ribbon of Dreams*, p. 3.

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102. Welles, *Interviews*, p. 88.

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104. Welles, *Interviews,* p. 102.

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106. Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), p. 78.

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116. Jean Collet, *Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1970), p. 6.

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120 Jean-Luc Godard, *The Future(s) of Film* (Berne: Verlag Gachnang and Springer AG, 2002), p. 15.

121. MacCabe, *Godard*, p. 123.

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130. Collet, *Jean-Luc Godard*, p. 32; Godard, *Interviews*, p. 29.

131. Narboni and Milne, *Godard on Godard*, p. 238.

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134. Brody, *Everything is Cinema*, p. 139.

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