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ABSTRACT

Why have some movie directors made classic early films, but subsequently failed to match their initial successes, whereas other directors have begun much more modestly, but have made great movies late in their lives? This study demonstrates that the answer lies in the directors' motivations, and in the nature of their films. Conceptual directors, who use their films to express their ideas or emotions, mature early; thus such great conceptual innovators as D. W. Griffith, Sergei Eisenstein, and Orson Welles made their major contributions early in their careers, and declined thereafter. In contrast experimental directors, whose films present convincing characters in realistic circumstances, improve their techniques with experience, so that such great experimental innovators as John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, and Akira Kurosawa made their greatest films late in their lives. Understanding these contrasting life cycles can be part of a more systematic understanding of the development of film, and can resolve previously elusive questions about the creative life cycles of individual filmmakers.

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Introduction

In an essay written 50 years ago, the eminent film critic André Bazin declared that it was useful to "distinguish, in the cinema between 1920 and 1940, between two broad and opposing trends: those directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality." Bazin explained that for the purposes of this distinction, he defined "image" very broadly, as "everything that the representation on the screen adds to the object there represented," comprising a variety of means that could be used to allow the cinema "to impose its interpretation of an event on the spectator."[1] Bazin's insight was a striking one, that under other circumstances might have served as the basis for an analytical framework for subsequent studies of the history of the development of film. In the event, it has received little attention, in part perhaps because of Brazin's diffidence in stating and applying his analysis. For the validity of Bazin's distinction is not bounded by the time limits he suggested, and its implications are far broader than he claimed in his essay. In this paper we will develop Bazin's distinction, and pursue in some detail what we consider one of its key implications. We believe that doing this can yield a deeper understanding not only of the development of film, but also of the careers of the important filmmakers of the past, present and future.

Two Kinds of Innovators

Important and influential film directors are either conceptual or experimental innovators. These two categories -conceptual and experimental- describe two distinct career paths and two opposing sets of concerns, styles, methods, and values. Conceptual innovators tend to produce their most important work early in their careers, creating art based on ideas. Experimental

innovators, in contrast, tend to produce their most important work late in their careers, creating art based on experience, particularly visual experience. These two categories, which correspond to Bazin's distinction, apply to all the arts (and most likely to all creative endeavors) and in film entail specific characteristics that account for specific innovations and contributions. They also account for various phenomena related to artistic careers, such as the one-hit wonder, the sophomore jinx, and the wise, old master.

The ideas that motivate conceptual filmmakers are usually one of three kinds: moral, philosophical, or psychological. Films based on moral ideas tend to be allegorical or didactic (or both). In these films, cinematic elements serve to promote a certain worldview. Filmmakers often employ typological, well-defined characters and elaborate special effects to influence audiences. Their films are often extremely entertaining and moving: audiences lose medium awareness (that is, forget they are watching a movie) and get caught up in the story. Epic battles between good and evil symbolize everyday moral problems and contemporary political debates. The films often appeal to and attract large audiences, allowing filmmakers to bring their messages to the multitudes. Othertimes, however, films based on moral ideas are self-reflexive (calling attention to the fact they are movies) and programmatic, aiming to convince viewers through inflammatory images and the rhetorical use of artifice (for example, spotlighting and close-ups). These films are usually less absorbing and more blatantly didactic, relying on argument or accusation rather than symbolism to convey their filmmakers' ideas. These films are often targeted to specialized audiences with specific interests and concerns.

Films by conceptual directors based on philosophical ideas share many techniques with these self-reflexive morality tales. Their filmmakers tend to foreground artifice and seldom allow

viewers to lose medium awareness. Their stories are often disjointed, cause and effect relationships are intentionally ambiguous or nonexistent, and it is often difficult to identify with their characters. This type of conceptual director often employs various distancing techniques that betray the conventions of cinematic realism, such as jump cuts, extreme long shots and close-ups, deep focus shots, and unusual camera angles. By thwarting absorption in this way, they promote particular ideas, using their movies to speculate about various philosophical problems or comment on earlier films (or both). These films usually attract smaller audiences, earning critical success rather than popular success. These audiences are happy to decode difficult films and to consider a particular film's relation to its antecedents, its place in the history of cinema.

The final kind of idea that motivates conceptual filmmakers is psychological. These are ideas based on emotions and ideas about the self (usually the filmmaker's self). The main aim of these films is to convey these emotions. (One may object by claiming that emotions are *not* ideas. But the achievement of these films is to turn emotions into ideas, to encapsulate emotions in an easily communicable form.) Some of these films are vehicles of self-expression, while others are complex examinations of a particular character's psyche. Like all conceptual films, they employ techniques that promote their final aims. And these aims usually involve relating concepts and feelings within a filmmaker's mind, rather than issues in the world without.

Over their careers, conceptual filmmakers may make films of all three kinds, or combine elements of all three kinds in a single film. What unites all conceptual filmmakers is their use of ideas; these ideas motivate and orient their films. Often the films are end-driven, with the idea as the film's goal. And often conceptual directors will subordinate photography to dialogue -

choosing to propel their films through language rather than visual images - in order to relate their ideas clearly. (In fact, conceptual filmmakers are more likely to write the films they direct than their experimental counterparts.) Conceptual filmmakers will also subordinate particular elements of a film - such as character and narrative - to its overall structure. Whether a giant blockbuster with a moral message or a small arthouse film exploring intersubjectivity or some other philosophical issue, films by conceptual directors rely on the intellect, on the persuasiveness of ideas.

Experimental filmmakers, on the other hand, have vastly different motivations. They tend to make movies based on experience and are unwilling to encapsulate this experience in particular concepts or ideological statements. They usually make movies using unobtrusive techniques and invisible direction. They want to entertain, rather than inform, educate, or influence. Accordingly, they encourage identification and absorption, designing their films to promote the loss of medium awareness. Experimental filmmakers tend to avoid explicit symbolism; they prefer realism, which they promote through their use of photography. They want to present truth and reality, and accordingly, they want their viewers to see for themselves, to be participants in their films, rather than recipients of conceptual messages. Toward this end, experimental directors tend to subordinate dialogue to photography, often using eye-level cameras, bright lighting, seamless editing, and natural-seeming camera angles. They respect the conventions of cinematic realism, such as the 180-degree rule (which "dictates that the camera should stay on one side of the action to ensure consistent left-right spatial relations between objects from shot to shot").[2] As a result of their desire to entertain, films by experimental film directors are often popular and financially successful, garnering large audiences and box office

receipts.

Unlike their conceptual counterparts, experimental filmmakers usually do not have clear objectives (besides the desire to entertain or the ambiguous aim to present reality). Without predetermined goals, they often create films around characters and individual scenes, proceeding by trial and error toward a finished product. They tend to be uncertain and suspicious of the tightly structured, purposeful films of conceptual directors. And they will often forsake coherency for effect, designing scenes to absorb viewers rather than contribute to final climax or a tightly structured plot.

Earlier studies of conceptual and experimental artists have identified two distinct methods of innovation: the first proceeding from predetermined ideas and 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. These models apply to filmmakers as well with only slight modification - for filmmaking is an extremely expensive endeavor requiring support from large corporate studios, which require sound business plans and responsible production schedules. Directors must coordinate large crews and budgets or collaborate with producers who will orchestrate their productions for them. But even in collaborative partnerships, filmmakers must communicate their aims and beliefs to, among others, producers, cinematographers, editors, actors, lighting people, and engineers. As a result of these conventions and requirements, experimental filmmakers cannot be as extreme in their methods as their experimental counterparts in the other arts. They cannot revise endlessly or

begin a project without some conception of its ultimate structure. Due to budget constraints they cannot always shoot scenes in sequence or on location. They must compromise and develop production plans, in order to coordinate their films and generate support form the studios. It should also be noted that the structure of the cinema equally places limitations on conceptual filmmakers, for studios seldom trust very young, inexperienced artists with large budgets. Thus, young directors often work in lower-level positions before directing movies (for example, as second or third directors, as television or commercial directors, or as assistants). As a result, the cinema has fewer young upstarts than the other arts, fewer brash young geniuses.

This study will apply this analytical framework to the work and careers of 13 important directors. They comprise all the members of the 20 most influential directors of all time, as designated by a panel of 48 expert judges for *Movie Maker Magazine*, who were born through 1920.[3] They are listed in Table 1. All but one are deceased, and completed their careers sufficiently long ago that all their films have been extensively evaluated. All 13 directors are of obvious importance. Five of them were ranked among the top 10 directors in the *Sight and Sound* polls of directors in both 1992 and 2002, and another four were ranked among the top 10 in one of these two polls. Eleven of the 13 directors had at least one film ranked in the top 10 by the six *Sight and Sound* critics' polls held during 1952-2002, and four of them placed more than one film in those polls.

Seekers and Finders

> This picture is not about how beautiful life is. It's about how life *is*.
> Billy Wilder on *The Apartment*[4]

> Real life isn't what interests me... Even as a child, I drew pictures not of a person, but of the picture in my mind of the person.

Federico Fellini[5]

Andrew Sarris wrote in *The American Cinema* that "The debt that all film-makers owe to D. W. Griffith defies calculation. Even before *The Birth of a Nation*, he had managed to synthesize the dramatic and documentary elements of the modern feature film."[6] Although *The Birth of a Nation* is widely condemned for its racist portrayal of blacks, it stood with Griffith's other major films for its dramatic technical innovations, including the use of close-ups to focus attention on parts of scenes, the aggressive use of cross-cutting to increase dramatic tension, and rapid editing that accelerated the tempo and added excitement to narratives. In recognition of his technical contributions, James Agee later reflected that "As a director, Griffith hit the picture business like a tornado. Before he walked on the set, motion pictures had been, in actuality, static ... His camera was alive, picking off shots; then he built the shots into sequences, the sequences into tense, swift narrative."[7]

Griffith used techniques for conceptual ends. Dwight Macdonald observed that "Griffith treats his epic subjects as Eisenstein does, not as historical narratives running through time but as cinematizations in space of abstract themes. He shapes them primarily to express an *idea* ... to which the story is subordinated as a mere allegory."[8] Gerald Mast further pointed out that Griffith's allegories were personal statements, born of deep conviction: "that material was simply the Truth, the humanistic gospel according to Saint D. W. ... He wanted the images on the screen to illuminate his personal vision of good and evil."[9] Griffith himself affirmed this. In a publicity interview for *The Birth of a Nation*, he stated "I believe in the motion picture not only as a means of amusement, but as a moral and educational force." His belief in the didactic value of movies was such that in 1915 he made a startling prediction: "The time will come, and in less than ten

years ... where the children in the public schools will be taught practically everything by moving pictures. Certainly they will never be obliged to read history again."[10]

The deterioration of Griffith's work after his landmark films became a commonplace even during his lifetime. So for example a critic observed in 1926 that "His development has followed a peculiar line... Griffith ... was the great creative mind on the direction side of picture-making in the early days... [H]e made great pictures such as *Judith of Bethulia*, *The Birth of a Nation*, *Broken Blossoms*, *Intolerance*. Then he began to repeat his faults and not merely fail to acquire new virtues, but even to lose grasp on those which he had."[11] Many theories have been proposed to explain Griffith's decline. Among them, Gerald Mast noted, was one that refers to a common problem among conceptual artists: "Perhaps he ran out of innovative ideas, both technically and intellectually."[12]

Charlie Chaplin's goal was not to educate his viewers, but to entertain them. Max Linder, an earlier star of comic films, paid tribute to Chaplin's methodical pursuit of his goal: "Charlie... has studied laughter with care, and knows how to provoke it with the rarest precision."[13] Chaplin explained that the key to his comedy was a sympathetic understanding of human nature, which he used to avoid affectation: "I strive for naturalness in all my action." He achieved this by observing normal people in the course of their daily lives: "I start out to find my characters in real life... I search for the man I am going to represent myself. When I find that man, I follow him, watch him at his work, and his fun, at the table, and every other place I can see him. Often, I will study one man for a week."[14]

The basis of Chaplin's art in the observation of real people and situations marks him as an experimental artist, and from early in his career, evaluations of his work stressed that his films

had both the virtues and defects of experimental art. So for example a review of *The Great Dictator*, made when Chaplin was 51, praised it as "not only the climax of Chaplin, so far, but a resumé of Chaplin's whole growth, in his picture-making and in the evolution of his social conscience," but also noted that "There is practically no plot... [T]he picture is a rambling, episodic sort of thing that a Chaplin picture has always been."[15] André Bazin, a great admirer of Chaplin's, similarly recognized that the power of his films lay in characterization and situations rather than in unifying themes or consistent technique: "Think back to what you can remember of Charlie, and dozens of scenes will come to mind as clear cut as the picture of the character himself... The only serious formal criticisms that can be leveled against a Chaplin film concern its unity of style, the unfortunate variations in tone, the conflicts in the symbolism implicit in the situations."[16] Chaplin wasn't troubled by critics' complaints about his films' lack of unity. He told an interviewer that "I don't care much about story... If you have the neatest tailored plot in the world and yet haven't personalities, living characters, you've nothing."[17] Gerald Mast stressed that development of character was a necessary part of Chaplin's films: "The Chaplin structure not only allows for the examination of character but demands it. The long sequences deny the possibility of a mere string of gags; the gags revolve around the location, the objects, and especially the people in the sequence."[18]

As a director, Chaplin subordinated style to substance. Mast observed that "unlike discussions of Griffith, discussion of Chaplin's contribution to the cinema focuses on what he does *on* film rather than *with* film. Whereas Griffith combined the devices of cinema into a coherent narrative medium, Chaplin advanced the art by making all consciousness of the cinematic medium disappear so completely that we concentrate on the photographic subject

rather than the process."[19] In similar terms, Andrew Sarris remarked that "The apparent simplicity of Chaplin's art should never be confused with lack of technique. For Chaplin, his other self on the screen has always been the supreme object of contemplation, and the style that logically followed from this assumption represents the antithesis to Eisenstein's early formulations on montage."[20]

Chaplin's experimental approach allowed him to develop artistically throughout his career, and to continue making significant films in his 50s and 60s. So for example Sarris praised *Monsieur Verdoux*, made when Chaplin was 58, for its "genius of economy and essentiality," and Bosley Crowther wrote of the brilliance of *Limelight*, made when Chaplin was 63, for the sensitivity of its "appreciation of the courage and the gallantry of an aging man."[21] Bazin stressed Chaplin's unusual longevity as an artist: "Chaplin is the only film director whose work stretches over forty years of the history of cinema... The average duration of film genius is somewhere between five and fifteen years... Only Chaplin has been capable, I will not say of adapting himself to the evolution of the film, but of continuing to be the cinema." And Bazin recognized that this ability was related to Chaplin's persistent experimentation: "Chaplin has never stopped moving forward into the unknown, rediscovering the cinema in relation to himself."[22]

John Ford's attitude toward movies was pragmatic: "This is a business. If we can give the public what it wants, then it's a good business and makes money. The audience is happy and we're happy."[23] He wanted his movies to achieve immediacy and realism: "I try to make people forget they're in a theatre. I don't want them to be conscious of a camera or a screen. I want them to feel what they're seeing is real."[24] He believed that simple and unpretentious techniques were

the best means to this end: “I like, as a director and spectator, simple, direct, frank films. Nothing disgusts me more than snobbism, mannerism, technical gratuity... and, most of all, intellectualism.”[25] François Truffaut remarked on Ford’s success in achieving his goal: “John Ford might be awarded (the same goes for Howard Hawks) the prize for ‘invisible direction.’ The camera work of these two great storytellers is never apparent to the eye.”[26]

Ford’s work is consistently praised for its visual qualities. Alfred Hitchcock declared that “a John Ford film was a visual gratification,” and Elia Kazan stated that Ford “taught me to tell it in pictures.”[27] Gerald Mast commented that “Ford’s method emphasized visual images rather than talk,” and Ford agreed, stating that “Pictures, not words, should tell the story.”[28] On another occasion Ford elaborated on his philosophy: “When a motion picture is at its best, it is long on action and short on dialogue. When it tells its story and reveals its characters in a series of simple, beautiful, active pictures, and does it with as little talk as possible, then the motion picture medium is being used to its fullest advantage.”[29]

Ford’s emphasis on beautiful pictures, created with unobtrusive techniques, identifies him as an experimental director. Consistent with this, his work developed gradually, and with considerable continuity. Peter Bogdanovich reflected that “Every Ford movie is filled with reverberations from another - which makes his use of the same players from year to year, decade to decade, so much more than just building ‘a stock company’ - and one film of his cannot really be looked at as separate from the rest.”[30] Ford’s career as a director spanned nearly 50 years, and he is widely considered to have improved his work until late in his life. Thus Bogdanovich considered Ford’s late films his best, “not only in execution but in depth of expression,” and Sarris judged that “the last two decades of his career were his richest and most rewarding.”[31]

Sarris considered experience the key to Ford's late achievements: "The economy of expression that Ford has achieved in fifty years of film-making constitutes the beauty of his style."[32]

Jean Renoir declared that "I try my hardest to make as marketable films as possible."[33] He wanted to make his viewers participants: "It's impossible to have a work of art without the spectator's participation, without his collaboration."[34] He wanted his films to be lifelike, and François Truffaut remarked that they were: "Renoir's films draw their animation from real life."[35] Peter Wollen observed that *The Rules of the Game* "strives to capture life in the raw, with a sense of events unfolding naturally, spontaneously... It is an ethnographic film in the sense that, despite its intricate plot, it truly tries to capture an impression of life as it is lived."[36]

Renoir explained that he increased the realism, and liveliness, of his films in the process of making them: "I have a tendency to be theoretical when I start working... and it's extremely boring. Little by little (and my contact with the actors helps enormously), I try to get closer to the way in which characters can adapt to their theories in real life."[37] He stressed that his understanding of his films was a product of the same process: "I find the true meaning of the acting, a scene, even a word, only after the words have materialized, once they exist."[38] Truffaut believed that Renoir managed to communicate to his audience this sense of creation: "instead of having a finished product handed to us to satisfy our curiosity, we feel we are there as the film is made, we almost think that we can see Renoir organize the whole as we watch the film projected."[39] Renoir's unobtrusive technique contributed to this effect. So for example Pauline Kael noted that in *Grand Illusion* "there is no unnecessary camera virtuosity: the compositions seem to emerge from the material. It's as if beauty just happens... The characters, the dialogue, the fortress, the farm, the landscape, all fuse into the story and the theme. The result is the

greatest achievement in narrative film."[40]

Even Renoir's admirers conceded that he had the weaknesses as well as the strengths of an experimental artist. So Bazin, who had no doubt that Renoir was the greatest French director, recognized that he "has never been able to 'construct' a scenario... Renoir has always been more concerned with the creation of characters and situations in which they could express themselves rather than with a story."[41] Renoir compared his method to that of another great experimental director in explaining the source of this failing: "I prefer a working method that thinks of each scene as a separate little film. That's what Chaplin does, by the way, and God knows it worked well for him... The only problem is that this often works against me because of another of my obsessions, of slightly neglecting the importance of the story line. I'm obsessed with the idea that in reality, the story isn't very important."[42]

Buster Keaton was frequently compared with Charlie Chaplin during his career, and the comparisons continue today. A revealing instance for the purposes of this study is that of Gerald Mast, who made the two great comedians the subject of a section of his monograph, *The Comic Mind*. Mast declared that the two represented "the two poles of silent comics," and argued that this was illustrated by their major works: "*The Gold Rush* [by Chaplin] is an episodic series of highly developed, individual situations... [T]he thematic coherency of [Keaton's] *The General* is itself the product of the film's tight narrative unity... Everything in the Chaplin film ... is subordinate to the delineation of the lonely tramp's character... Everything in *The General*... is subordinate to the film's driving narrative."[43] By identifying what he called the "Keaton imperative," Mast contrasted Keaton's rigid, formulaic plots with the disjointed organization of Chaplin's films: "Unlike the Chaplin films, which can start with a Charliesque bang of a gag, the

early reels of the Keaton feature must establish the character Buster plays. Then the Buster character faces what might be called 'the Keaton imperative.' Buster *must* do something - something that the character he plays would never do, yet somehow must... Buster's successful accomplishment of the Keaton imperative reveals how close the Keaton comic world is to melodrama."[44] Mast stressed that Keaton paid great attention to plot, and to the overall unity of his films: "Keaton's most successful films are those with the strongest plots, 'mounting' rhythms, mounting troubles, and an irresistible, 'indomitable' drive toward the climax. Unlike Chaplin's films, Keaton's rely on drive, suspense, story, increasing complexity, and tension."[45]

Mast's analysis amounts to the recognition that Keaton's conceptual approach was fundamentally different from Chaplin's experimental orientation. This is highlighted by Mast's comments on a scene in Keaton's *Sherlock Junior*, in which a movie projectionist falls asleep. In his dream he walks up to the screen, and after several failed attempts, succeeds in entering the movie he is showing. Mast observes that this scene "is very much at the heart of Keaton's style and imagination. The mechanical perfection of the stunt is extraordinary, but behind the mechanical ability to work the gag is the sheer marvel of even conceiving it. Such farfetched lunacy is not what Chaplin would do at all; it is too dependent on trick, too divorced from individual human feelings, too much a far-out stunt. But it is precisely the kind of imagination that Keaton reveals in film after film"[46] In *Sherlock Junior*, Keaton explored the relationship between movies and reality in a way that never would have occurred to the experimental Chaplin, whose films were anchored in reality. The conceptual device of creating the fantasy of a movie within a movie that existed within yet another movie was one that would later be used by such conceptual directors as Fellini and Godard.[47] The surrealistic aspects of *Sherlock Junior* did not

go unnoticed at the time, for René Clair compared the film to Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*.[48]

The conceptual nature of Keaton's comedy may explain a puzzle that has long attracted considerable attention, of why he declined as an artist so early and so rapidly. Keaton was fired by MGM in 1933, at the age of 38, and his career as a director had in fact ended several years earlier. Keaton's marital problems and alcoholism are commonly cited as the causes of his professional demise, but these may have been caused or exacerbated by his loss of inspiration. Thus one biographer suggested that Keaton's underlying problem may have been his inability to go beyond his early peak achievement, and that the source of this problem may have lain in the nature of his success. Daniel Moews observed that Keaton's best films did not show a progression, but instead displayed a sameness: "Perfection was instantly achieved and firmly held, but it was a static perfection. It led nowhere. It provided no opportunities for development. If the Keaton comedy was not necessarily exhausted, even under the best of all possible circumstances it soon would have been."[49]

A biographer of Howard Hawks noted that "He wanted to make good films with big stars and bring in a lot of money... For Hawks there was something wrong with a picture if it didn't go over with the public."[50] Hawks consistently described his goals in experimental terms, explaining that "All I'm doing is telling a story. I don't analyze or do a lot of thinking about it... We just made scenes that were fun to do. I think our job is to make entertainment."[51] Like John Ford, whom Hawks took as his model, Hawks wanted to tell his stories visually: "Tell it from your eyes. Let the audience see exactly as they would if they were there."[52] Like Ford, he considered simplicity a virtue: "I try to tell my story as simply as possible."[53] And like Ford, Hawks

considered strong characters the key to his films: “if you can do characters, you can forget about the plot... Let them tell the story for you, and don’t worry about the plot.”[54]

Many critics have commented on Hawks’ subordination of technique to content, and on his avoidance of abstraction in favor of the concrete. Thus Robin Wood declared that “Nowhere in Hawks is one aware of ‘direction’ as something distinct from the presentation of the action; there is no imposed ‘style’... Nowhere in Hawks’ work does he show any interest in Ideas, abstracted from character, action, and situation.”[55] Andrew Sarris considered Hawks’ films models of economy: “This is good, clean, direct, functional cinema.”[56] Henri Langlois agreed that the power of Hawks’ work lay in its clarity and directness: “The essential. The truth of the dialogue, the truth of the situations, the truth of the subjects, of the milieux, of the characters... There is nothing superfluous.”[57]

When Sarris placed Hawks among the pantheon directors in his book on the American cinema in 1968, he observed that “Howard Hawks was until recently the least known and least appreciated Hollywood director of any stature.”[58] For Hawks’ admirers, the longtime critical neglect was a direct consequence of his skill as an experimental director. So for example Gerald Mast argued that Hawks was “so perfect at convincing the audience of the artlessness of his art that the artist literally disappeared for every contemporary commentator... The apparent ease and accident of Hawks’s stories is the ultimate artistic ruse.”[59] Mast contrasted Hawks’ experimental approach with that of several prominent conceptual directors: “Hawks’s films reject the modernist aims of Ingmar Bergman, Alain Resnais, Federico Fellini, and Jean-Luc Godard, filmmakers whose urge was not so much to tell a story but to inquire whether it was possible or desirable for stories to be told at all. The self-conscious, self-reflexive quest in films like

Persona, *8 ½*, and *Contempt*, whose subject is the making of that very film itself, seems totally absent from the films of Howard Hawks, which go about their cheerful business of telling lucid stories."[60]

Sergei Eisenstein abandoned his studies in engineering to enlist in the Red Army in 1918, and the Revolution became the inspiration for his subsequent career in theater and film. His theories and innovations were all based on the principle that art must serve political goals. So for example in 1924 he expressed his belief that cinema was "a factor for exercising emotional influence over the masses," and declared that "there is, or rather should be, no cinema other than agit-cinema."[61]

Eisenstein's early training in engineering may have contributed to his desire to develop a scientific approach to making films. In a interview shortly after he directed his landmark work, *Battleship Potemkin*, he explained that art should be made systematically: "My artistic principle... is: not intuitive creativity but the rational constructive composition of effective elements... That is, I believe, a purely mathematical affair and it has nothing whatsoever to do with the 'manifestation of creative genius.' You need not a jot more wit for this than you need to design a utilitarian steel works."[62]

Eisenstein was a conceptual artist, who made radical formal innovations. Gerald Mast explained that his "films break all the rules of narrative construction. They lack a protagonist and focal characters; they lack a linear plot."[63] Eisenstein is known for many technical innovations, which were presented most notably in *Potemkin*. The film as a whole was meticulously constructed, with five parts mirroring the five-part structure of classical drama.[64] Perhaps his most celebrated technical device was what Eisenstein called the montage of attractions, as he

rapidly juxtaposed images of several different objects to express an abstract concept. Eisenstein's desire to rouse his audience also led him to accelerate the film's pace: the average shot length in *Potemkin* was about two seconds, well below the average of 5-6 seconds in Hollywood films of the time.[65] *Potemkin* was conceived as revolutionary propaganda, and Eisenstein deliberately avoided creating any individual three-dimensional characters.[66]

Paul Seydor specifically called attention to the ideational nature of Eisenstein's early work, observing that it was "quintessentially a cinema of (though not necessarily for) the mind. Space and movement are not literally seen, that is, are not on the screen; they exist only in the viewer's imagination, his eye serving to register the details with which his mind will make the 'proper' points."[67] David Bordwell explained that Eisenstein played a seminal role in the early development of a conceptual cinema: "He demonstrated that montage could assemble the raw data of the Lumière [i.e. documentary] method in patterns which expressed the poetic imagination. Dialectical montage was an admission of the presence of artistic consciousness... [A]fter Eisenstein, a less didactic, more associational montage became a dominant poetic style of the avant-garde."[68] In view of this, it is not surprising that the conceptual director Jean-Luc Godard paid homage to Eisenstein as the "greatest editor in the world," for he explained that editing meant "organizing cinematographically; in other words planning dramatically, composing musically, or in yet other words, the finest film-making."[69]

Alfred Hitchcock declared that "in the world of films and film production it is the public's appetite that must first be appeased."[70] This was basic to his view of film: "I've always believed in film as the newest art of the twentieth century because of its ability to communicate with the mass audiences of the world."[71] Andrew Sarris maintained that Hitchcock's success in

achieving his goal caused many critics and scholars to ignore his importance: “His reputation has suffered from the fact that he has given audiences more pleasure than is permissible for serious cinema. No one who is so entertaining could possibly seem profound to the intellectual puritans.”[72]

Hitchcock consistently stressed the primacy of visual images. So for example he wrote: “It is no use telling people; they have got to SEE. We are making pictures, moving pictures, and although sound helps and is the most important advance the films have ever made they still remain primarily a visual art.”[73] He explained to an interviewer that he thought in pictures, and that this was what animated his films: “This is what gives the effect of life to a picture - the feeling that when you see it on the screen you are watching something that has been conceived and brought to birth directly in visual terms.”[74] He wanted his viewers to be caught up in the reality of his films: “Watching a well-made film, we don’t sit by as spectators; we participate.”[75] Shooting his films in sequence contributed to this end: “After all, the film is seen in sequence by an audience and, of course, the nearer a director gets to an audience’s point of view, the more easily he will be able to satisfy an audience.”[76] François Truffaut considered Hitchcock’s films to be a textbook for directors on the use of visual images: “In Hitchcock’s work a film-maker is bound to find the answer to many of his own problems, including the most fundamental question of all: how to express oneself by purely visual means.”[77]

Hitchcock’s experimental orientation is equally clear from his firm belief that technique should never be obtrusive. So for example he wrote that “The motion picture is not an arena for display of techniques. It is, rather, a method of telling a story in which techniques, beauty, the virtuosity of the camera, everything must be sacrificed or compromised when it gets in the way

of the story itself... Technique that calls itself to the audience's attention is poor technique. The mark of good technique is that it is unnoticed."[78] James Agee remarked on the realism Hitchcock achieved through his invisible technique: "He has a strong sense of the importance of the real place and the real atmosphere."[79]

As Hitchcock approached the age of 50, he expressed the opinion that "Style in directing develops slowly and naturally."[80] In a study of Hitchcock's career written when the director had passed the age of 65, Robin Wood concluded that his art had grown in a number of dimensions: "Not only in theme - in style, method, moral attitude, assumptions about the nature of life - Hitchcock's mature films reveal, on inspection, a consistent development, deepening and clarification... There is discernible throughout Hitchcock's career an acceleration of the process of development right up to the present day."[81] Truffaut agreed, as he wrote in 1963 that "Hitchcock's mastery of the art grows greater with each film."[82]

Billy Wilder stated his goal simply: "I try to make pictures for entertainment."[83] He usually did this with comedy: "I don't want to start asking myself if my film is important... What is important is to sit in the theater and hear people laughing at the right moment."[84] Like many other experimental directors, Wilder declared that "I'm just a story-teller."[85] He wanted his own efforts to be invisible: "the best directing is the one you don't see. The audience must forget that they are in front of a screen - they must be sucked into the screen to the point when they forget that the image is only two-dimensional."[86] He believed the key to engaging the audience lay in characterization: "I don't write camera angles and dialogue. I write characters and dialogue. It doesn't matter what is happening to your characters unless people care about them."[87] And his characters had to behave convincingly: "I don't think that people behave very much differently in

my pictures than they do in life."[88]

Wilder was often denigrated by critics for what they considered the superficiality and commercialism of his work: thus Sarris pointed out that "Wilder was thought of as the [Hollywood] system personified with all its serpentine wiles and crass commercialism."[89] So for example at the height of his success, Pauline Kael wrote that "In Hollywood it is now common to hear Billy Wilder called the world's greatest movie director. This judgment tells us a lot about Hollywood: Wilder hits his effects hard and sure; he's a clever, lively director whose work lacks feeling or passion or grace or beauty or elegance. His eye is on the dollar, or rather on success, on the entertainment values that bring in dollars."[90] Wilder was hurt by such attacks, and his consistent response was to defend the craft of his experimental approach: "I am a craftsman, I try to do it as well as I simply can. At no time do I put myself in the category of Ingmar Bergman or Jean-Luc Godard; I grew up in an industry and I'm proud of it. I work for a living."[91] His admirers agreed with his defense. So for example James Agee praised *Sunset Boulevard* as "Hollywood craftsmanship at its smartest and at just about its best, and it is hard to find better craftsmanship than that, at this time, in any art or country."[92]

Akira Kurosawa wanted his films to reach the broadest possible audience: "A film should satisfy a wide range of people, all the people."[93] As a young man, Kurosawa was uncertain about his choice of career until he began working in a movie studio, where he discovered his vocation: "It was like the wind in a mountain pass blowing across my face. By this I mean that wonderfully refreshing wind you feel after a painfully hard climb... I was standing in the mountain pass, and the view that opened up before me on the side revealed a single straight road."[94]Stephen Prince explained the significance of Kurosawa's language: "He has found his calling, and it is expressed

as a Way... It signifies, in general terms, persistent devotion and hard work dedicated to mastering the secrets of a discipline." Prince further observed that Kurosawa's conception of cinema was implied by his vision of the straight road: "Realization of cinematic structure and of visual patterning had to be learned through experience and once learned, could not be communicated in words... Kurosawa's film style, then, is not an intellectualized one; it has not been shaped through fidelity to a previously constructed political or theoretical position, as are films by Eisenstein, Godard, or Straub."[95]

Prince noted that experimental goals and techniques were basic to Kurosawa's films: "Kurosawa adopted the spartan injunction of facing reality rather than pursuing the pleasures to be found in an escape from it... The linear narratives of his films symbolized the terms of Kurosawa's social commitment, setting his heroes upon spiritual and personal journeys that led to confrontations with social ills."[96] Donald Richie agreed that the basis of Kurosawa's style was "a search for reality and an inability to tolerate illusion." Characterization was central to this process: "In simplest terms... his pictures are about character revelation."[97] Kurosawa was responsible for a number of technical innovations, several of which contributed to the rapidly-paced narrative of the *Seven Samurai*. Yet these innovations were all devised to serve an experimental purpose. Thus Joseph Anderson and Richie concluded that in Kurosawa's great movies, "this mastery of film style has but one purpose: it is meant to tell a story."[98]

At the age of 71, Kurosawa wrote in his autobiography that the two people he would like to resemble as he grew old were Jean Renoir and John Ford.[99] Unlike both of them, Kurosawa continued to direct movies well into his 80s. Although his international reputation had grown steadily since *Rashomon* had won the top prize at the 1951 Venice Film Festival, Kurosawa

retained the uncertainty and humility of his experimental orientation to the end of his life. In 1990, when he was 80, the American Academy of Motion Pictures honored him with a special Oscar. In his acceptance speech, he declared that he had not yet reached the end of the road he had seen before him 55 years earlier, but that he was determined to continue his journey: "I really don't feel that I have yet grasped the essence of cinema. Cinema is a marvelous thing, but to grasp its true essence is very, very difficult. But what I promise you is that from now on I will work as hard as I can at making movies, and maybe by following this path I will achieve an understanding of the true essence of cinema and earn this award."[100]

There is remarkably widespread agreement that *Citizen Kane* is the most important movie ever made. To cite just one of many possible indicators, it has placed first in all five decennial polls *Sight and Sound* has conducted of movie critics since 1962. Among the most celebrated facts about *Citizen Kane* is that it was directed and coauthored by Orson Welles, who also played the title role, when he was just 26 years old. It was Welles' first film.

The importance of *Citizen Kane* derived in large part from its technical innovations. This was the intentional product of careful planning. Both Bruce Herrmann, the film's composer, and Gregg Toland, its photographer, emphasized that they were given exceptional amounts of time and freedom to achieve the novel aims they and Welles had formulated.[101] The result was a film that Bosley Crowther described upon its release as "far and away the most surprising and cinematically exciting motion picture to be seen here in many a moon."[102]

Beyond the film's many specific technical innovations, Welles' single greatest achievement in *Citizen Kane* may have been synthetic, as he created symbolic linkages between the novel technical devices and the film's story. The variety of striking technical means used to

punctuate the narrative of the story reinforces the message implicit in the variety of differing judgments of Kane presented by different characters. Jorge Luis Borges recognized this, as he observed that *Citizen Kane's* true subject is "the discovery of the secret soul of a man," which was accomplished through "the rhythmic integration of disparate scenes without chronological order. In astonishing and endlessly varied ways, Orson Welles exhibits the fragments of the life of the man, Charles Foster Kane, and invites us to combine and reconstruct them."[103]

Critics have long remarked on Welles' ostentatious use of technique. Thus Richard Schickel observed that Welles "insisted on making movies which called attention to the fact that they were, indeed, movies. In his bravura use of film all pretense of artlessness, all the subtle techniques developed by earlier masters to give the illusion of the realistic point of view were abandoned. Welles compelled the attention to film as *film*, as something unique to itself."[104] Similarly, Pauline Kael remarked that Welles "makes a show of the mechanics of film... [H]is is not the art that conceals art, but the showman's delight in the flourishes with which he pulls the rabbit from the hat." [105] More profoundly, other critics have recognized that *Citizen Kane* made a key contribution to the lineage of conceptual cinema. So Truffaut reflected that "when I see *Kane* again for perhaps the thirtieth time, it is its twofold aspect as fairy tale and moral fable that strikes me most forcefully."[106] And David Bordwell observed that because of its representation of the processes of imagination, *Citizen Kane* had influenced the great conceptual directors who saw it early in their careers: "As the ancestor of the works of Godard, Bergman, Fellini, Bresson, and Antonioni, *Kane* is a monument in the modern cinema, the cinema of consciousness."[107]

Citizen Kane dominates Welles' career. When he was presented the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award in 1975, at the age of 60, the tribute mentioned by name only

one film, *Citizen Kane*, which it described as "a benchmark in world cinema, an achievement against which other films are still measured."[108] Yet like F. Scott Fitzgerald and a number of other conceptual artists who made landmark contributions early in their careers, Welles was haunted by his early masterpiece, for no later work could approach its significance. Thus although Andrew Sarris noted that *Citizen Kane* by itself would have guaranteed Welles' place in Sarris' highest category of pantheon directors, he also pointed out a consequence of this: "The conventional American diagnosis of his career is decline, pure and simple."[109]

Early in his adult life, Ingmar Bergman realized that making films was to him "a natural necessity, a need similar to hunger and thirst."[110] As time went on, this need persisted, and became the basis for his career as a director: "My hunger has endlessly renewed itself. Money, fame, and success have been surprising, but basically indifferent, consequences of my rampage."[111] To Bergman, film offered a unique means of expression: "No other art-medium - neither painting nor poetry - can communicate the specific quality of the dream as well as the film can."[112]

Bergman was a conceptual director, whose films used complex and often confusing techniques to express abstract ideas. Birgitta Steene explained that "His genius is not narrative, hardly even descriptive, for the people in his movies have often been marionettes with fixed qualities, morality play characters disguised as humans."[113] Bosley Crowther observed that "the extraordinary thing about [*The Seventh Seal*] is the forcefulness with which it conveys the magnitude of its abstract ideas." In the film, a 14th-century knight challenges Death to a chess match in which the stake is his life. Crowther wrote that "It is obvious that the knight is intended as a symbol of modern man, a modern intellectual, such as Bergman himself. He is weary of war,

disillusioned about serving an unknown God that permits the injustices, cruelties, and sufferings that occur in the world, and shocked by man's fear and trembling in the face of prophesied doom - in this case the plague, which clearly symbolizes the nuclear bomb."[114]

Bergman's films aggressively called attention to their own technical means. So for example Wheeler Dixon noted that *Persona* is "a film in which rips in the image, out-of-focus shots, repeated sequences, and elaborate optical effects constantly remind us that we are watching a film, a construct, a world that Bergman has invented solely for cinematic consumption."[115] Bergman also made his films difficult to understand. Lloyd Michaels listed the problems *Persona* posed for viewers: "1) the absence of visual codes to distinguish between what is dreamed or imagined and what is actually occurring; 2) the ellipses, doublings, and disruptions that confound any sense of a linear narrative; 3) the montage of apparently unrelated images...; 4) the discontinuities in space and time...; 5) the inconsistencies in point of view."[116]

Bergman made important films over a long period of time, and Truffaut observed that the nature of his films changed considerably, constituting a series of distinct periods.[117] Frank Gado has noted that Bergman periodically changed his style, often by consciously imitating a particular cinematic technique. So for example in 1959 *The Virgin Spring* was inspired by Bergman's study of Kurosawa, in the course of which he viewed *Rashomon* dozens of times, and in 1964 *All These Women* was inspired by Bergman's strong feelings for Fellini's *8 ½*.[118] The conceptual basis of Bergman's art is underscored by Philip Kemp's observation that he was "the first film-maker to use the cinema as an instrument of sustained philosophical meditation."[119]

Federico Fellini declared that "I have been criticized for making my films only to please myself. The criticism is well-founded, because it's true. It's the only way I can work... If what

pleases me pleases other people, enough of them, I can go on working. Then, I am lucky."[120] Fellini preferred memory and fantasy to observation and reality. He explained that "I make my films because I like to tell lies, to imagine fairy-tales... I mostly like to tell about myself."[121] His movies recorded his own version of reality: "My fantasies and obsessions are not only my reality, but the stuff of which my films are made."[122] Gerald Mast noted that although Fellini's apprenticeship was in neo-realist cinema, his true love was not for somber settings: "He prefers the places of mystery, magic, and make-believe - the circus, the variety theatre, the nightclub, the opera house - to the squalid slums of reality."[123]

Like many other conceptual directors, Fellini avoided linear narrative in his films: "I am trying to free my work from certain constructions - a story with a beginning, a development, and ending. It should be more like a poem with metre and cadence."[124] He compared his efforts to devise new cinematic forms to the conceptual innovations of Cubism in painting: "So I said: let's invent episodes, let's not worry for now about the logic or the narrative. We have to make a statue, break it, and recompose the pieces. Or better yet, try a decomposition in the manner of Picasso. The cinema is narrative in the nineteenth-century sense: now let's try to do something different."[125]

Fellini's most celebrated movie, *8 ½*, was a conceptual work in both form and substance. Concerning its form, Peter Bondanella observed that "Everything in the work avoids the traditional seamless storyline of the classic Hollywood film. The mass of visual images Fellini creates is held together in almost a miraculous state of grace by the use of dream and fantasy sequences."[126] Concerning its substance, Gerald Mast explained that *8 ½* exceeded normal conceptions of self-reflexiveness: "It is not merely about filmmaking... it is about the making of

this very film, a film which the director finds impossible to make but which has been made nonetheless."[127]

Fellini clearly appreciated Bergman as a fellow conceptual director, as he bestowed on him his highest honor, the title of showman: "Bergman's way of telling a story, the richness of his temperament and above all his way of expressing himself exactly as a showman ought to - that is, as a mixture of magician and conjurer, prophet and clown, travelling salesman and preacher - makes him exactly what a showman ought to be."[128] And Bergman reciprocated Fellini's respect. When an interviewer suggested that Fellini was dishonest, Bergman vehemently protested: "No, no, please! Fellini is Fellini. He is not honest, he is not dishonest, he is just Fellini... He is just - I love him."[129]

Measuring Movie Careers

> Style, no matter what art it is concerned with, cannot be imposed consciously on any work. It must be the result of growth and patient experimentation with the materials of the trade.
>
> Alfred Hitchcock[130]

> You know, the great mystery that requires 20 years doesn't exist in any field. Certainly not in a camera.
>
> Orson Welles[131]

Two different kinds of evidence will be used to make systematic assessments of when these 13 directors made their best movies. One of these is a poll taken in 2002 by *Sight and Sound*, the journal of the British Film Institute, in which 145 critics from around the world were asked to list the ten best movies ever made. For the purposes of this study, each appearance of a movie on a critic's list was counted as a single vote. Each director's best movie by this measure is listed in Table 2.

The resulting list is an impressive one; all its entries are immediately familiar to students of film. *Citizen Kane* in fact placed first overall in the 2002 *Sight and Sound* critics' poll, as the greatest movie ever made, and four other films from Table 2 joined it in the top ten in that poll, as *Vertigo* placed second, *The Rules of the Game* third, *Battleship Potemkin* seventh, and *8 ½* ninth.

There is no obvious difference in the distributions of total votes received by the films in Table 2 according to the categorization of their directors. Thus the median number of votes received by the six conceptual films was 14.5, virtually the same as the median of 15 votes for the seven experimental works. The same is emphatically not true, however, for the distributions of the directors' ages when they made these movies. The median age of the seven experimental directors when they made their best films was 53, fully 17.5 years above the median age of 35.5 of the six conceptual directors. The two distributions do not even overlap, as the conceptual directors made their best films at age 43 or before, while the experimental directors made theirs at 44 and above. And the extremes of the distributions are very far apart, as John Ford and Howard Hawks made their best films when they were at least 35 years older than Orson Welles and Sergei Eisenstein were when they made their own master works; Ford and Hawks had both passed the age of 60, whereas Welles and Eisenstein had not yet reached 30. The evidence of Table 2 therefore strongly indicates that conceptual directors make their greatest contributions at younger ages than do experimental directors.

The second kind of evidence used in this study is drawn from commercial guides to movies available on videocassette or DVD. Specifically, we used *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). These guides rate each of the movies they list. Our procedure was to create a data set that included the listings of all movies made by our 13 directors that were included in these four guides. From this data set, Table 3 presents all the movies by these directors that received the highest rating from the largest number of guides. This listing therefore effectively represents the consensus of these guides on the most important films made by each of our 13 directors.[132]

Table 4 presents the median age of each director when he made the films listed in Table 3. The median ages of the six conceptual directors when they made their best films as rated by the movie guides range from 27 to 41.5; four of these six median ages were below 40. In contrast, the corresponding median ages of the seven experimental directors range from 39 to 62; six of these seven median ages were above 40. Again the extremes of the distributions are far apart, as Welles and Eisenstein both made their best films at the median age of 27, fully 35 years below Ford's median age of 62.

The evidence from the movie guides can be used to provide additional information about the relationship between directors' ages and the quality of their work. Table 5 lists all the films by our 13 directors that received the highest rating from at least one of the four movie guides and that were made when the directors were 30 or younger. Four directors appear in the table. Three of these four directors are conceptual; they account for eight of the 10 films listed in the table, and for all five of the films listed that were given the highest rating by two or more of the guides.

Table 6 considers the work of older directors: it lists all the films in the data set that received the top rating from at least one guide and that were made by directors aged 60 and above. Five directors appear in the table. Four of these five directors are experimental, and they

account for 12 of the total of 14 films in the table, and for six of the seven films listed that received the highest rating from two or more of the guides.[133] One exception to the domination of this tabulation of late masterpieces by experimental directors should be noted, however, as one of the four late works given the highest rating by all four of the guides was Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*, which he directed at the age of 68.

Nothwithstanding Bergman's late masterpiece, overall Tables 5 and 6 provide further evidence that the precocious directors - those who make important films at early ages - tend to be conceptual, whereas the movies' old masters, who are great in old age, tend to be the experimental directors. Among the seven experimental directors, only Chaplin made early films sufficiently important to appear in Table 5, and of the six conceptual directors only Bergman appears in Table 6.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that movie directors, like painters, poets, and novelists, can usefully be divided into experimental and conceptual innovators. Whereas some directors aim to create convincing characters, and to make their audiences forget they are watching a movie, others subordinate their characters to plot, and intend their films as personal philosophical statements or fantasies. The directors whose work improves with age tend to be drawn from the first group, while the young geniuses of film generally belong to the second group.

This study has established that there have been significant numbers of great directors of both of these types. And although this study considered only directors born through 1920, it is clear that more recent directors continue to represent both categories. So for example the French New Wave directors who had an enormous impact on their art in the 1960s were conceptual in

orientation. Most of them began making movies only after having worked as film critics, and all were thoroughly versed in the history of movies: as Jean-Luc Godard observed of himself and his friends, "Our first films were all *films de cinéphile* - the work of film enthusiasts."[134] A recent study of Godard's films provides a characterization of his work, and that of his friends, that might serve as a general description of conceptual filmmaking:

> The result is a brand of cinema more self-aware and proudly artificial than classical stylists find acceptable. Editing may not be 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 complete 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.[135]

More recently, another group of young conceptual directors emerged from American film schools. This group's most prominent members include Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, and Steven Spielberg. At early ages these directors made a number of films that were among the most commercially successful in the history of the industry. Their conceptual approach was manifested in their frequent use of fantasy and myth. So for example Lucas explained that his films were motivated by his interest in the imaginary and his belief that film is a moral instrument: "*Star Wars* came out of my desire to make a modern fairy tale. In college I became fascinated by how culture is transmitted through fairy tales and myths. Fairy tales are how people learn about good and evil, about how to conduct themselves in society." [136] The early work of these directors will most likely prove to have been their most important - the work that will

influence future generations and feature prominently in the history of film. Today the recent revival of independent cinema in America is a result of the innovations of a number of conceptual filmmakers, including Quentin Tarantino, Spike Lee, Todd Haynes, and Robert Rodriguez. The conceptual nature of these filmmakers' work suggests that their future films will decline in importance as compared to their early films.

Throughout the last thirty years, there has also been a number of experimental directors. Prominent among these have been Robert Altman, John Cassavetes, and Clint Eastwood. These directors have consistently made films that are based on the belief that, in Altman's words, the audience wants to see "something that they can believe is true."[137] And indeed, Eastwood, at 75 years old, is currently making the best films of his life - having won two Academy awards for direction in the last 12 years, most recently in 2005 for *Million Dollar Baby*.

André Bazin's division of movie directors into those concerned with reality and those who employ images that go beyond direct representation parallels similar divisions that have been made for painters, poets, and novelists. And as is true for practitioners of these other arts, the creative careers of movie directors are directly related to the type they belong to: in general, directors concerned with the image are at their best early in their careers, while those who portray reality improve with experience. We believe that an awareness of these contrasting life cycles can be part of a more systematic understanding of the development of film and the creativity of filmmakers. And perhaps an awareness of these life cycles will help predict the success of future filmmakers - illuminating their impending careers by their current motivations.

Footnotes

1. Bazin 1967, 24-26.
2. Bordwell and Thompson 1997, 480.
3. Wood 2002.
4. Chandler 2002, 227.
5. Chandler 1995, 11.
6. Sarris 1985, 51.
7. Agee 1964, 397.
8. Hochman 1974, 149.
9. Mast 1981, 54.
10. Geduld 1971, 29, 34.
11. Hochman 1974, 146.
12. Mast 1981, 74.
13. Mast 1979, 36; McCaffrey 1971, 55.
14. McCaffrey 1971, 45-47.
15. Hochman 1974, 50-51.
16. Bazin 2005, 118-19.
17. Hayes 2005, 81.
18. Mast 1971, 109-10.
19. Mast 1986, 92-93.
20. Sarris 1968, 40.
21. Hochman 1974, 56; Amberg 1971, 274.
22. Bazin 2005, 138-39.
23. Peary 2001, 48.

24. Peary 2001, 85.

25. Peary 2001, 71.

26. Truffaut 1994, 63.

27. Peary 2001, ix.

28. Mast 1981, 240; Peary 2001, 64.

29. Peary 2001, 47.

30. Bogdanovich 1978, 31.

31. Bogdanovich 1978, 24; Sarris 1976, 124.

32. Sarris 1985, 47.

33. Renoir 1989, 6.

34. Renoir 1989, 186.

35. Truffaut 1994, 46.

36. Wollen 2002, 161.

37. Renoir 1989, 4-5.

38. Renoir 1989, 179.

39. Truffaut 1994, 42.

40. Leprohon 1971, 193.

41. Bazin 1992, 104; Bazin 2005, 121.

42. Renoir 1989, 82-83.

43. Mast 1979, 125-26.

44. Mast 1979, 135.

45. Mast 19779, 141.

46. Mast 1979, 132.

47. See the comments on *Sherlock Junior* of Thomson, 1980, 303.

48. Cook 1981, 206.

49. Moews 1977, 312.

50. McCarthy 1997, 7.

51. McBride 1982, 8.

52. Bogdanovich 1997, 262.

53. McBride 1982, 82.

54. McBride 1982, 33.

55. Wood 1968, 11-13.

56. Sarris 1985, 55.

57. McBride 1972, 67.

58. Sarris 1985, 53.

59. Mast 1982, 367.

60. Mast 1982, 18.

61. Taylor 1998, 35, 40.

62. Taylor 1998, 65.

63. Mast 1981, 155.

64. Mast 1981, 157.

65. Bordwell 1993, 46.

66. Bordwell 1993, 51.

67. Cook 1981, 177.

68. Gottesman 1976, 104.

69. Milne 1972, 115.

70. Gottlieb 1995, 180.

71. Gottlieb 2003, 130.

72. Sarris 1985, 58.

73. Gottlieb 1995, 48.

74. Gottlieb 1995, 255-56.

75. Gottlieb 1995, 109.

76. Gottlieb 1995, 208.

77. Truffaut 1967, 8.

78. Gottlieb 1995, 208.

79. Agee 1964, 214.

80. Gottlieb 1995.

81. Wood 1969, 17.

82. Truffaut 1994, 87.

83. Horton 2001, 68.

84. Horton 2001, 71.

85. Madsen 1968, 52.

86. Madsen 1968, 56.

87. Chandler 2002, 324.

88. Crowe 1999, 175.

89. Sarris 1998, 324.

90. Hochman 1974, 504.

91. Horton 2001, 64-65.

92. Agee 1964, 411.

93. Prince 1999, 36.

94. Kurosawa 1983, 93.

95. Prince 1999, 34-35.

96. Prince 1999, 302.

97. Richie 1965, 185, 197.

98. Anderson and Richie 1982, 380.

99. Kurosawa 1983, xii.

100. Prince 1999, 342-43.

101. Gottesman 1971, 69-77.

102. Gottesman 1971, 47.

103. Gottesman 1971, 127.

104. Hochman 1974, 486-87.

105. Hochman 1974, 489.

106. Truffaut 1994, 284.

107. Gottesman 1976, 104.

108. American Film Institute 1975.

109. Sarris 1985, 78.

110. Steene 1968, 22.

111. Bergman 1994, 49.

112. Björkman, Manns, and Sima 1973, 44.

113. Steene 1972, 17.

114. Steene 1972, 76-78.

115. Michaels 2000, 45.

116. Michaels 2000, 15.

117. Truffaut 1994, 259.

118. Gado 1986, 241, 310-11.

119. Nowell-Smith 1996, 573.

120. Chandler 1995, 84-85.

121. Bondanella 1978, 8.

122. Chandler 1995, 58.

123. Mast 1986, 322.

124. Bondanella 1978, 104.

125. Bondanella 2002, 72.

126. Bondanella 2002, 98.

127. Mast 1981, 290.

128. Fellini 1996, 99.

129. Simon 1972, 21.

130. Gottlieb 1995, 115.

131. Estrin 2002, 81.

132. No film by Chaplin received the highest rating from all four guides; those listed for him in Table 3 were given the top rating by three of the guides. For all the other directors, all the films listed in Table 3 received the top rating in all four guides.

133. Eisenstein died at 50, so could not have appeared in Table 6. The other five conceptual directors, however, all lived to 70 or beyond.

134. Godard 1986, 173.

135. Strerritt 1999, 20.

136. Kline 1999, 143.

137. Sterritt 2000, 202.

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Table 1: Directors Included in this Study

Director	Country of birth	Year of birth	Year of death
Bergman,Ingmar	Sweden	1918	
Chaplin, Charlie	Great Britain	1889	1977
Eisenstein, Sergei	Russia	1898	1948
Fellini, Federico	Italy	1920	1993
Ford, John	US	1894	1973
Griffith, D. W.	US	1875	1948
Hawks, Howard	US	1896	1977
Hitchcock, Alfred	Great Britain	1899	1980
Keaton, Buster	US	1895	1966
Kurosawa, Akira	Japan	1910	1998
Renoir, Jean	France	1894	1979
Welles, Orson	US	1915	1985
Wilder, Billy	Austria	1906	2002

Source: See text and Wood 2002.

Table 2: Best Film by Each Director, Sight and Sound Critics Poll, 2002

	Votes	Age
Conceptual		
Bergman, *Wild Strawberries*	7	39
Eisenstein, *The Battleship Potemkin*	19	27
Fellini, *8 1/2*	18	43
Griffith, *Intolerance*	5	41
Keaton, *The General*	11	32
Welles, *Citizen Kane*	45	26
Experimental		
Chaplin, *Modern Times*	6	47
Ford, *The Searchers*	15	62
Hawks, *Rio Bravo*	5	63
Hitchcock, *Vertigo*	41	59
Kurosawa, *The Seven Samurai*	15	44
Renoir, *The Rules of the Game*	29	45
Wilder, *Some Like It Hot*	7	53

Source: Sight and Sound 2002.

Table 3: All Films by 13 Directors Given Highest Ratings by Film Guides

	Age
Conceptual	
Bergman, *The Seventh Seal*	39
Wild Strawberries	39
Fanny and Alexander	64
Eisenstein, *The Battleship Potemkin*	27
Fellini, *La Dolce Vita*	40
8 1/2	43
Griffith, *Birth of a Nation*	40
Intolerance	41
Keaton, *The General*	32
Welles, *Citizen Kane*	26
The Magnificent Ambersons	27
Touch of Evil	43
Experimental	
Chaplin, *The Gold Rush*	36
City Lights	42
Modern Times	47
Ford, *The Searchers*	62
Hawks, *His Girl Friday*	44
Hitchcock, *The 39 Steps*	36
Foreign Correspondent	41
Rebecca	41
Rear Window	55
Vertigo	59
North by Northwest	60

Table 3, continued.

	Psycho	61
Kurosawa,	*Rashomon*	40
	The Seven Samurai	44
	Yojimbo	51
Renoir,	*Grand Illusion*	43
	The Rules of the Game	45
	The Southerner	51
Wilder,	*Double Indemnity*	38
	The Lost Weekend	39
	Some Like It Hot	53

Source: This and subsequent tables are based on a data set constructed from Bleiler 2005, Craddock 2004, Maltin 2005, and Walker 2004. See text for the procedures used.

Table 4: Median Ages of Directors When They Made the Films Listed in Table 3

	Age
Conceptual	
Bergman	39
Eisenstein	27
Fellini	41.5
Griffith	40.5
Keaton	32
Welles	27
Experimental	
Chaplin	42
Ford	62
Hawks	44
Hitchcock	55
Kurosawa	44
Renoir	45
Wilder	39

Table 5: Movies Made by Directors Aged 30 or Below That Were Given the Highest Ranking by One or More Movie Guides

Director, movie	Age	Number of guides that gave movie highest ranking
Eisenstein, *The Battleship Potemkin*	27	4
Welles, *Citizen Kane*	26	4
Welles, *The Magnificent Ambersons*	27	4
Eisenstein, *October*	29	2
Keaton, *Our Hospitality*	28	2
Chaplin, *The Cure*	28	1
Chaplin, *Easy Street*	28	1
Eisenstein, *Strike*	26	1
Keaton, *The Navigator*	29	1
Keaton, *Seven Chances*	30	1

Table 6: Movies Made by Directors Aged 60 or Above That Were Given the Highest Ranking by One or More Movie Guides

Director, movie	Age	Number of guides that gave movie highest ranking
Bergman, *Fanny and Alexander*	68	4
Ford, *The Searchers*	62	4
Hitchcock, *North by Northwest*	60	4
Hitchcock, *Psycho*	61	4
Ford, *Mister Roberts*	61	3
Kurosawa, *Ran*	75	3
Ford, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*	68	2
Bergman, *Autumn Sonata*	60	1
Hitchcock, *The Birds*	64	1
Hitchcock, *Frenzy*	73	1
Kurosawa, *Dersu Uzala*	65	1
Kurosawa, *Kagemusha*	70	1
Kurosawa, *Dreams*	80	1
Renoir, *French Can-Can*	61	1