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FROM THE NEW WAVE TO THE NEW HOLLYWOOD: LIFE CYCLES OF IMPORTANT MOVIE DIRECTORS FROM GODARD AND TRUFFAUT TO SPIELBERG AND EASTW

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ABSTRACT

Two great movie directors were both born in 1930. One of them, Jean-Luc Godard, revolutionized filmmaking during his 30s, and declined in creativity thereafter. In contrast, Clint Eastwood did not direct his first movie until he had passed the age of 40, and did not emerge as an important director until after 60. This dramatic difference in life cycles was not accidental, but was a characteristic example of a pattern that has been identified across the arts: Godard was a conceptual innovator who peaked early, whereas Eastwood was an experimental innovator who improved with experience. This paper examines the goals, methods, and creative life cycles of Godard, Eastwood, and eight other directors who were the most important filmmakers of the second half of the twentieth century. Francis Ford Coppola, Stanley Kubrick, Stephen Spielberg, and François Truffaut join Godard in the category of conceptual young geniuses, while Woody Allen, Robert Altman, John Cassavetes, and Martin Scorsese are classed with Eastwood as experimental old masters. In an era in which conceptual innovators have dominated a number of artistic activities, the strong representation of experimental innovators among the greatest film directors is an interesting phenomenon.

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Introduction

In 1930, two of the most important filmmakers in the history of the cinema were born. In 1960 one of them, Jean-Luc Godard, revolutionized the art form, as *Breathless* announced the ascendancy of the French New Wave, and during the next seven years, in rapid succession Godard made a series of films, including *Contempt, Pierrot le Fou, Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, and *Weekend*, that challenged and influenced filmmakers around the globe. In sharp contrast, Clint Eastwood's impact was not nearly as immediate. In the early 1960s he was acting the role of Rowdy Yates in the television series *Rawhide*, and by 1970 he had yet to direct his first feature film. It was only in the early 1990s, after more than two decades as a director, that Eastwood emerged as an important filmmaker, as *Unforgiven* swept the major American film awards. In 2004, he had another major success with *Million Dollar Baby*, and in 2006 – at the age of 76 – the *New York Times* declared that he had become the greatest living American filmmaker. By then, remarkably, Godard's most influential work was four decades behind him.

The contrasting career arcs of Godard and Eastwood are not random or accidental. They are representative: characteristic, if extreme, examples of the two life cycles that account for the careers of the most influential directors in the second half of the last century. This paper, a sequel to our earlier article that analyzed the careers of the greatest film directors born through 1920, describes these life cycles and considers how they help us to understand the innovations of important filmmakers.[1]

Two Kinds of Innovators

The most influential filmmakers in the history of cinema have approached their work in two different ways, and as a result they have made different kinds of films, and exhibited different kinds of careers. We call these two approaches *conceptual* and *experimental*. Conceptual innovators tend to produce their most influential work early in their careers. They base this work on preconceived ideas, which have little or no relation to their first-hand experience of the world. Experimental innovators, in contrast, tend to produce their most influential work later in their careers. Their work most often arises directly from their experience of the world, while contributing to it as well. Experimental innovators often describe the making of their work as a process of discovery. In reference to filmmaking, these two approaches manifest specific attributes and styles that illuminate significant innovations in the history of cinema.

The ideas that motivate conceptual filmmakers range from the intertextual to the moral. One type of conceptual director makes films that innovate by directly commenting on or reimagining the motifs, subjects, and styles of their predecessors. Their films can seem like intellectual exercises, especially to those unfamiliar with the films' context in the history of cinema. To sophisticates, however, these films often seem intellectually exciting, even revolutionary. Films by this type of conceptual director often draw attention to the fact that they are films. They are self-reflexive and deploy distancing techniques – such as jump cuts, extreme long shots and close-ups, deep focus shots, and unusual camera angles – that betray the conventions of cinematic realism. It is often difficult for audiences to identify with the characters in these films or to follow the arc of the story. Indeed, characterization is often beside the point; conceptual directors of this type tend to use characters as props to advance their ideas.

Another type of conceptual director shares this disregard for character, yet incorporates it in plot-driven morality tales. Their films tend to be allegorical, didactic, or both. Their films often serve to promote a particular worldview, which is often starkly defined and unambiguous. Good battles against evil; characters represent well-known stock figures; fantastic or unrealistic worlds symbolize everyday moral problems and contemporary political debates. Films by these directors are often entertaining and moving: cinematic techniques such as special effects encourage audiences to lose medium awareness – that is, forget they are watching a movie – and to get caught up in the action. Audiences support the characters in these films not because of who these characters are, but because of what they symbolize. These films often garner large box-office receipts.

These two types of conceptual directors represent the extremes of the conceptual approach to filmmaking. Individual conceptual filmmakers may combine elements of both throughout their careers or even in individual films. Indeed, a hallmark of many conceptual filmmakers is their frequent changes in styles and concerns across their careers. What unites all conceptual filmmakers, however protean, is the use of ideas to motivate and orient their work. These ideas may be intertextual or moral as in the above examples, or they may be more generally philosophical, commenting on topics such as truth and knowledge. Films by all conceptual directors are also usually highly planned and end-driven. Conceptual directors often see themselves as *auteurs*: they try to control as many aspects of production, often writing, editing, and producing their films as well as directing them. In this way, they aim to impress their personal visions on the world.

Experimental filmmakers tend not to be motivated by ideas at all. Instead, they make movies based on their experiences in the world, and they resist encapsulating these experiences in ideological statements, abstract concepts, or allegories. One could say they try to impress the world on their films, rather than their films onto the world. Accordingly, they favor naturalism, and often make movies using unobtrusive techniques and invisible direction that aims to absorb viewers. Toward this end, they use natural-seeming camera angles and lighting, and seamless editing. They aim to entertain or to illuminate reality, rather than to educate. They encourage spectators to identify with characters who, unlike the characters of their conceptual counterparts, usually seem genuine, complex and ambiguous – just like real people. These experimental directors tend to avoid explicit symbolism; they prefer realism, which they often promote through their use of photography. They want their viewers to see for themselves, to become participants in their films.

Unlike conceptual filmmakers, experimental filmmakers usually do not have specific goals for their work, apart from the desire to entertain or the ambiguous aim to present reality. Without predetermined goals, they often create films around characters and individual scenes, proceeding intuitively and by trial and error toward a finished product. They tend to spurn the tightly structured, end-driven films of their conceptual counterparts. Experimental directors often forsake coherency for effect, designing scenes to absorb viewers rather than contribute to a final climax. They often work collaboratively, inviting actors and writers to contribute to the development of the film under production. They make films to learn about the world, and often consider their work as a process of discovery aided by their collaborators.

Framework and Selection Criteria

Previous studies of conceptual and experimental innovators in other arts have identified the same distinct methods of innovation: one proceeding from predetermined ideas, the second from experience via a long process of trial and error. These studies have shown that the first method describes the contributions of conceptual artists and accounts for careers that begin brilliantly and decline with age. Correspondingly, the second method describes experimental artists and accounts for careers that improve with age, as the artists learn from their mistakes and gradually discover their voices. This study will apply this analytical framework to the work and careers of 10 important directors born after 1920, who are listed in Table 1.

The list of ten filmmakers used in this study is derived from two sources. First, we took all the directors born after 1920 included in *MovieMaker* magazine's list of the "25 Most Influential Directors of All Time." This list was composed by a panel of 48 expert judges selected by the magazine. This gave us eight names. The chief film-critic for the New York Times, A.O. Scott, gave us an additional two names. In his summary of the best films of 2006, he wrote, "Clint Eastwood, the greatest living American filmmaker (as of November), just gets better and better."[2] His qualification "as of November" refers to the director Robert Altman, who died in November of that year. Accordingly, we added both Eastwood and Altman to the list from *MovieMaker*.

It is worth noting that *Movie Maker* designated these initial eight directors as the most influential, rather than simply the greatest. In any creative activity, genuine importance – the long-term status that makes an individual the subject of serious and sustained study – is a function of innovation. In the short run, many practices may attract attention and gain publicity, but in the long run it is only those individuals who innovate, who create new practices that

influence the work of others in their disciplines, who are remembered, and studied. Their importance stems from the changes they make in their disciplines; the greater the changes, the greater the importance. What matters most about these innovators is their specific contributions: which of their practices were influential?

In categorizing individual directors, our attention consequently focuses not on all aspects of their work, but more narrowly on their most important contributions. The nature of these contributions is the basis for categorizing the directors as experimental or conceptual, and the timing of these contributions is the basis for determining when in their careers the directors were at their creative peaks. In categorizing the directors considered in this study as either experimental or conceptual, we have drawn on a range of evidence, including the judgments of scholars and critics, and statements by the directors themselves, as well as our own understanding of each director's work. In the discussion of the next section, we present some of the evidence on which we based our decisions. There is no way to prove that any of the statements, by experts or by the directors, are correct, for these statements generally represent individual opinions. Similarly, there is no way to prove that our own judgments as to the directors' categorization are correct, for there is no way to prove inductive propositions. We believe, however, that the division of these directors into the two types described above can be done quite unambiguously, and that doing so helps us to gain a more systematic understanding of these directors' careers than has previously been available. To this end, we proceed to a consideration of each of the 10 directors, treated chronologically by date of birth.

Directors

Robert Altman named his production company Sandcastle because he believed making a movie was like building one: “You get a bunch of mates together and go down to the beach and build a great sandcastle. You sit back and have a beer, the tide comes in, and in twenty minutes it’s just smooth sand. That structure you made is in everybody’s memories, and that’s it. You all start walking home, and someone says, ‘Are you going to come back next Saturday and build another one?’ And another guy says, ‘Well, OK, but I’ll do moats next time, not turrets!’ But that, for me, is the real joy of it all, that it’s just fun, and nothing else.”[3] Beverly Walker observed that Altman’s films were not strong on story – “Plot and heroics are not his bag” – but instead concentrated on characterization: “The way Altman depicts human beings is his most critical attribute as an artist. Every aspect of filmmaking art is put at the service of his perception of people.”[4]

Altman’s techniques were all intended to enhance his films’ realism. One of his most distinctive devices involved sound: “Instead of ordinary, clear sound, he uses overlapping sound – characters’ voices, even scenes, blend into and interrupt each other.” Altman explained: “That’s the way sound is in real life.”[5] His visual techniques, including long takes, continuous camera movement, and avoidance of close-ups, were equally aimed not at clarity but at authenticity: “Ideally, I want someone to walk out after one of my pictures and say, ‘I don’t have any idea what that was about, but it was right.’”[6]

Altman’s basic conviction was that “moviemaking is a collaborative art.”[7] He wanted the characters in his films to be joint creations: “If the vision were just mine, just a single vision, it wouldn’t be any good. It’s the combination of what I have in mind, with who the actor is and then how he adjusts to the character, along with how I adjust, that makes the movie.”[8] Pauline

Kael believed that Altman's approach allowed actors to give their best performances: "He sets them free to give their own pulse to their characters; inspired themselves, they inspire him."[9] Julie Christie, who starred in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, recalled that at first she found it "most unnerving to work with a democratic director. Directors are little kings."[10] Altman reflected that over time he had learned that he should try to create a conducive atmosphere for creativity, then stay out of the way: "I find more and more that the less I do the better the work comes out."[11]

Echoing the sentiments of many experimental artists, Altman explained that he did not approach his films with a clear plan: "My head is full of smoke and fog – I don't see anything. I just know that if you blow it away, we'll see it."[12] A journalist who watched Altman make *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* observed that "It is almost impossible to exaggerate the organic quality of an Altman film ... Once the film has begun, Altman moves cautiously, tentatively, finding out who the people are, assessing their relationships ... There is nothing intellectual about this groping. It is done by hunch, instinct, intuition." [13]The process was unavoidable, because Altman wanted each film to be a discovery: "What I want to see is something I've never seen before, so how can I tell someone what that is? I'm really looking for something from these actors that can excite me."[14]

As a child, Stanley Kubrick loved fairy tales and mythology. He became a director because he believed that film was the medium best able to realize the potential of this literature: "Naturalism finally does not elicit the more mysterious echoes contained in myths and fables; these resonances are far better suited to film than any other art form."[15] His aim as a filmmaker was always to carry out his initial conception; he explained that "What interests me about making a film is the impact the original idea makes on me in the first place... That's what I try to

remember all through the shooting and cutting and editing. Because films are all in bits and pieces and you can easily lose track of the main objective and that's where you go wrong."[16] Kubrick was convinced that any idea that interested him could be expressed in a movie: "If it can be written or thought, it can be filmed."[17]

Kubrick's strengths and weaknesses were those of a conceptual director. He was often praised for his technique and his systematic control of plot, and criticized for the weakness of his characterization. Thus for example Jean-Pierre Coursodon wrote in 1983 that "of all the living directors, he is perhaps the one who has the best understanding of the awesome technical possibilities of modern film making and of the ways to translate them into a totally controlled, thoroughly individual vision," but also noted that "Kubrick sees *all* people as puppets."[18] Gerald Mast observed that "in none of the films is there a successful fulfilling love relationship; there is something cold, sterile, and dead about the Kubrick world."[19] Pauline Kael explained that this was a consequence of Kubrick's overarching themes: "It isn't accidental that we don't care if the characters live or die; if Kubrick has made his people so uninteresting, it is partly because characters and individual fates just aren't big enough for certain kinds of big movie directors."[20] Kubick's own language does not dispel the charge, as for example he explained that the goal of *2001* was to make its audience ponder "man's destiny, his role in the cosmos and his relationship to higher forms of life."[21]

Kubrick was often considered obsessive in his desire to control every aspect of his films: to this end he not only produced the films he directed, but he also wrote the scripts, directed the research, selected the costumes, chose the music, cut and edited the footage, and even directed the publicity campaigns.[22] The writer Terry Southern, who collaborated with Kubrick on the

script for *Dr. Strangelove*, paid tribute to Kubrick's authority, and compared him in this respect to two other conceptual directors: "I was fascinated by this new thing of director as God ... like Fellini and Bergman."[23] Kubrick was a perfectionist, and he was rumored to have done as many as a hundred takes of some scenes. He claimed that this was an exaggeration, but admitted that he might do as many as thirty takes. He explained that this happened only when the actors were unprepared, and that the repeated filming was effectively a form of rehearsal; he contended that movie actors would concentrate, and learn their lines, only when they were stimulated by the excitement of actual filming.[24] One could also speculate, however, that the multiple takes were a product of Kubrick's desire to get exactly the effects he had imagined.[25]

Several of Kubrick's films contain examples of an intriguing phenomenon – a desire to use obsessively realistic details in the service of fantasy – that appears in the work of a number of conceptual artists.[26] Kubrick acknowledged this trait with characteristic understatement: "I have always enjoyed dealing with a slightly surrealistic situation and presenting it in a realistic manner."[27] In pursuit not only of a visually convincing but also a scientifically responsible representation of a hypothetical space mission that lay 35 years in the future, for *2001* Kubrick assembled a team of 35 artists and designers, 20 special-effects experts, and a staff of scientific advisers. He explained that the scenes set in outer space "would be done with the aid of a vast assortment of cinematic tricks, but ... that everything possible would be done to make each scene completely authentic and to make it conform to what is known to physicists and astronomers."[28] In another instance, Kubrick spent years preparing for a project that he never realized, a film biography of Napoleon. His description of his research in 1970 suggests the degree of his commitment to factual accuracy in detail:

> The first step has been to read everything I could get my hands on about Napoleon, and totally immerse myself in his life. I guess I must have gone through several hundred books on the subject, from contemporary nineteenth-century English and French accounts to modern biographies. I've ransacked all these books for research material and broken it down into categories on everything from his food tastes to the weather on the day of a specific battle, and cross-indexed all the data in a comprehensive research file. In addition to my own reading, I've worked out a consultant arrangement with Professor Felix Markham of Oxford... He's available to answer any questions that derive from my own reading or outside of it. We're also in the process of creating prototypes of vehicles, weapons, and costumes of the period which will subsequently be mass-produced, all copied from paintings and written descriptions of the time and accurate in every detail. We already have twenty people working full time on the preparatory stage of the film.[29]

Variety is another feature of Kubrick's work that is characteristic of a number of important conceptual innovators in the arts.[30] Kubrick's short filmography includes a film noir (*The Killing*), two very different war films (*Paths of Glory* and *Full Metal Jacket*), a historical epic (*Spartacus*), a political comedy (*Dr. Strangelove*), a philosophical science-fiction fantasy (*2001*), an eighteenth-century costume drama (*Barry Lyndon*), and a horror film (*The Shining*). Alexander Walker observed that "Because almost every film Kubrick has directed has entailed constructing a new concept, he is a filmmaker who resists the customary critical approach that tries to distinguish strongly linked themes in a director's work." For Walker, Kubrick's protean output was a result of his need to take on new challenges: "repeating a subject... would mean repeating *himself*. And he has simply not the time or the patience for that."[31]

The director John Sayles paid tribute to the nature of John Cassavetes' influence on a younger generation of directors:

> It might have been *Shadows* or *Faces* or *A Woman Under the*

> *Influence*. A kid in his teens or early twenties sits in a little art house or college auditorium watching the screen, and it dawns suddenly – "This is an American movie, but I know these people. It isn't a Technicolor dream or a cartoon with live actors; it doesn't drip with studio mood music or theatrical problem-drama dialogue. There is recognizable human behavior, adult human behavior, happening up on a movie screen. What gives? Who did this and how?"[32]

Sayles recognized that Cassavetes was an experimental director whose films were an attempt to represent real life. Cassavetes himself explained that this affected both their form and their content: "I try to make things believable and natural and seem like they're happening ... I write looser dialogue. The words are there, but they don't necessarily have to come to a conclusion ... I don't like things that are neat... this is *life*."[33] Not surprisingly, Cassavetes disdained the action blockbusters that vastly out-earned his films: "I've never seen an exploding helicopter. I've never seen anybody go and blow somebody's head off. So why should I make films about them?"[34] Ray Carney stressed that Cassavetes' work was based on concreteness and perception, and avoided any conceptual devices: "His films simply reject essentializing, metaphorizing, subjectivizing, abstracting, and contemplative forms of knowledge and relationship."[35]

Early in his career Cassavetes collaborated with an older writer, Edward McSorley. His description of what he learned could serve as a handbook for the experimental approach to filmmaking:

> Cassavetes later said that McSorley taught him the three most important things he knew: 1) that character was more important than plot, and that the most important thing of all was to present characters truthfully; 2) that the artist should not explain or define too much, or "do too much thinking for the audience," but that the story should "evolve, so that people could understand it only gradually as it went along"; 3) that "style is truth" and all that really mattered was that every scene should be as true to life,

> truthful about the characters and their real feelings and behavior, as possible.[36]

Cassavetes was a seeker, who wanted his movies to be acts of discovery. Mike Ferris, his longtime principal cameraman, explained that "He didn't want to know what was going to happen. He wanted to discover it, and be surprised. He created freedom. When it came to the characters he made you feel that he didn't know any more than you did – that you were asking questions on the same plane. He was searching. Looking for answers about people."[37] Cassavetes gave a similar account, as he explained that making his films was a quest: "The whole idea to me and to the people that I work with is to find some kind of personal truth, some kind of revelation. That's why we work on a story that has some kind of meaning that we don't quite understand."[38] One consequence of this was that his movies generally had to be filmed in continuity: *"Faces* was shot in sequence. A film like this has to be. We didn't know exactly what was going to happen next, even with a script ... [I]t's a picture about emotions, and these emotions had to develop, be worked out."[39] Another consequence of Cassavetes' uncertainty was that he often filmed many takes of a scene. Unlike Kubrick, however, who repeated scenes because he could not get his actors to perform according to his preconceived ideas, Cassavetes' repetition occurred because he didn't know exactly what he wanted. Al Ruban, a cameraman who often worked with Cassavetes, recalled that "He'd drive everybody crazy insisting that we shoot something again and again. He kept looking for something else to happen in the scene ... There was no bigger thrill for him than having something happen spontaneously." When something did happen, however, Cassavetes recognized it: "He didn't know what he was looking for but when he found it, he knew."[40]

Cassavetes spent most of his career working outside the Hollywood studios, and his attacks on the commercial film establishment earned him a reputation as a renegade. In retrospect, it is clear that his extreme experimental approach to making movies was radically different from the conceptual approaches that enjoyed the greatest critical and commercial success during the 1960s and '70s. Thus Ray Carney, an admirer of Cassavetes, explained the reason for the relative neglect of his work:

> Cassavetes' problem getting attention from the most sophisticated filmgoers has been compounded by the degree to which his work is jarringly out of step with both the style and content of most other "significant" contemporary film. Not only is his loose and baggy photographic and narrative style the opposite of the elegantly photographed, tightly paced intellectual exercises of a Bergman or Antonioni, but the plots, characters, and situations in Cassavetes' films resist just the sorts of metaphorical and philosophical expansions that these directors and others have taught us to expect in important contemporary films.[41]

Jean-Luc Godard's first movie had an almost instant impact on young directors. The Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci, for example, recalled that he had immediately recognized it as a watershed: "I saw *À 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 *À bout de souffle*."[42] The German director Volker Schlöndorff recognized Godard's fundamental innovations in editing: "The older generation said that Godard didn't know how to edit pictures, but that was all a big misunderstanding – Godard just edited his films in a different style, and today nearly every film is cut in the way that Godard cut *À bout de souffle*. Godard invented the craftsmanship of the future."[43]

Like most of his colleagues in the French New Wave, Godard was a film critic before he

became a director. He explained why all his early films were based directly on other films: "I knew nothing of life except through the cinema, and my first efforts were 'films de cinéphile,' the work of a film-enthusiast. I mean that I didn't see things in relation to the world, to life or history, but in relation to the cinema."[44] In retrospect, he realized that his first film was more fantastic than real: "I thought I was doing a thriller movie or a gangster movie, but when I saw the print for the first time I discovered what I'd done was completely different from what I supposed. I thought I was making *The Son of Scarface* or *The Return of Scarface*, and I discovered I'd made *Alice in Wonderland*."[45] David Sterritt described the new form created by Godard:

> The result is a brand of cinema more self-aware and proudly artificial than classical stylists find acceptable. Editing may be not only visible but aggressive and even disruptive, vying for attention with the story itself. Lighting designs may be expressionistic, symbolic, or otherwise compelling in their own right. Dialogue and other sounds may compete with each other, or be presented for pure noise value rather than for coherent meanings. Above all, the grammar of screen storytelling may be radically altered, forcing viewers into new relationships with the material they're seeing and hearing. Even the plot line might be (and often is) bent into innovative shapes that bring out unexpected meanings at the expense of ordinary values like momentum and suspense. Asked by a bewildered colleague whether his movies have any kind of structure – even a beginning, middle, and end – Godard famously replied, "Yes, but not necessarily in that order."[46]

Peter Wollen neatly described a common characteristic of the innovations of many young conceptual artists when he 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."[47] Godard and his New Wave colleagues cannibalized the movies of the past, and it was Hollywood that provided their primary sustenance: "Godard treated Hollywood as a kind of conceptual property store from which he

could serendipitously loot ideas for scenes, shots, and moods."[48] Godard's intellectual reach went far beyond movies, however, and his films are also studded with quotations from, and references to, works of music, painting, and literature. Jean-Pierre Gorin, who co-directed several films with Godard, summarized Godard's entire career as "an assault on the notion of intellectual property."[49]

Rather than stressing the visual nature of film, Godard considered it equivalent to writing: "I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them. Were the cinema to disappear, I would simply accept the inevitable and turn to television; were television to disappear, I would revert to pencil and paper. For there is a clear continuity between all forms of expression."[50] A scholar observed that Godard's work is "not simply cinema *about* philosophy or cinema *with* philosophy, rather it is cinema *as* philosophy. The cinematograph is a machine for thinking, for propelling thought."[51] For Susan Sontag, "That Godard has boldly addressed the task of representing or embodying abstract ideas as no other filmmaker has done before him is undeniable."[52]

Late in his life, the greatest French director of an earlier generation stressed the contrast between his own method and Godard's. In 1970, Jean Renoir explained that he had considered the job of the director to consist of creating the proper atmosphere to help the actors: "The actor has something inside himself, but very often he doesn't realize what he has in mind and his heart. I always try to start the work from the actor." He observed that Godard epitomized the opposite approach: "A great director, perhaps the top director of his day, Jean-Luc Godard is exactly the opposite of me. He starts with the camera. His frames are really a direct expression of his personality but without the in-between worries brought by actors."[53] The experimental Renoir

thus recognized that the conceptual Godard subordinated the actors to the camera because his goal was to express his own ideas, unlike Renoir himself, who wanted to use the camera to record the results of the collaboration between director and actors.[54]

True to his extreme conceptual nature, Godard's films are individually eclectic, and collectively protean. Gerald Mast observed that "Godard films are consistent in their inconsistency, their eclecticism, their mixing of many different kinds of ideas and cinematic principles."[55] In 1968, the critic Manny Farber remarked that "Each Godard film is of itself widely varied in persona as well as quality," and predicted that "At the end of this director's career, there will probably be a hundred films, each one a bizarrely different species."[56] Three decades and fifty Godard films later, Peter Wollen acknowledged 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." Yet Wollen also recognized that Godard's single greatest contribution had been his first film, which had all the central characteristics of a radical conceptual innovation: "*Breathless* was both a loving appropriation of narrative film and its desecration in the name of youth and improvised revolt, so that all the conventional rules of editing, lighting, screen-writing and direction were trashed, all the time-honored conventions ignored."[57]

Clint Eastwood began his movie career as an actor, and did not direct his first film until the age of 41. His early work as a director was more successful commercially than artistically or critically. In an assessment of his work in 1989, when Eastwood was 59, Geoff Andrew concluded that "Eastwood's best films remain fine examples of well-crafted, intelligent popular entertainment."[58]

In 1992, Eastwood won an Oscar for directing *Unforgiven*, which was also voted best picture. Kenneth Turan praised it as "a western for those who know and cherish the form, a film that resonates wonderfully with the spirit of films past while staking out a territory quite its own."[59] Eastwood had had the script of the film for more than a decade, but he explained that he had delayed making it because "I figured I had to age into it."[60] In 2004, at the age of 74, Eastwood won a second Oscar for directing *Million Dollar Baby*, which also won the Oscar for best movie. Roger Ebert declared that it was "a masterpiece, pure and simple." Ebert reflected on Eastwood's career: "Some directors lose focus as they get older. Others gain it, learning how to tell a story that contains everything it needs and absolutely nothing else. *Million Dollar Baby* is Eastwood's twenty-fifth film as a director, and his best." Ebert observed that the movie had "the simplicity and directness of classical storytelling; it is the kind of movie where you sit very quietly in the theater and are drawn deeply into lives that you care very much about."[61] In 2006, Eastwood directed *Letters from Iwo Jima*. The *New York Times'* critic, A. O. Scott, called it "close to perfect," and described it as "utterly original, even radical in its methods and insights." Scott declared that *Letters* was the year's best film, and named Eastwood "the greatest living American filmmaker."[62] Michael Wilmington praised *Letters* for its realism: "Eastwood shows war as it really happens in life rather than the way we usually see it in movies."[63]

Eastwood has a modest conception of the director's role: "The most a director can usually do with actors is to set up a nice atmosphere in which to work."[64] He considers making movies "definitely a democracy," and rejects the idea that the director is in control: "It's an ensemble."[65] His goal is "to allow everyone to bring something to the party, and not try to be so preconceived that I shut down creative ideas from other people. A lot of actors have wonderful suggestions

because they've thought very deeply about their characters."[66] Eliciting good performances is crucial: "You can shape the direction or shape the tone, but by and large, you're only as strong as the support you surround yourself with."[67] The key to success is what happens while filming: "I think that directing a film is *seeing* it, when you see it there live, when it's happening right there in front of you."[68] Because of this, he doesn't diagram his scenes in advance: "I hate to be the prisoner of a diagram. The best ideas come to me when the camera is in place, ready to shoot... Of course, I have a general idea of the sequence, but I try to remain as flexible as possible. I'll always leave the actor the latitude to modify one of his movements if he has a good reason."[69] In 1988, almost two decades into his career as a director, Eastwood recalled that initially his favorite stage of filmmaking had been editing, but that over time his attitude had changed: "now I take more pleasure in the shooting itself. On every film, I discover something new, I want to try things out."[70] For Eastwood, the central element in a film is character development: "if a character doesn't grow in each film, if he doesn't learn something about life as he goes along, there isn't any sense in doing the film."[71] Yet he doesn't want his characters' destinies to be fully resolved: "I like to leave them ... still in the process of finding their way." The incompleteness increases the audience's involvement: "It's the audience's imagination and participation that makes a film work. You don't have to tell them everything."[72]

In 1957, before he began to make movies, the young film critic François Truffaut predicted a conceptual revolution: "The film of tomorrow appears to me as even more personal than an individual and autobiographical novel, like a confession, or a diary. The young filmmakers will express themselves in the first person and will relate what has happened to them ... The film of tomorrow will be an act of love."[73] Just two years later Truffaut became a leader

of that revolution. The magazine *L'Express* christened him, along with Godard and a number of their friends including Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, and Louis Malle, as the New Wave. Almost overnight Paris became the center of the advanced film world.

Truffaut's early films, like those of Godard, disoriented and irritated many critics accustomed to traditional techniques: "Odd camera angles, high-key exposures, grain, interspersed stop-and-go motion, sequences which suddenly zoom into a bird's eye view, multiple-scene frames, cutouts, squares of action surrounded by black - Truffaut uses whatever technique suits his purpose, or his whim."[74] Yet other critics, and many young directors, found Truffaut's films thrilling. Pauline Kael explained that "What's exciting about movies like *Shoot the Piano Player* and *Breathless* (and also the superb *Jules and Jim*...) is that they, quite literally, move with the times. They are full of unresolved, inexplicable, disharmonious elements, irony and slapstick and defeat all compounded – *not* arbitrarily as the reviewers claim – but in terms of the filmmaker's efforts to find some expression for his own anarchic experience, instead of making more of those tiresome well-made movies that no longer mean much to us."[75]

Truffaut's early work largely shared the attitudes and aesthetic of Godard's. Thus for example Peter Brunette observed of his second film, *Shoot the Piano Player*, that "Unlike the American films it simultaneously emulates and discards, it never ceases to push its authorship - the delightful fact that some very clever young man must have made it – in the viewer's face."[76] Truffaut acknowledged that he didn't aim at realism: "*Shoot the Piano Player* isn't made to be believed, but to divert, to amuse."[77] This was in keeping with his belief that "the cinema is a show, and I compare a film to an act in a circus, or in a music hall."[78] Like Godard, Truffaut felt free to quote from the history of film: "this genre of film is an amalgam, filled with references to

the American films I've loved."[79] This conceptual synthesis of older elements was intended to be both innovative and dynamic: "Above all I was looking for the explosion of a genre (the detective film) by mixing genres (comedy, drama, melodrama, the psychological film, the thriller, the love film, etc.)."[80]

Although he was dogged throughout his career by the criticism that his films did not deal with important issues, Truffaut contended that important art did not have to treat social or political causes. His films were intended as entertainments, but he nonetheless believed that they held larger messages. As he had predicted in 1957, these messages were intensely personal, for they grew out of the experiences that had had the greatest meaning in his own life, so that several themes recur in his films – the sadness of neglected children, the difficulty of relationships between men and women, and the magic of the cinema.

In *The Comic Mind,* Gerald Mast compared Woody Allen's films to those of an earlier experimental director: "What distinguished Chaplin from his able but less interesting competitors was precisely his ability to add character, thematic richness, emotional poignancy, and structural complexity to mere roughhouse. Similarly, what distinguishes Woody Allen is his ability to add character, thematic richness, a psychoanalytic examination of the modern temper, and a sociological analysis of our modern times to mere parody."[81] Mast considered both Allen and Chaplin to be observers of contemporary American society, and attributed the difference in their themes to a change in society: "One might call Woody Allen's entire *oeuvre* 'Modern Times,' and if the problem for Allen's city dwellers has shifted from the external one of finding a job and founding a home to the internal one of feeling secure enough to survive between appointments with the analyst, that shift is symptomatic of five decades of change in American life itself."[82]

Jean-Pierre Coursodon praised Allen's films as the funniest comedies made since those of the Marx brothers, but noted that their shortcomings were those of an experimental artist: "Woody Allen's movies are plotless, chaotic, uneven, self-indulgent ... shoddily produced and clumsily directed."[83] Allen has stressed that he is not interested in the technical aspects of filmmaking, and that his goal as a director is to make the audience forget the camera: "It doesn't jar the audience, you know. You become unaware that it's film."[84] For Coursodon, Allen has been successful in this: "People and places in his films look real, his characters sound natural."[85]

Allen explained that for him "a film grows organically."[86] Although he usually writes his own screenplays, he believes that a film is "not really written beforehand. It's written during the filming."[87] He encourages actors to "change what you want" during filming, always hoping they will surprise him: "Any artist – you see it very clearly in jazz musicians – comes out there, and what differentiates the great ones from the lesser ones is that they can thrill you with the turn of a phrase, a run, or the bending of a note. This is true of acting."[88] He considers making movies a craft, and a director's skills improve over time: "Technique is something you learn ... It's like throwing a ball or playing billiards or playing the piano ... I looked up one day and a certain technique had come from doing films and being interested in improving and working at it. And now I know what to do to make a film."[89]

Most critics agree that Allen's work improved. Coursodon remarked that "Allen's growth in what could be called his postslapstick period [is] so striking that one finds it difficult to deal with the early efforts without comparing them – unfairly – with the masterful works that were to follow."[90] Experimental artists improve their work gradually, as they learn more about the world they are trying to represent, and improve the skills they use to represent it. Mast saw Allen doing

this, creating a body of work that evolved over time, with each film resembling the earlier ones but improving on them: “Woody Allen ... has mastered both his cinematic craft and his subject ... As with Chaplin, each film Allen has made has arguably been the best to that point in his career ... and, like Chaplin’s, every Allen film is simultaneously a unique creation and unmistakably linked to his work as a whole.”[91] Allen’s changes were deliberate, as he explained that he had consciously decided to change his style: “I wanted to take a step toward more realistic and deeper films ... I really count *Annie Hall* as the first step toward maturity in some way in making films.”[92]

Francis Ford Coppola was the first of the precocious young directors who were trained in film schools and went on to create the New Hollywood. His example inspired many others. George Lucas, who was five years younger than Coppola, recalled the excitement when Coppola was given a feature film to direct at Warner Brothers just a year after he left film school: “Francis Coppola had directed his first picture as a UCLA student and now, Jesus, he got a feature to direct! It sent shock waves through the student film world because nobody else had ever done that. It was a big event.”[93] Coppola will always be known primarily for a landmark work he made early in his career. Thus in 1999 Steven Spielberg, one of the dominant figures in the New Hollywood, told an interviewer he considered *The Godfather* the best film made by any living director: “I’ve never made a movie anywhere near as good as *The Godfather*, and I don’t have the ambition to, either.”[94]

Pauline Kael praised Coppola as an “authentic hero” for the scale of the allegory of *The Godfather*: “The completed work is an epic about the seeds of destruction that the immigrants brought to the new land... We’re not used to it: how many screen artists get the chance to work in

the epic form, and who has been able to seize the power to compose a modern American epic?"[95] An interviewer reported that Coppola never wanted to make films "that he deplores with the generic epithet 'naturalism.' He wants, he says, to exploit the power of film to create works, as do artists in other media, that may deviate from apparent reality but that 'explore what we are as a people and a nation and a world.'"[96] Coppola explained that his goal was not to illustrate reality, but to express his imagination:

> Ever since I started making films, I've tried to use the theatre director's approach – imagining this enormous production as an event that I want to create – and then I've gone with the camera and sound and tried my very best to record it as I imagined it. There is another point of view – the illustrator-director's approach – which I think is the opposite of my own. That starts with a series of pictures, moving pictures, which you produce, and which, when the pictures are displayed, *becomes* a production.[97]

Like Kubrick, Coppolla based his films on what a biographer calls "prodigious and compulsive research."[98] He interviewed experts on the subjects of his films, and hired researchers. He then systematically incorporated the resulting information into his films. For *Apocalypse Now*, for example,

> I made a list of all the things you would have to touch on to make an honest film about Vietnam, and there were 200 things. Like the use of drugs, the fact that black soldiers were up at the front line, the fact that American officers lived in affluence and played golf, that American soldiers there were very young, 17 and 18. And my list went on, thing after thing. I tried as well as I could to get as many of those things into the film. For those of you who choose to see the film again, you will see that every inch of it is packed with some other point.[99]

For Coppola, movies are a way to express his conception of social trends and epoch-making events. He once remarked that he would like to become a new kind of artist: "I want to

basically pick up not with the great filmmakers but with the great thinkers and novelists... Joyce, Thomas Mann, etc. And to try to write a novel. But instead of it being a novel on the written page, it would be written in cinema."[100]

Coppola and the other leading young directors of the New Hollywood were nearly all conceptual in approach. Martin Scorsese was an exception. As he remarked himself, "We're all close friends, George [Lucas] and Spielberg and myself. But... they were the mythmakers." Scorsese's movies were not fantasies, but were made "out of real love for the subject matter and for the characters. Or, I should say, out of empathy with the characters."[101]

Scorsese's strength lay in creating realistic characters and environments, with "carefully textured psychological portraits of Americans deeply entangled in their neorealistically detailed social environments."[102] A reviewer of *Raging Bull* remarked that "Scorcese himself is a native of New York City's Little Italy, so he understands these people and their world. He didn't make a movie about foreign matters. The setting is his home."[103] Pauline Kael agreed on the source of Scorsese's success:

> *Mean Streets* never loses touch with the ordinary look of things or with common experience; rather, it puts us in closer touch with the ordinary, the common, by turning a different light on them... [T]here has never before been a gangster film in which you felt that the director himself was saying, "This is my story..." [W]e're so affected because we know in our bones that he has walked these streets and has felt what his characters feel. He knows how natural crime is to them.[104]

When Jerry Capeci, a journalist who has written extensively on the Mafia, was asked what he considered the truest movie or television portrayal of the mob, he answered "*GoodFellas*, hands down."[105]

Scorsese intended his films to be realistic. For example, he reflected that "*Mean Streets* was an attempt to put myself and my old friends on the screen, to show how we lived, what life was like in Little Italy. It was really an anthropological or a sociological tract."[106] Similarly, he explained that his goal for *GoodFellas* was "to be as close to the truth as possible in a fiction film, without whitewashing the characters or creating a phoney sympathy for them ... Throughout the picture I was always telling people, 'There's no sense in making another gangster picture, unless it is as close as possible to a certain kind of reality, to the spirit of a documentary.'"[107]

Scorsese's realism was often disturbing, particularly to those who expected movies to be allegorical or inspirational. One reviewer commented that "*Raging Bull* is so tough and so intransigently anti-romantic that some viewers are certain to wonder why it was made at all. Where's the *moral*? ... La Motta is not a nice guy; *Raging Bull* is not, and does not want to be, a nice movie – Scorsese is after verismilitude, not myth."[108] Scorsese understood that this hurt him commercially, in comparison with his New Hollywood peers: "With the advent of *Rocky* and *Star Wars* and the Spielberg pictures, on the best side they're morally uplifting; you leave the theater the way you did at the end of *Casablanca*. And on the worst side, they're sentimental. Lies. That's the problem. And where I fit in, I don't know." He recognized, though, that morality tales were not an option for him: "It's very hard for me to do the uplifting, transcendental sentimentalism of most films, because it's just not true. And it's not because I'm this great prophet of truth – it's just like embarrassing to do it on the set. How would you stage the scene? What do you tell the actors, you know?" He understood that "what sells is fantasy and sentimentality," but he was not tempted to do it himself: "What I'm afraid of is pandering to

tastes that are superficial."[109] His own commitment was to showing the people he grew up with: "My stuff is like some guy on the street corner talking."[110] He believes that his accomplishment involved honesty: "I just think I tried to depict certain types of places and certain types of people as honestly as possible."[111]

Gerald Mast observed that George Lucas and Steven Spielberg were the master mythmakers of their era: "Their common commitments are myth and movies." Spielberg's real commitment was not to his subject but to his viewers: "In Spielberg's mythology, the essential close encounter is between filmmakers and their audiences, for whom the dreams and myths of the imagination become concrete celebrations of sound, light, color, and space." The common theme in Spielberg's films was his delight in the properties of his medium: "Like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T.* is as much a hymn to the wonder of movies as to the mysteries of outer space."[112]

Spielberg is a conceptual director who subordinates characterization to plot. The writer Peter Benchley, who objected to what he considered the simplifications Spielberg made in his story for *Jaws,* told a journalist: "Spielberg needs to work on character. He knows, flatly, zero... He is a twenty-six-year old who grew up with movies. He has no knowledge of reality but the movies. He is B-movie literate. When he must make decisions about the small ways people behave, he reaches for movie clichés of the forties and fifties."[113] Richard Dreyfuss, who acted in *Jaws* and several other Spielberg films, conceded that Spielberg was primarily concerned with plot: "Steve's not what you'd call an actor's director ... In his philosophy, the actors serve the story."[114] Spielberg freely admits that stories are his primary concern: "The conception of the story is the most exciting part about making a picture for me."[115]

Spielberg's early films were generally adventure stories aimed at young audiences. François Truffaut, who acted in *Close Encounters*, praised Spielberg's ability to entertain: "I believe that the success of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* comes from Steven's very special gift for giving plausibility to the extraordinary."[116] In 1993, however, Spielberg shifted to a more serious subject. *Schindler's List* was a great critical and commercial success, it won seven Oscars, including Best Film and Best Director (Spielberg's first), and many critics praised it as a masterpiece. Some dissenters, however, criticized it for its simplifications. A biographer of Spielberg, John Baxter, observed that "The film's vision of the Holocaust is... suspect because of Spielberg's partiality for the Big Moment and the Flamboyant Gesture."[117] More bluntly, Jean-Luc Godard declared that "*Schindler's List* is a good example of making up reality. It's Max Factor... I saw a documentary, not a good one, but at least you get the real facts about Schindler. [Spielberg] uses this man and this story and all the Jewish tragedy as if it were a big orchestra, to make a stereophonic sound from a simple story."[118]

Spielberg owns 25 paintings by Norman Rockwell, who is his favorite artist: "Aside from being an astonishingly good storyteller, Rockwell spoke volumes about a certain kind of American morality." Spielberg proudly shares Rockwell's values: "I've never made a movie that I consider immoral. I've never made a film that I could say, 'You know, I wish I hadn't made that picture because it led people astray.' And I'm real proud of that." For him, movies are a moral imperative: "I do think I have a personal responsibility as a family man to use my filmmaking opportunities to put out there stories that have some sort of redeeming social value."[119]

<u>Directors and Painters</u>

Film scholars have never systematically examined the attitudes of directors toward the process of making their movies. The topic is a complex one, because directors perform a number of different functions, and deal with large numbers of actors and technicians. Interviews with directors reveal a wide variety of attitudes. In working on this study, however, we were struck by a particular parallel between the statements of some conceptual directors and painters, and by a very different parallel between those of some experimental directors and painters. Although more systematic study remains to be done, we report these relationships here because they are suggestive, and may prompt others to consider our analysis in studying managers of other kinds of enterprises.

Some conceptual painters have stated that their works are so completely preconceived that they find the actual execution of the works uninteresting. A prominent example is Jasper Johns. In 1965 he told the critic David Sylvester that he chose to paint images that were "preformed" elements, and that because there were no significant decisions to be made while he worked, "I usually get bored before I finish."[120] Steven Spielberg expressed a similar attitude: "Because I've got such a clear picture in my head of what the final film should look like, the actual process of making the movie is kind of laborious and sometimes boring."[121] He compared making a movie to a highly preconceived form of painting: "You know exactly what you want, it's like painting by the numbers."[122]

For Spielberg, making a movie was often frustrating, because of the many obstacles to "trying to capture some of what you've got in your head and trying to get it up on the screen."[123] Directing was consequently a struggle: "Making a movie, any movie, is like fighting hand-to-hand war... *Every* filmmaker is a commanding officer."[124] Similar attitudes were expressed by

Spielberg's friend and frequent collaborator, George Lucas. Lucas is a highly conceptual director, who at the age of 33 made the blockbuster *Star Wars*, the first movie ever to yield gross revenues of more than $500 million. In 1980, he told an interviewer, "I hate directing. It's like fighting a fifteen-round heavyweight bout with a new opponent every day." Like Spielberg, Lucas was distressed by the difficulty of making the film he'd imagined: "You go to work knowing just how you want a scene to be, but by the end of the day, you're usually depressed, because the actual product didn't match the image."[125]

Lucas' attitude toward directing appears to be reflected in his lack of interest in actors. John Seabrook observed in 1997 that "because Lucas has little rapport with actors, his films tend to have only passable acting in them." Seabrook quoted Mark Hamill, one of the leading actors in *Star Wars*: "I have a sneaking suspicion that if there were a way to make movies without actors, George would do it."[126]

A radically different attitude toward artistic process appears in the statements of some experimental directors and painters. In a remark quoted above, John Cassavetes explained that what he was looking for while filming was "some kind of revelation." The word is the same one used by the Abstract Impressionist Mark Rothko in 1948: "The picture must be for [the artist], as for anyone experiencing it later, a revelation ..." Interestingly, Rothko compared the process of making his paintings to unscripted theatrical performances: "I think of my pictures as dramas; the shapes in the pictures are the performers ... Neither the action nor the actors can be anticipated, or described in advance." The painting was completed in a "flash of recognition."[127]

The cinematographer Haskell Wexler, who worked with Cassavettes, compared his method to that of an experimental painter: "It was like working on a film with a living sketch

pad, when the artist has a sense of what the film should be, but he doesn't know whether to use a pen or make this part longer. He would try not to impose his view and hope that the actors could improve and expand on it with improvisation, without letting them know what he had in mind. They would try and please him and he would hope it would turn out better than he imagined."[128] Cassavetes stressed that he avoided preconception: "I *hate* knowing my theme and my story before I start ... When you know in advance what the story is going to be, it gets boring really fast."[129] He explained that his job was to allow his actors to relax: "The director's function is to set up that atmosphere of being able to expose yourself without being criticized on a level of failure."[130] He took pains to avoid influencing the actors: "When we're filming, I actually give up all my own ideas and preconceptions, so that I can devote myself exclusively to what's unfolding in front of me."[131]

Like Cassavetes, Robert Altman wanted to give his actors the confidence to surprise him: "I want them to show me something I haven't seen before, and to do that I have to encourage them or make them feel safe that if they do go too far, that isn't going to appear in the film. I need to assure them that we'll do it again until it's right. I never will give them any instructions that limit them in their performances."[132] He wanted to learn from making his movies: "It's better for me not to know exactly what I'm getting into ... I know I'm going to learn something. There's a sense of discovery that, I hope, the audience will be able to share."[133] The excitement of making movies was in the uncertainty: "If I knew how everything was going to be done, I'd always be late for work, because it would be dull."[134]

Just as for Jasper Johns painting a picture is a laborious process of recording an image that he has created fully in his mind, so for some conceptual movie directors making a film is a

frustrating struggle to transform a precise mental image into a physical product. In contrast, for Mark Rothko the act of painting was a quest for discovery, and for some experimental directors making a movie is an exhilarating adventure. Whereas Spielberg and Lucas are bored while directing, and often frustrated by their actors' failure to replicate their clear mental images, Cassavetes and Altman were excited by the act of making movies, and considered their actors a source of discoveries. Spielberg and Lucas think of directors as military commanders, whereas Cassavetes and Altman thought of directors as people who get a group of friends together to discuss a text, or to enjoy a day at the beach. Spielberg and Lucas do not represent all conceptual directors, nor do Cassavetes and Altman stand for all experimental directors. Yet the powerful parallel in attitude between these directors and their counterparts in painting suggests that their contrasting attitudes are more than accidental.

Measuring Careers

Having categorized the directors in our sample, we can now consider whether there have been systematic differences in the life cycles of the conceptual and experimental innovators. As in our earlier study, a number of independent sources of evidence will be used to determine when these directors made their most important movies. The first of these is a poll taken in 2002 by *Sight and Sound*, the journal of the British Film Institute, in which several hundred critics and directors from around the world were asked to list the ten best movies ever made. In analyzing these responses, we counted each appearance of a movie on a critic's or director's list as a single vote. The movie (or movies, in cases of ties) by each director in our sample that received the most votes is listed in Table 2. The results are generally not surprising, for the table contains such classics as *The Godfather*, *Breathless*, *2001*, *Jaws*, *E.T.*, and *Nashville*. The median age at

which the conceptual directors made the films listed in Table 2 was 31.5, fully 16 years below the median age of 47.5 at which the experimental directors made their entries in the table.

The second source of evidence is four commercial guides to movies: *Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide* (2005 edition), *Halliwell's Film Guide 2004, Video Hound's Golden Movie Retriever* (2004), and *TLA Video and DVD Guide* (2005). Each of these guides rates each of the movies they list, in each case up to a maximum of four stars. We created a data set that included all movies by our ten directors that were included in these four guides. We then ranked the movies by adding up the total number of stars given to each movie by all four guides. Table 3 presents the highest-ranked film (or films) of each director by this measure. The film guides produce somewhat different results from the *Sight and Sound* poll, as seven of the 13 movies in Table 3 are not included among the 12 films in Table 2. The resulting age difference between the two groups of directors is smaller, but remains qualitatively the same, as the median age of the conceptual directors when they made the films in Table 3 was 35, whereas that of the experimental directors was 40.5.

The third source of evidence is a listing published in 2002 by the National Society of Film Critics of what they called 100 essential films.[135] Table 4 presents all the movies by our 10 directors that are included among these 100 films. All 10 directors are represented, and two directors have more than one entry on the list. Nine of the 12 movies in Table 4 also appear in Tables 2 or 3. The median age of the five conceptual directors when they made their best films as judged by the National Society of Film Critics was 33, nine years below the median age of the experimental directors, of 42.

The fourth source of evidence is a listing of a "canon of great films" published in 2007 by

the *Village Voice*. The editor of the compilation freely admits that it is "an idiosyncratic selection, one that defies conventional wisdom and abides by the tradition of advocacy that has long informed film criticism at the *Voice*."[136] Yet the listing reflects the judgments of a series of influential critics who wrote for the *Voice*, including Jonas Mekas and Andrew Sarris, and it is useful for this study because it provides an independent evaluation of the importance of the work of the directors considered here. One element of that independence is immediately apparent in Table 5, which lists all the films made by our 10 directors that appear in the *Voice's* guide. Unlike Tables 2-4, all of which contain entries for all 10 directors, four directors – Allen, Coppola, Spielberg, and Truffaut – are not represented in Table 5. It is also striking that six of the 16 entries in Table 5 are films by Godard, and three each are by Cassavetes and Scorsese, so that these three directors together account for three quarters of the total entries in the table. Fully 12 of the 16 films in Table 5 do not appear in Tables 2, 3, or 4. When we consider the ages at which the directors made the films that are included in Table 5, however, we find the median age at which the conceptual directors made their films was 37, whereas that of the experimental directors was 43.5. Thus in spite of the sharp difference between the *Voice's* judgments and those of our other three sources about which films, and which directors, are most important, the *Voice's* implicit assessment of the creative life cycles of the directors of the two types is similar to those of the other three sources.

Four very different sources of evidence all point to the same conclusion, that the conceptual directors considered in this study made their greatest movies considerably earlier in their careers than their experimental counterparts. As summarized above, the central tendency for each type of evidence indicates that the conceptual directors peaked during their thirties, and the

experimental directors during their forties. Three of the five conceptual directors – Kubrick, Spielberg, and Truffaut – made major films that appear in these tables before they had reached the age of 30, compared to none of the five experimental directors. All five of the experimental directors have films in these tables that they directed at the age of 50 or above, compared to only Godard among the conceptual directors. Overall, this quantitative evidence clearly supports the proposition that the greatest movie directors of the second half of the twentieth century included both conceptual young geniuses and experimental old masters.

Conclusion

Orson Welles revolutionized filmmaking with his first movie, *Citizen Kane*, when he was 26 years old, and never again made a contribution of comparable importance. In contrast, John Ford directed his most important films after the age of 60. In an earlier article, we showed that this difference was not anomalous, but was a characteristic example of a systematic pattern that has been identified across the arts: conceptual innovators typically make important early discoveries and decline in creativity thereafter, while experimental innovators improve gradually over time, and make their greatest contributions later in their lives.[137] The present study demonstrates that a dramatic contrast in the careers of two great contemporary filmmakers presents another such example. Thus Jean-Luc Godard created a conceptual revolution with *Breathless*, his first movie, at the age of 30, while the experimental Clint Eastwood did not become a great director until he had passed the age of 60. By extending our analysis of movie directors to the most important filmmakers of the late twentieth century, this study again demonstrates the value of systematic analysis of the creative life cycles of individual artistic innovators. Admirers not only of Godard but also of Francis Ford Coppola and Steven Spielberg

need no longer puzzle over the diminished creativity that followed their early landmark achievements: they are merely among the latest in a line of aging conceptual innovators that earlier included such notable figures as Herman Melville, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Rauschenberg, and Bob Dylan. Clint Eastwood's experimental approach to filmmaking similarly explains why he has joined the contemporary artists Louise Bourgeois and Frank Gehry in producing his greatest work after the age of 60. This study has also revealed an interesting fact about the film industry. The second half of the twentieth century has been a period in which a number of arts have been dominated by conceptual innovators.[138] The even balance between experimental and conceptual innovators among the era's very greatest filmmakers is consequently an intriguing phenomenon.

Footnotes

1. Galenson and Kotin 2007.
2. Scott 2006b.
3. Thompson 2006, xviii.
4. Sterritt 2000, 129.
5. Sterritt 2000, 7.
6. Breskin, 1992, 297.
7. Sterritt 2000, 13.
8. Sterritt 2000, 129.
9. Kael 1975, 450.
10. Sterritt 2000, 14.
11. Sterritt 2000, 24.
12. Thompson 2006, 49.
13. Sterritt 2000, 12.
14. Thompson 2006, 132.
15. Walker 1972, 15.
16. Phillips 2001, 14.
17. Corliss 1994, 19. Corliss suggested a modification: “We think he meant: ‘If I can think it, I can film it.’”
18. Coursodon 1998, 188, 183.
19. Mast 1986, 444.
20. Schwam 2000, 145.
21. Phillips 2001, 48.
22. Phillips 2001, 35, 81.

23. Phillips 2001, 16.

24. Phillips 2001, 166, 201.

25. Phillips 2001, 114.

26. James Joyce is a notable example of this; see Beja 1992, 64.

27. Phillips 2001, 114.

28. Phillips 2001, 19, 36.

29. Phillips 2001, 85.

30. Galenson 2007.

31. Walker 1972, 8.

32. Charity 2001, 111.

33. Carney 2001, 341.

34. Carney 2001, 375.

35. Carney 1994, 10.

36. Carney 2001, 103.

37. Charity 2001, 151.

38. Carney 2001, 135.

39. Carney 2001, 150.

40. Fine 2005, 164-65.

41. Carney 1985, 11.

42. Cowie 2004, 133.

43. Cowie 2004, 146.

44. Sterritt 1998, 4.

45. Sterritt 1998, 29.

46. Sterritt 1999, 20.

47. Wollen 2002, 77.

48. Wollen 2002, 76.

49. MacCabe 2003, 123.

50. Milne 1986, 171.

51. Morrey 2005, 242.

52. Sontag 1969, 152-53.

53. Stevens 2006, 610-11.

54. On Renoir as an experimental director, see Galenson and Kotin 2007.

55. Mast 1986, 356.

56. Farber 1998, 259.

57. Wollen 2002, 80-81, 92.

58. Andrew 1989, 92.

59. Carr 2002, 304.

60. Carr 2002, 304.

61. Ebert 2006, 214-15.

62. Scott 2006a, 2006b.

63. Wilmington 2007.

64. Kapsis and Coblentz 1999, 26.

65. Kapsis and Coblentz 1999, 73.

66. Kapsis and Coblentz 1999, 229.

67. Knapp 1996, 9.
68. Kapsis and Coblentz 1999, 71.
69. Kapsis and Coblentz 1999, 98.
70. Kapsis and Coblentz 1999, 236.
71. Knapp 1996, 7-8.
72. Kapsis and Coblentz 1999, 67-68.
73. Truffaut 1994, 19.
74. Braudy 1972, 84.
75. Brunette 1993, 152.
76. Brunette 1993, 3.
77. Brunette 1993, 129.
78. Brunette 1993, 130.
79. Brunette 1993, 132.
80. Brunette 1993, 135.
81. Mast 1979, 307.
82. Mast 1986, 431.
83. Coursodon 1998, 12.
84. Schickel 2003, 162.
85. Coursodon 1998, 15.
86. Kapsis and Coblentz 2006, 40.
87. Kapsis and Coblentz 2006, 51.
88. Kapsis and Coblentz 2006, 121, 157-58.

89. Lax 2007, 201.

90. Coursodon 1998, 11.

91. Mast 1979, 319.

92. Allen 1993, 77.

93. Pollock 1990, 72.

94. Friedman and Notbohm 2000, 229.

95. Kael 1975, 397, 402.

96. Phillips and Hill 2004, 134.

97. Phillips and Hill 2004, 103.

98. Chown 1988, 6.

99. Chown 1998, 145.

100. Phillips and Hill 1988, 122.

101. Brunette 1999, 176.

102. Mast 1986, 438.

103. Hayes 2005, 146.

104. Kael, 1975, 173.

105. Capeci 2006.

106. Christie and Thompson 2003, 48.

107. Christie and Thompson 2003, 150.

108. Hayes 2005, 136.

109. Brunette 1999, 136-37.

110. Brunette 1999, 148.

111. Emery 2003, 50.

112. Mast 1986, 497-98.

113. Baxter 1996, 131.

114. McBride 1997, 236.

115. Friedman and Notbohm 2000, 16.

116. McBride 1997, 276.

117. Baxter 1996, 393.

118. Sterritt 1998, 182.

119. Friedman and Notbohm 2000, 223-25.

120. Sylvester 2001, 151, 155. On Johns as a conceptual painter, see Galenson 2006, 38-39.

121. Emery 2003, 65.

122. Friedman and Notbohm 2000, 16.

123. Emery 2003, 65.

124. Friedman and Notbohm 2000, 79.

125. Kline 1999, 88.

126. Kline 1999, 202.

127. Breslin 1993, 239-40. On Rothko as an experimental painter, see Galenson 2006, 36-37.

128. Fine 2005, 162.

129. Carney 2001, 209.

130. Carney 2001, 153.

131. Carney 2001, 158.

132. Emery 2003, 18.

133. Sterritt 2000, 89.

134. Sterritt 2000, 213.

135. Carr 2002.

136. Lim 2007, 1.

137. E.g. see Galenson 2006.

138. E.g. see Galenson 2008.

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Table 1: Directors Included in this Study

Director	Country of birth	Year of birth	Year of death
Allen, Woody	US	1935	--
Altman, Robert	US	1925	2006
Cassavetes, John	US	1929	1989
Coppola, Francis Ford	US	1939	--
Eastwood, Clint	US	1930	--
Godard, Jean-Luc	France	1930	--
Kubrick, Stanley	US	1928	1999
Spielberg, Steven	US	1946	--
Scorsese. Martin	US	1942	--
Truffaut, François	France	1932	1984

Source: see text and Wood 2002.

Table 2: Best Film or Films by Each Sample Member, *Sight and Sound* Poll of Critics and Directors, 2002

	Votes	Age
Conceptual		
Coppola, *The Godfather*	36	33
Godard, *Breathless*	17	30
Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey*	32	40
Spielberg, *Jaws*	3	29
Spielberg, *E.T. the Extraterrestrial*	3	36
Truffaut, *Jules and Jim*	16	30
Experimental		
Allen, *Crimes and Misdemeaners*	4	54
Altman, *Nashville*	7	50
Cassavetes, *Shadows*	2	30
Cassavetes, *A Woman Under the Influence*	2	45
Eastwood, *Unforgiven*	3	62
Scorsese, *Raging Bull*	16	38

Source: see text and *Sight and Sound* 2002.

Table 3: Best Film or Films by Each Sample Member, by Ratings in Film Guides

	Total stars	Age
Conceptual		
Coppola, *The Godfather Part II*	16	35
Godard, *Breathless*	15.5	30
Kubrick, *Paths of Glory*	16	29
Kubrick, *Dr. Strangelove; or How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*	16	35
Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey*	16	40
Spielberg, *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial*	16	36
Truffaut, *Jules and Jim*	16	30
Experimental		
Allen, *Annie Hall*	16	42
Altman, *M*A*S*H*	15.5	45
Cassavetes, *Faces*	11.5	39
Eastwood, *Unforgiven*	14.5	62
Scorsese, *Mean Streets*	16	31
Scorsese, *Raging Bull*	16	38

Source: see text and Bleiler 2005; Craddock 2004, Maltin 2005; Walker 2004.

Table 4: All Films by Sample Members Included in National Society of Film Critics' *100 Essential Films*

	Age
Conceptual	
Coppola, *The Godfather*	33
Coppola, *The Godfather Part II*	35
Godard, *Breathless*	30
Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey*	40
Spielberg, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*	31
Spielberg, *Schindler's List*	47
Truffaut, *The 400 Blows*	27
Experimental	
Allen, *Annie Hall*	42
Altman, *Nashville*	50
Cassavetes, *Faces*	39
Eastwood, *Unforgiven*	62
Scorsese, *Raging Bull*	38

Source: Carr 2002.

Table 5: All Films by Sample Members Included in *Village Voice Film Guide*

	Age
Conceptual	
Godard, B*reathless*	30
Godard, C*ontempt*	33
Godard, *Pierrot le Fou*	35
Godard, T*wo or Three Things I Know About Her*	37
Godard, *Weekend*	37
Godard, *JLG/JLG*	65
Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey*	40
Kubrick, *Barry Lyndon*	47
Experimental	
Altman, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*	46
Cassavetes, *Shadows*	30
Cassavetes, *Faces*	39
Cassavetes, *Love Streams*	55
Eastwood, *Unforgiven*	62
Scorsese, *Taxi Driver*	34
Scorsese, *The King of Comedy*	41
Scorsese, *The Age of Innocence*	51

Source: Lim 2007.