A CONCEPTUAL WORLD: WHY THE ART OF
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IS SO DIFFERENT
FROM THE ART OF ALL EARLIER CENTURIES

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## ABSTRACT

This paper surveys 31 new genres of art that were invented during the twentieth century,
chronologically from collage, papier collé, and readymades through installation, performance, and
earthworks. This unprecedented proliferation in art forms was a direct consequence of the dominant
role of conceptual innovation in the century s art, as a series of young iconoclasts deliberately broke
the conventions and rules of existing artistic practice in the process of devising new ways to express
their ideas and emotions. This overview affords a more precise understanding of one conspicuous
and important way in which twentieth-century art differed from that of all earlier eras. The
proliferation of genres has fragmented the advanced art world. A century ago, a great painter could
influence nearly all advanced artists, but today it is virtually impossible for any one artist to influence
practitioners of genres as diverse as painting, video, and installation. This survey also underscores
the central role of Picasso in the advanced art of the past century, as he not only created the first, and
one of the most important, of the new genres, but in doing so he also provided a new model of
artistic behavior that became an inspiration for many other young conceptual artists.

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<u>Introduction</u>

> What is sculpture? What is painting? Everyone's still clinging to
> outdated ideas, obsolete definitions, as if the artist's role was not
> precisely to offer new ones.
>
> Pablo Picasso, 1943[1]

The twentieth century was a time of extremely rapid and sustained artistic innovation. One striking feature of this is the increase in the number of kinds of art that occurred during the century. Even casual observers of the art world are aware that some of the most popular forms among young artists, including video and installation, are of recent vintage. Yet although all narratives of the art of the past century discuss many new art forms, none has systematically surveyed these innovations. Doing so shows that dozens of new genres of art were invented during the twentieth century, and reveals some surprisingly strong general characteristics that unite what have usually been considered as widely disparate artistic forms, lacking any overall coherence or commonality. Overall, this survey clarifies our understanding of how and why the art of the twentieth century stands apart from earlier art.

<u>Format</u>

This paper will present a chronological narrative of 31 artistic genres that were invented during the twentieth century. These vary considerably in importance: some are widely used today, while others are rare or extinct. Of the 31 genres, 22 are contained as entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Each of these, when first mentioned, will be footnoted to its *OED* entry. Another nine genres are included in this paper because, in my opinion, each is sufficiently important that it should be included in the *OED*. When first mentioned, each of these nine genres will be footnoted to the relevant discussion in the fifth edition of H. H. Arnason's *History of*

*Modern Art*. To facilitate locating all the genres discussed within this paper, each of the 22 that

appears in the *OED* will be marked by a single asterisk the first time it appears in the text, while

each of the other nine genres will be marked by two asterisks.

A note is in order here on the precise nature of the terms selected for discussion. "Genre"

can be used to refer to the style of works of art, but this is not the concern here: this paper is *not*

about the invention of Fauvism, Cubism, and the many other schools or styles of art invented in

the last century. Rather, this paper is concerned with new *categories* of art. Each of these

constitutes a new art form. In each case, the words included in the paper can be applied not only

to a type of art in general, but can designate a single work - for example a collage, or an

earthwork, to anticipate the first and last genres chronologically.

The Beginning

Early in 1912, Pablo Picasso made a small oval painting that included a piece of oil cloth,

printed to imitate chair caning, glued to the canvas. As John Golding later explained, "This was

the first *collage*,* that is to say the first painting in which extraneous objects or materials are

applied to the picture surface."[2] The invention of collage "struck the most violent blow yet at

traditional painting," because it violated a fundamental tradition that had been honored since the

Renaissance, that nothing other than paint should be placed on the two-dimensional surface of

the support, and because it did this in a particularly irreverent way, by using "bits of rubbish."[3]

Art historians have long considered collage a far-reaching innovation: so for example

Golding commented that "The aesthetic implications of *collage* as a whole were vast, and its

invention was to lead to a whole series of developments in twentieth-century art."[4] In the myopic

discipline of art history, however, it has not generally been appreciated just how vast the

implications of the innovation of collage have been, for these go far beyond aesthetic considerations. When he made *Still Life with Chair Caning*, Picasso set in motion a remarkable series of events that would make the art of the twentieth century fundamentally different from that of all earlier centuries. During the next six decades, the invention of dozens of new artistic genres would radically transform the functions as well as the appearance of art.

That collage initiated this process is fitting for a number of reasons. The inventor himself was an archetype. Not only was Picasso the most important artist of the twentieth century, but when he made *Still Life with Chair Caning* at the age of 31, he became the first in the line of dozens of young innovators who would transform twentieth-century art by creating new genres.[5] And like virtually all of those later innovators, Picasso was a conceptual artist, whose contributions were the embodiments of new ideas. Collage was an archetypal conceptual innovation, for it dramatically and decisively broke the rules of an existing art form. And it was also an archetype in that, like many of the later conceptual innovations in twentieth-century art, it was synthetic, and involved combining previously disparate elements into a single work.

The 1910s

The impact of Picasso's example in creating a new genre was almost immediate. Since 1909, Picasso had worked closely with Georges Braque in developing Cubism. The two spent August of 1912 working together in Sorgues, a small town in the South of France. Picasso left to return to Paris at the beginning of September. In Picasso's absence, within the next few weeks, Braque created the first papier collé,* *Fruit Dish and Glass*, by attaching three pieces of wallpaper, printed to resemble wood-grain, to a charcoal still life.[6] Braque later recalled, "After having made the [first] papier collé I felt a great shock, and it was an even greater shock for

Picasso when I showed it to him."[7] Papier collé was obviously related to the innovation of

collage, but it produced an effect that Picasso had not recognized. In the earlier stages of Cubism,

Picasso and Braque had largely abandoned color as a result of their concern with using shading to

give solidity to the flat planes of the fragments into which they broke the objects they

represented. Papier collé presented a way to reintroduce color into their art, for it showed how

they could symbolize objects through the use of flat colored planes. This ushered in a new

synthetic phase in the two artists' development of Cubism. Thus George Heard Hamilton pointed

to the rapid development from Braque's innovation: "The skill and authority with which both

artists manipulated their discoveries can be seen in *papier collés* executed only a few months

later, where an 'analytical' fragmentation of objects was succeeded by their 'synthetic'

construction from forms not originally derived from them."[8]

A trip to Paris in 1913 prompted the young Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin to give up

painting in favor of sculpture. His key experience in Paris was a visit to Picasso's studio, where

Tatlin saw some small three-dimensional works that Picasso had made, in a Cubist idiom, from

pieces of paper, sheet metal, and wire. Upon his return to Moscow later in 1913, Tatlin began to

make sculptures with the same kinds of scrap materials Picasso had used, but which Tatlin

systematically organized into forms through the use of geometric planning. Searching for a name

for his new works, Tatlin tried several, including painterly relief - signifying the works'

intermediate position between painting and sculpture - before settling on the name counter-

relief.**[9] Tatlin chose this name to emphasize his objection to traditional sculptural relief, and it

has become associated with his innovation.[10] Tatlin's emphasis on the use of common materials

that were not associated with the tradition of fine art struck a responsive chord with a number of

young Russian artists who wanted to create forms for a new mass audience, and over the course

of the next few years the concept of construction* came to be associated with Tatlin's work.[11]

The precise date when this began is unclear, but by 1920 the term construction was used by

Russian artists to refer both to a process for making art works and to the final result of that

process.[12] By that time, Tatlin had been recognized as the founder of Constructivism, with

followers who included Naum Gabo and Alexander Rodchenko. In keeping with Tatlin's initial

concerns, Constructivism used mathematical planning and modern technology to explore the

artistic qualities of common materials.

Late in his life, Marcel Duchamp recalled:

> In 1913 I had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel to a
> kitchen stool and watch it turn...
> In New York in 1915 I bought at a hardware store a snow
> shovel on which I wrote "In Advance of the Broken Arm."
> It was around that time that the word "readymade"* came
> to mind to designate this form of manifestation.[13]

The real fame of the readymade dates from 1917, when the American Society of Independent

Artists declined to exhibit a porcelain urinal that Duchamp had purchased, signed with the

fictitious name R. Mutt, and titled *Fountain*. The ensuing controversy produced a heated debate

over the boundaries of art that became a central issue in generating the art of the second half of

the twentieth century. It is primarily because of this that many art critics consider Duchamp the

greatest influence on the art of that era.[14]

The highly conceptual nature of Duchamp's work has proved irresistible to many

conceptual art scholars, and there has been a vast outpouring of analysis of his art, and his life.

An issue that has been relatively neglected, however, in this great body of work is that of the

origins of the readymade. Duchamp himself did not discuss the inspiration for this innovation,

beyond describing it as a "happy idea" he had in 1913, in the passage quoted above. Few scholars

appear to have considered whether Duchamp's idea might have been related to Picasso's

innovation of collage just one year earlier. In 1971, the critic Clement Greenberg did make this

connection, writing of Duchamp that:

> He would seem to have attributed the impact of Cubism - and
> particularly of Picasso's first collage-constructions - to what he
> saw as its startling difficulty; and it's as though the bicycle wheel
> mounted upside-down on a stool and the store-bought bottle rack
> he produced in 1913 were designed to go Picasso one better in this
> direction.[15]

In this regard, it is interesting to note that although *Fountain* was effectively unaltered from the

object Duchamp purchased, the same was not true of the first readymade, in which Duchamp

fastened together, or collaged, two disparate objects. Although there is no evidence that

Duchamp saw Picasso's collage, an obvious feature of conceptual art is that it is often not

necessary to see an innovation in order to understand its significance, and this is clearly true for

collage.[16] It appears likely that Duchamp's enormous influence on the art of the late twentieth

century was made possible by Picasso's key early innovation.

A number of artists associated with the Dada movement began to create new genres

during World War I. In several cases, these artists and their innovations subsequently became

important in Surrealism. An example of this is the biomorph,* that Jean Arp first created in 1915

or 1916.[17] Arp was one of the founders of the first Dada group, in Zurich, and he later became an

influential Surrealist. The shapes of the biomorphs came from Arp's interest in automatism, and

appear to be related to plants or primitive animal forms. William Rubin observed that Arp's

biomorphism gained currency as "the nearest thing to a common form-language for the painter-poets of the Surrealist generations."[18]

Arp's interest in automatism soon produced another new genre. In 1916 and 1917 he began to make collages in which torn pieces of paper were fixed to a support in the positions they supposedly fell into when dropped from above.[19] Although Arp's greatest concern with these collages was in the use of accident in creating works of art, just as the Dada poet Tristan Tzara made poems from words cut out of newspapers and drawn from a hat or scattered on a table, it was a different aspect of the creation of these works - the tearing of the pieces of paper - that resulted in their designation as the first examples of a new genre, papier dechiré.*[20]

Photomontage* was invented by Dada artists in Berlin in an attempt to create a new art form, based on photography, that would replace easel painting.[21] Although it failed to achieve this goal, it quickly spread from its initial use, of creating biting political and social commentary and satire, to the commercial advertising profession. William Rubin argued that photomontage was a misnomer for photo-collage, since the images were not montaged in a darkroom but were instead made by pasting superimposed photographs onto a support, but photomontage nonetheless came to be the accepted term for the works of a number of Berlin Dadaists, especially John Heartfield, George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, and Hannah Höch.[22]

The 1920s

In Paris late in 1921, the American Dada painter and photographer Man Ray began to make photographs without a camera. Under the influence of Duchamp, Man Ray had become interested in making works of art without traditional means. After using an airbrush to make paintings without touching the canvas, Man Ray began to make photographs by placing objects

on photographic paper and exposing it to light. This was not a new process, for it had been used in the nineteenth century. But instead of making static images, as in the earlier instances, Man Ray moved the light source and shifted the objects, creating new visual effects suggesting depth and movement. To honor his invention of this new practice, Man Ray named his new works rayograms.*[23]

In early 1922, apparently unaware of Man Ray's invention, in Berlin the Hungarian artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy independently made works using virtually the same process, which he called photograms.*[24] Moholy-Nagy was a Constructivist, and was interested in mechanical interactions of light and motion. The images he produced differed considerably in appearance from those of Man Ray, but they were basically similar in consisting of photographs made without a camera.

The German artist Max Ernst discovered frottage* in 1925.[25] As a Surrealist, Ernst was always alert to new ways of drawing on the subconscious, and he later recorded an experience he had on August 10, 1925:

> Finding myself one rainy evening in a seaside inn, I was struck by
> the obsession that showed to my excited gaze the floor-boards
> upon which a thousand scrubbings had deepened the groove. I
> decided then to investigate the symbolism of this obsession and, in
> order to aid my meditative and hallucinatory faculties, I made from
> the boards a series of drawings by placing on them, at random,
> sheets of paper which I undertook to rub with black lead.[26]

The success of this new means of producing images prompted Ernst to extend it, and to make rubbings of a wide range of objects. He concluded that frottage was "the real equivalent of that which is already known by the term *automatic writing*." Like Rimbaud's desire to allow his subconscious to write poetry, Ernst believed his subconscious could now create images: "by

widening in this way the active part of the mind's hallucinatory faculties I came to assist *as spectator* at the birth of all my works, from the tenth of August, 1925, memorable day of the discovery of *frottage*."[27]

Exquisite corpse** was invented in 1925 by the Surrealist poet André Breton.[28] It originated in a word game motivated by the Surrealists' love of accidental and irrational effects. Each of a group of friends would write a word or phrase on a piece of paper, then fold the paper so the next participant could not see the previous entries. The first result obtained in this way gave the game its name: "The exquisite/corpse/shall drink/ the young/wine."[29] The game was readily extended to drawing, and provided a means for creating composite irrational images: Breton remarked that "With the *Exquisite Corpse* we had at our disposal - at last - an infallible means of sending the mind's critical mechanism away on vacation and fully releasing its metaphorical potentialities."[30]

<u>1930s</u>

In 1930, the young American sculptor Alexander Calder visited the Paris studio of Piet Mondrian. Calder later recalled that the sight of Mondrian's colored rectangles gave him a shock. He suggested to Mondrian that "perhaps it would be fun to make these rectangles oscillate," and although the painter immediately rejected the suggestion, Calder seized on this goal, of combining abstraction and movement.[31] Calder began to make wire sculptures with revolving elements; some were driven by small electric motors, others with hand cranks. In 1932, a friend brought Marcel Duchamp to see these sculptures. Duchamp liked them, and arranged for Calder to exhibit them at a Paris gallery. Calder later wrote: "I asked him what sort of a name I could give these things and he at once produced 'Mobile'*... Duchamp also suggested that on my

invitation card [for the exhibition] I make a drawing of the motor-driven object and print: CALDER: SES MOBILES."[32] The term mobile was later extended to the wire sculptures that Calder began to make later in 1932 that did not have motors, but that were instead moved by air currents.

Many of Calder's fellow artists attended his exhibition of mobiles. Calder recalled that in reacting to the mobiles, one of them had retrospectively named another genre: "Jean Arp said to me, 'Well, what were those things you did last year - stabiles?'* Whereupon, I seized the term and applied it first to all the things previously shown at Percier's [gallery] and later to the large steel objects I am involved in now."[33]

Surrealism had a particular concern with objects that were not intended to be artistic. As early as 1923, Breton had called for "the concrete realization... of objects perceived only in dreams."[34] An exhibition in Paris in 1936 dedicated to the Surrealist object included a number of types of objects, including "natural objects, interpreted natural objects, perturbed objects, found objects,* mathematical objects, Readymades, etc."[35] In an essay written for the exhibition, Breton described "the surrealist aim of bringing about *a total revolution of the object* through various measures, including: ... showing it in whatever state external forces such as earthquake, fire or water may have left it; retaining it just because of the doubt surrounding its original function; or because of the ambiguity resulting from its totally or partially irrational conditioning by the elements, entailing its dignification through chance discovery (the 'found object')."[36] Found objects could be natural objects, such as stones or plants, or such manufactured objects as a shoe, a toy, or a loaf of bread.[37]

1940s

No new genres were created during the 1940s until well after the end of World War II. In 1949, two young French artists proposed a new form of collage that came from the streets of Paris. In that year Raymond Hains and Jacques de la Mahé Villeglé first dismounted a long section of torn posters from their original locations on walls and fences and transferred them to canvas.[38] In tribute to the process of removal, they named their new work décollage.**[39]

The same year marked the first appearance of the environment.*[40] Early in 1949, in a Milan gallery Lucio Fontana exhibited *Ambiente nero*, or *Black Environment*, in which an abstract shape covered with phosphorescent varnish hung from the ceiling, lit only by black light. The work consisted of the entire space of the gallery, which surrounded the viewer.[41] This was part of Fontana's Spatialist program aimed at transcending painting and sculpture by developing color and form into surrounding space. During the 1960s, the term environment was extended to a wide variety of works of art that the spectator had to walk into.[42]

1950s

Assemblage* is perhaps the single exception to the rule that the new genres of the twentieth century were all invented by conceptual artists.[43] In 1953, the experimental painter Jean Dubuffet began to make lithographs from collages of torn fragments of a variety of colored and printed papers.[44] In the belief that the term "collage" should be reserved for works made during the 1910s and '20s, Dubuffet gave his works the new name of assemblages d'empreintes (imprint assemblages).[45] In 1955 Dubuffet extended this technique to oil paintings: he would begin by making a large number of paintings, then cut them into pieces, and create new works by fitting these pieces together and gluing them onto clean canvases. He called the resulting works tableaux d'assemblages (painting assemblages).[46] True to his experimental nature, Dubuffet

made his assemblages to achieve a visual effect, for he found that combinations of small pieces of paper or canvas covered with many different colors achieved a "lively scintillation" that he could not obtain through other means. Equally experimental was his attitude that the works he produced in this way were "not so much undertaken with the idea of realization as in the spirit of preliminary research, with a view to future realizations."[47]

Assemblage came to be used to describe a wide range of works of art, but its typical application was not to the collages of pieces of paper or canvas that Dubuffet had made. Instead, in the catalogue for a major exhibition titled "The Art of Assemblage," presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1962, William Seitz explained that the works included nearly all shared two characteristics: "1. They are primarily *assembled* rather than painted, drawn, modeled, or carved. 2. Entirely, or in part, their constituent elements are preformed natural or manufactured materials, objects or fragments not intended as art materials."[48] Interestingly, therefore, the three-dimensional works made of manufactured objects that are now commonly called assemblages are far in spirit and appearance from the two-dimensional works of paper and canvas to which Dubuffet first gave the name.[49]

In 1954, the young artist Robert Rauschenberg began using the term combine-painting, or simply combine**, to refer to paintings to which he attached real objects.[50] Initially the combines were intended to be mounted on walls, but over time some came to be free-standing. Two combines - *Bed* (1955) and *Monogram* (1959) - are among the five works made by American artists in the 1950s that are most frequently reproduced in textbooks of art history.[51] The term combine has never been extended to works by artists other than Rauschenberg, and is in fact generally restricted to works he made during 1954-64.[52] But the combines are widely considered

the most important works ever made by Rauschenberg, who is in turn considered one of the most influential artists of his generation.[53] One indication of their importance is that New York's Metropolitan Museum, which rarely presents exhibitions of the work of living artists, recently hosted a show titled "Robert Rauschenberg Combines," which included 170 of the works.[54] Arthur Danto contended that the combine *Bed* (1955) was a pivotal work between the past and the future of advanced art, "pointing in one direction back to the metaphysics of paint, which defined Abstract Expressionism... and, in the other, to the uninflected display of commonplace objects, which in various ways was to define Pop."[55]

The Italian conceptual artist Piero Manzoni began to make works he called achromes** in 1957.[56] The first achromes were made with kaolin - white clay - on canvas, but later Manzoni extended the name to white works made from other materials, including plaster or cotton balls. Whatever the medium, the achromes were "monochrome works with neutral surfaces that were emphatically devoid of any imagery."[57] The achromes were motivated by Manzoni's concern with the infinite. Their white surface was not a symbol, "just a white surface that is simply a white surface and nothing else;" although the achrome could not actually be infinite, it was "repeatable to infinity."[58]

One of the cultural trademarks of the early 1960s was baptized in 1958, when Allan Kaprow coined the term "happening"* to refer to a new form of performance.[59] As a young artist in the '50s, Kaprow was preoccupied with the Duchampian question, What is art? He began to fill gallery spaces with trash and other real objects, in keeping with one current view that art was anything, but he soon tired of this permissiveness: "'anything' was too easy. If anything was art, nothing was art."[60] His new answer was to invent the happening, "a collage of rather abstract

events for moveable audiences." The first happening, titled *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts*,

was presented in October, 1959, at the Reuben Gallery in New York. For Kaprow,

> The Happening seemed to me a new art form that couldn't be
> confused with paintings, poetry, architecture, music, dance, or
> plays. As residues of a European past, these old forms of art had
> lost their artness for me by overexposure and empty worship.
> Happenings were fresh.[61]

Over time, Kaprow became disturbed when his new happenings began to settle into

conventions, and became "just another version of vanguard theater." He decided to avoid this by

doing events only once, and by encouraging spontaneity in their execution.[62] Happenings

subsequently had no structured beginning, middle, or end; they were fluid and open-ended. They

had no plot, and were improvised. Chance played a key role in happenings, and they could not be

reproduced.[63] However, the author or authors of any particular happening did present a program

and a sequence of events for viewing, and the actions could often be interpreted as symbolic.[64]

Happenings came to be emblematic of popular culture in the early '60s, and were

promoted by the mass media as evidence of the emergence of new and more accessible forms of

art; it was in this spirit that the Supremes released a song titled "The Happening" in 1966.

Happenings could easily be emulated, and they spread rapidly around the world, in the process

influencing the work of artists as diverse as Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Beuys, and Yves

Klein. The highly conceptual nature of the genre was particularly attractive to artists who, like

Kaprow, were also cultural critics, and Kaprow was proud of the large body of writing that

quickly grew up around happenings.[65]

In 1959, Wolf Vostell and Nam June Paik began to include televisions in their

environmental works; this marked the first use of the twentieth-century's new mass medium in

advanced art. Yet Amy Dempsey argues that "the symbolic birth of Video* Art occurred later in 1965 when Paik purchased Sony's new Portapak hand-held video camera."[66] Since then video has become an important medium in advanced art, through the work of Paik, Ana Mendieta, Bruce Nauman, Bill Viola, Tony Oursler, and others. Many young artists today work primarily or exclusively in video, including such prominent figures as Pipilotti Rist, Steve McQueen, who won England's Turner Prize in 1999, and Matthew Barney.

In 1959, Gustav Metzger published "Auto-Destructive Art," a manifesto on the relationship between creation and destruction in art. In his scheme auto-destructives* were to be public monuments, created by collaborations between artists and scientists, that would symbolize the decay and disaster that resulted from the political and technological developments of the Cold War.[67] Metzger did not actually build these monuments, but in 1960 the sculptor Jean Tinguely made what would become the most celebrated artistic auto-destructive, *Homage to New York*, "a kinetic assemblage of junk and found objects meant to destroy itself in a performance that took place in MOMA's [Museum of Modern Art's] sculpture garden."[68] Tinguely stopped making auto-destructives in 1964, and the genre did not spread among visual artists. Metzger's influence might have been greater in another of the arts, however. Thus the English musician Pete Townshend, who had learned Metzger's theory as a student at Ealing Art College, made his show-ending auto-destructive act of smashing his guitar the trademark of his rock band, The Who. Townshend began the practice in 1964, and it quickly became famous; the  band's singer, Roger Daltrey, later recalled that "After two years, people were just coming to see us smash up all our gear. The music meant nothing."[69]

The 1960s

The French conceptual artist Yves Klein dreamed of flying effortlessly into the void, and in 1960 he devised a new means of creating images that represented weightless human bodies in space. Under his direction, nude models would apply his trademark blue paint to their bodies, then press themselves against large sheets of paper tacked to the wall or spread on the floor. These paintings were first made at Klein's Paris apartment, in front of a small number of his friends. One of those present, the critic Pierre Restany, gave the works the name Klein subsequently adopted, of anthropometries.**[70] The use of "living brushes" was consistent with Klein's conceptual belief that the artist should conceive works of art but not personally produce them: "True 'painters and poets' don't paint and don't write poems."[71]

In Rome in 1961, Piero Manzoni first signed human beings and declared them to be works of art, or living sculptures.**[72] An accompanying certificate of authenticity specified whether the individual was a work of art in whole, or only in the (body) part signed, and whether the person was always a work of art or only during certain activities. Among those in the highest category of works of art, in whole until death, were the artist Marcel Broodthaers and the linguist Umberto Eco.[73] Manzoni's action effectively extended Duchamp's readymades from manufactured objects to human beings. In 1969, the London-based artists Gilbert and George pronounced themselves living sculptures. Their art was initially made up of performances they called actions, the first of which, *The Singing Sculpture,* consisted of singing a music hall song, *Underneath the Arches,* for eight hours on each of two consecutive days. Subsequently they have worked in a wide variety of forms, consistently aimed at making art more widely accessible and at breaking down artistic and societal taboos. Their art is always based on their own experiences, and they consider themselves to be living sculptures at all times. Gilbert and George have

influenced Damien Hirst and other young British artists in their example of artists as performers, and in their enthusiasm for making art from everyday urban life.[74]

The Pop artist Claes Oldenburg made the first soft sculpture* in 1962.[75] These were originally made as props for happenings Oldenburg produced, but Oldenburg soon began to make large stuffed cloth articles of food, including hamburgers, ice cream cones, and slices of cake, which he presented at an exhibition at a New York gallery in 1962. Soft sculpture was quickly perceived as a radical challenge to traditional conceptions of sculpture, for instead of being rigid and resistant, Oldenburg's stuffed works were malleable and pliable.[76] The humor of Oldenburg's soft sculptures, and their surprising consistency, helped to make them one of the most distinctive contributions to early Pop art.

One of the most esoteric new genres was the creation of an English conceptual artist named John Latham. Latham developed a philosophy that held in part that instrumental reason and its tool, language, played a central role in the creation of social oppression and war. Beginning in 1964 his attack on language, and its institutionalization in books, was embodied in towers of books, or skoobs* (books spelled backwards), that he burned.[77] Book burning did not become popular among artists, and Latham appears to have been the sole artistic creator of skoobs.

It is not known exactly when the term installation* began to be used for art works, but sometime in the mid-1960s it emerged as a general name for environmental works, including assemblages and happenings.[78] Today many artists produce large, often room-sized works they call installations. These are extremely varied in intent and appearance, and share only the two characteristics that they usually involve a number of disparate objects, and they surround the

viewer. Prominent artists whose current output consists primarily or entirely of installations

include Christian Boltanski, Maurizio Cattelan, Tracey Emin, Roni Horn, Yayoi Kusama, and

Bill Viola. Kristine Stiles observed that "By 1970, installation had become so prevalent and

multifaceted that the French artist Daniel Buren would observe: 'Hasn't the term *installation*

come to replace [the term] *exhibition*?"[79]

Another label that first began to be used for works by visual artists during the mid-1960s

is performance.*[80] This grew out of a tradition that included the work of Futurist and Dada artists

early in the twentieth century, as well as collaborative works created by the composer John Cage,

the choreographer Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, and others at Black Mountain

College in North Carolina in the early 1950s.[81] It is uncertain when the term performance began

to be used for these multi-disciplinary activities, but the published notebooks of Carolee

Schneeman, who became an important performance artist, contain discussions using the name

performance art written in 1962-63.[82] Several of the most influential artists of the late 1960s and

the 1970s became known for their live or videotaped performance works, including notably

Joseph Beuys, Bruce Nauman, and Gilbert and George.

Two new genres originated in the art of Robert Smithson. The broader of the two,

earthwork,** was first named by Smithson in a 1969 article, and came to be widely used to refer

to the large landscape works he and such other artists as Walter De Maria and Michael Heizer

constructed in remote areas.[83] The name appears to have been taken from the title of a science

fiction novel, Brian Aldiss' *Earthworks*, that Smithson bought in the course of a documented

excursion he had made in 1967.[84] The narrower and more specific term, non-site,** was devised

by Smithson in 1968 to refer to the works he made for display in art galleries.[85] In Smithson's

usage, the site works were the large-scale projects he created in, and from, the landscape, which could only be viewed in their original locations, while the non-sites were made up of documentation and natural material taken from those sites, to be displayed indoors.[86]

<u>Young Geniuses</u>

For 26 of the 31 new genres discussed above, it is possible to identify a particular innovator (or innovators, in the case of Hains and Villeglé) and a date of first appearance with reasonable confidence. For these 26 genres, Table 1 shows the ages of these artists at the time of the innovations.

Pablo Picasso initiated this stream of innovations when he was 31 years old, and appropriately this is the overall median age of the 27 artists listed in Table 1 when they created their new genres. 24 of the 27 innovators, or 89%, were below the age of 35; apart from the experimental Dubuffet, only Lucio Fontana and the cantankerous John Latham were above the age of 35 when they made their innovations. Table 1 thus confirms that new genres are generally created by the young.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of artistic genres. In 1910, visual art consisted of painting, and to a minor extent sculpture. Today, less than one hundred years later, many visual artists spend their time making installations, videos, collages, performances, and a host of other types of work that did not exist in 1910. This has had profound implications for artists and their roles. Apart from the enormous changes in the appearance of art, the proliferation of genres has fragmented the art world. Early in the twentieth century, a great artist could influence nearly all advanced visual artists, but in contrast, a century later it is

virtually impossible for any one artist to influence artists making such different types of art as painting, videos, and installation.

Surprisingly, very few of the new genres were the result of new technology. Video was of course a twentieth-century invention, but nearly all the other genres described above use technologies available in 1900.

The dramatic increase in new artistic genres was a product of both new practices and new attitudes. Not only did many artists want to do new things, but they often wanted to underscore the novelty of these new things, by giving them new names. The self-consciousness with which many artists devised new practices, as well as the attitude that celebrated the novelty of those practices, was a feature of the conceptual approach to art that accounted for nearly all the new genres discussed above. To a greater extent than had ever before been true, the art of most of the twentieth century was dominated by a rapid succession of conceptual movements, from Fauvism and Cubism onward. All of these movements were dominated by young artists. It is young practitioners who generally break rules most decisively and conspicuously in all intellectual disciplines. This is true not only because young practitioners, who are new to a field, may have less respect for its traditions, but also because their elders have often become so accustomed to the rules of an activity that they are often hardly aware of the rules' existence, and impact. Seeing these rules with a fresh eye, brash young members of a discipline may consciously decide to depart from them. Creating a new genre is one obvious way of violating the existing rules.

The enumeration of new genres presented in this paper raises some puzzles that have not been analyzed, or even recognized, by art scholars. A striking puzzle involves chronology. The survey carried out above ends abruptly with the 1960s. Thus a decade that witnessed the creation

of a large number of new genres was followed by three decades that apparently produced none. It is not the case that artists ceased to innovate from 1970 on, but it would appear that artists working in the '70s, '80s, and '90s were no longer concerned with creating new genre trademarks for their movements or their own work. Why this was the case is an intriguing question.

Why conceptual artists became so aggressive in creating new practices in the twentieth century is a complex question. What appears clear, however, is that the explosion of new genres was triggered by the young genius who became the most dominant artist of the century. When Picasso invented collage in 1912, he not only made a specific contribution that soon led to extensions by Braque, Tatlin, Duchamp, and other young conceptual artists, but he also provided a new model of artistic behavior, that became an inspiration for many other young artists throughout the century, of the daring and protean young innovator. As early as 1912, the older, experimental artist Wassily Kandinsky could already foresee what he considered the unfortunate consequences of the younger artist's brilliance, as he described Picasso as a fearless mountain climber: "often driven wildly onward, Picasso throws himself from one external means to another. If a chasm lies between them, Picasso makes a wild leap, and there he is, standing on the other side, much to the horror of his incredibly numerous followers."[87] From Duchamp and Arp through Manzoni, Smithson, and beyond, many young conceptual artists learned the lesson that was a key part of Picasso's legacy, that horrifying the art world could be a direct route to success.

Footnotes

I thank Robert Jensen for discussions of the issues treated in this paper.

1.      Brassaï, *Conversations with Picasso* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 69.

2.      John Golding, *Cubism*, revised American edition (Boston: Boston Book and Art Shop, 1968), p. 103; J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Vol. 3, p. 469.

3.      Golding, *Cubism*, p. 103.

4.      Golding, *Cubism*, p. 105.

5.      David W. Galenson, "The Greatest Artists of the Twentieth Century," NBER Working Paper 11899 (2005).

6.      *OED*, Vol. 11, p. 166.

7.      John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, Vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 249.

8.      George Heard Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe, 1880-1940* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p, 247.

9.      H. H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, fifth ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), pp. 208-09; also see Sam Hunter, John Jacobus, and Daniel Wheeler, *Modern Art*, third ed. (New York: Vendome Press, 2004), p. 159.

10.     Richard Andrews, *Art Into Life* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 21.

11.     *OED*, Vol. 3, p. 794.

12.     Magdalena Dabrowski, "The Russian Contribution to Modernism: 'Construction' as Realization of Innovative Aesthetic Concepts of the Russian Avant-Garde," (unpublished Ph.D.  dissertation, New York University, 1990), Chaps 2-3.

13.     Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds., *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), p. 141; *OED*, Vol. 13, p. 270.

14.     E.g. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 125.

15.     Joseph Masheck, ed., *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), p. 126; also see p. 11.

16.     For discussion see David W. Galenson, *Old Masters and Young Geniuses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 86-93.

17. *OED*, Vol. 2, p. 209.

18. William Rubin, *Dada Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p. 40-41.

19. That the papers were not actually placed in this way is confirmed by Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, p. 41.

20. *OED*, Vol. 11, p. 166; Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 292.

21. *OED*, Vol. 11, p. 725.

22. Rubin, *Dada Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, p. 42; David Evans and Sylvia Gohl, *Photomontage: A Political Weapon* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1986), pp. 10-16.

23. Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1988), p. 96; *OED*, Vol. 13, p. 243.

24. *OED*, Vol. 11, p. 721; Baldwin, *Man Ray*, pp. 98-99.

25. *OED*, Vol. 6, p. 223.

26. Max Ernst, *Beyond Painting* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), p. 7.

27. Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, pp. 8-9.

28. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 288.

29. André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), p. 288-89.

30. Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 290.

31. Alexander Calder, *Calder* (New York: Pantheon, 1966), p. 113.

32. Calder, *Calder*, p. 127; *OED*, Vol. 9, p. 929.

33. Calder, *Calder*, p. 130; *OED*, Vol. 16, p. 429.

34. Rubin, *Dada Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, p. 143.

35. Rubin, *Dada Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, p. 211; John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, eds., *Oxford English Dictionary Additions Series*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 97.

36. Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 280. Duchamp later explained that the readymades were not related to found objects: "My Ready-Mades have nothing to do with the *objet trouvé* because the so-called 'found object' is completely directed by personal taste.

Personal taste decides that this is a beautiful object and is unique. That most of my Ready-Mades were mass produced and could be duplicated is another important difference;" Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 90-92.

37.     Rubin, *Dada Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, p. 144.

38.     Brandon Taylor, *Collage* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), p. 148.

39.     Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 515; Hunter, Jacobus, and Wheeler, *Modern Art*, p. 331.

40.     *OED*, Vol. 5, p. 315.

41.     Enrico Crispolti and Olivier Meessen, *Lucio Fontana* (Saint Paul de Vence: Galerie Pascal Retelet, 2000), pp. 142-43; Gill Perry and Paul Wood, eds., *Themes in Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 199.

42.     Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966), p. 159.

43.     *OED*, Vol. 1, p. 705.

44.     David W. Galenson, *Artistic Capital* (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 73-77; Peter Selz, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962), pp. 84-85.

45.     William Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), p. 150; Selz, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, p. 84.

46.     Selz, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, pp. 116-23.

47.     Selz, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, pp. 121, 105.

48.      Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*, p. 6.

49.     Amy Dempsey, *Art in the Modern Era* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), pp. 215-16.

50.     Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 484; Hunter, Jacobus, and Wheeler, *Modern Art*, pp. 300-01; Dempsey, *Art in the Modern Era*, p. 205.

51.     Galenson, *Artistic Capital*, p. 50.

52.     Dempsey, *Art in the Modern Era*, p. 206.

53.     E.g. Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 85-90; Arthur Danto, *The Madonna of the Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

2001), pp. 273-78; Dempsey, *Art in the Modern Era*, p. 206.

54. Paul Schimmel, *Robert Rauschenberg Combines* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006).

55. Danto, *The Madonna of the Future*, p. 278.

56. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 516; Hunter, Jacobus, and Wheeler, *Modern Art*, p. 360.

57. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 516.

58. Germano Celant, *Piero Manzoni* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1998), p. 132.

59. *OED*, Vol. 6, p. 1097; Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 1.

60. Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 2003), p. xxvii.

61. Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. xxvii-xxviii.

62. Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. xxviii.

63. Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. 15-26.

64. Hunter, Jacobus, and Wheeler, *Modern Art*, p. 314.

65. Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. 61; Hunter, Jacobus, and Wheeler, *Modern Art*, p. 314.

66. *OED*, Vol. 6, p. 614; Dempsey, *Art in the Modern Era*, p. 257.

67. *OED Additions Series*, Vol. 1, p. 11; Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 385-86.

68. Stiles and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, p. 386.

69. Larry Smith, *Pete Townshend* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999), pp. 14-15.

70. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 510; Hunter, Jacobus, and Wheeler, *Modern Art*, p. 330.

71. N. Charlet, *Yves Klein* (Paris: Adam Biro, 2000), p. 170.

72.    Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 515; Hunter, Jacobus, and Wheeler, *Modern Art*, p. 368.

73.    Celant, *Piero Manzoni*, p. 32.

74.    Louisa Buck, *Moving Targets 2* (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), pp. 19-22; Virginia Button, *The Turner Prize: Twenty Years* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), pp. 44-48.

75.    *OED*, Vol. 15, p. 930.

76.    Steven Madoff, ed., *Pop Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 228-33.

77.    *OED*, Vol. 15, p. 627; Stiles and Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, pp. 811-12.

78.    *OED Additions Series*, Vol. 2, p. 167; Dempsey, *Art in the Modern Era*, p. 247.

79.    Gill Perry and Paul Wood, eds., *Themes in Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 202.

80.    *OED*, Vol. 11, p. 544.

81.    Dempsey, *Art in the Modern Era*, p. 222.

82.    Carolee Schneeman, *More than Meat Joy* (New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1979), pp. 9-11.

83.    Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 614; Hunter, Jacobus, and Wheeler, *Modern Art*, p. 372; Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 116.

84.    Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, p. 68.

85.    Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, p. 614.

86.    Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, p. 104.

87.    Kenneth Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds., *Kandinsky* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), p. 152.

Table 1: Ages of Artists at Time of Inventing New Genres

| Date | Genre | Artist | Age |
|------|-------|--------|-----|
| 1912 | collage | Picasso | 31 |
| 1912 | papier collé | Braque | 30 |
| 1913 | counter-relief | Tatlin | 28 |
| 1915 | readymade | Duchamp | 28 |
| 1916 | biomorph | Arp | 29 |
| 1916 | papier dechiré | Arp | 29 |
| 1921 | rayogram | Man Ray | 31 |
| 1922 | photogram | Moholy-Nagy | 27 |
| 1925 | frottage | Ernst | 34 |
| 1925 | exquisite corpse | Breton | 29 |
| 1932 | mobile | Calder | 34 |
| 1932 | stabile | Calder | 34 |
| 1949 | décollage | Hains<br>Villeglé | 23<br>23 |
| 1949 | environment | Fontana | 50 |
| 1953 | assemblage | Dubuffet | 52 |
| 1954 | combine | Rauschenberg | 29 |
| 1957 | achrome | Manzoni | 24 |
| 1958 | happening | Kaprow | 31 |
| 1959 | auto-destructive | Metzger | 33 |
| 1960 | anthropometry | Klein | 32 |
| 1961 | living sculpture | Manzoni | 28 |
| 1962 | soft sculpture | Oldenburg | 33 |
| 1964 | skoob | Latham | 43 |
| 1965 | video | Paik | 33 |
| 1968 | non-site | Smithson | 30 |
| 1969 | earthwork | Smithson | 31 |

Source: see text.