

NBER WORKING PAPER SERIES

A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A VERY YOUNG  
OR VERY OLD INNOVATOR  
CREATIVITY AT THE EXTREMES OF THE LIFE CYCLE

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Working Paper 10515

<http://www.nber.org/papers/w10515>

NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH

1050 Massachusetts Avenue

Cambridge, MA 02138

May 2004

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[A Portrait of the Artist as a Very Young or Very Old Innovator:](#)

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[May 2004](#)

[JEL No. J4](#)

### **[ABSTRACT](#)**

[Orson Wells made \*Citizen Kane\*, his greatest movie, when he was 25 years old; Frank Lloyd Wright designed Fallingwater, his most famous house, when he was 70. Contrasts as great as this raise the question of whether there is a general explanation of when in their lives great innovators are most creative. For each of seven artistic disciplines, this paper examines a major innovation made by a very young artist, and another made by an old one, with the goal of understanding the role of the artist's age and experience in the accomplishment. The analysis shows why youth was necessary for the innovations of such conceptual artists as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Arthur Rimbaud, Maya Lin, and Orson Welles, all of whom produced their masterpieces before the age of 30, and why extensive experience was necessary for the innovations of such experimental artists as Piet Mondrian, Elizabeth Bishop, Henrik Ibsen, and Frank Lloyd Wright, all of whom made major contributions after the age of 60. This paper demonstrates the generality of the distinction between conceptual and experimental innovators in artistic disciplines, and the value of the analysis in explaining the very different relationships between age and creativity for the two types of artist.](#)

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As I believe no man a real poet or genius of any sort who does not go on improving till eighty and over, I shall begin again and again as often as you set me right.

Robert Browning to

Thomas Carlyle, 1856<sup>1</sup>

□

You know, the great mystery that requires 20 years doesn't exist in any field.

Orson Welles, 1960<sup>2</sup>

Recent research on important painters, poets, and novelists has established that there are two different types of creativity, and that each is associated with a distinct life cycle of important achievements.<sup>3</sup> Conceptual innovators arrive suddenly at innovations based on new ideas. These often constitute immediate and radical changes in basic conventions of their disciplines. Although these innovations can be made at any time, the most radical, and consequently the most important, usually occur early in a career, when the artist has not yet become committed to habits of thought about the discipline, and is better able to perceive and appreciate extreme deviations from existing methods and practices.

In contrast, experimental innovators arrive gradually at innovations based more heavily on perception. Their major innovations normally appear piecemeal in increments, which are the results of an extended period of trial and error. The greatest experimental innovations are based on long chains of experimentation, and therefore usually emerge only after many years of work, late in an artist's career.

The purpose of this paper is to sharpen our understanding of this analysis by examining a series of extreme examples of both types of creativity. These are drawn both from the artistic disciplines that have already been considered in this regard and from others that have not

previously been studied. Examining extreme cases - of important innovations made very early or very late in artists' careers - can serve to spotlight the most basic differences between the conceptual and experimental approaches. Doing this in a wide variety of activities can furthermore underscore the most basic elements that are common to each of the two types of innovation.

The conceptual innovations considered here were all made by artists aged 31 or younger; one was produced by a poet at the age of just 16. The experimental innovations studied here were all made by artists aged 58 and above; two were made by artists above the age of 70. All these innovations were among the most important works of very important members of their disciplines, and consequently most rank among the most important contributions to the respective disciplines in their times. They include what many literature critics consider the Great American Novel, and what most film critics consider the Great American Movie - indeed, the Greatest Movie Ever Made.

In every one of the following case studies, the goal is to understand the role of the artist's age, and career experience, in the accomplishment of the specific achievement selected. Thus for the conceptual innovators a basic question is how an artist so young can make such an important contribution to a discipline: what characteristics of the innovation reflect the artist's youth? For the experimental innovators, a basic question is why this late work is more important than most, or all, of the artist's earlier output: what about this innovation was aided by the artist's considerable experience? By asking these questions about these many individual masterpieces in a diverse group of arts, we can gain greater insight into how age affects the production of major artistic advances.

## Fine Artists

If Picasso is the archetypal finder, who, then, is the seeker?

Mondrian, no doubt.

David Sylvester, 1995<sup>4</sup>

I couldn't imagine a more banal activity than simply providing visual kicks to the public.

Joseph Kosuth, 1970<sup>5</sup>

□

Piet Mondrian arrived in New York in October, 1940, after the windows of his London studio were broken and the house next to his was destroyed by German bombs. Mondrian painted in New York for the next 3 ½ years, until his death in 1944. He spent much of that time working on a group of paintings he had started in Paris and London and brought with him to New York, and he consequently began and completed only three new paintings while in New York. The last of these, *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, which he completed in 1943, is reproduced in more textbooks of art history than any other painting Mondrian executed in his career of more than 50 years.<sup>6</sup> Remarkably, therefore, the last painting Mondrian completed, at the age of 71, is considered by art historians to be the most important one he ever made.

Mondrian's goals for his art were both vast and imprecise. He wrote extensively, if often incomprehensibly, about the purposes of art and the means of achieving them. Both were influenced by Mondrian's belief in Theosophy. Carel Blotkamp explained that Mondrian took from Theosophy the conviction "that all life is directed towards evolution, and that ... it is the goal of art to give expression to that evolution."<sup>7</sup> A key turning point in Mondrian's art occurred around the time of his move from his native Holland to Paris in 1912, when his recognition of the importance of Cubism led him to believe that abstraction could present a purer version of reality, and consequently represent a more advanced stage of evolution. The aim of his art

became the creation of relationships between colors, and between shapes, that would transcend naturalism:

Pure abstract art becomes completely emancipated, free of naturalistic appearances. It is no longer natural harmony but creates equivalent relationships. The realization of equivalent relationships is of the highest importance for life. Only in this way can social and economic freedom, peace, and happiness be achieved.<sup>8</sup>

□

Mondrian believed that artists could serve as leaders of society in moving toward these universal goals. He recognized that the goals were distant, but he was patient: “he never rushed himself, apparently convinced that evolution in art, as in the universe, was an extremely slow process.”<sup>9</sup>

Mondrian’s working methods were explicitly based on intuition: “Pure intuition becomes conscious through long culture and creates pure abstract art, which arises neither from intellect nor from vague intuitive feeling.”<sup>10</sup> Although his geometric compositions are often assumed to be the result of calculation, he told a friend this was never the case:

I believe that it is possible by means of horizontal and vertical lines, created *consciously* but not *calculatingly*, guided by a higher intuition and brought to harmony and rhythm.... to arrive at a work of art which is as strong as it is true ... And *chance* must be as far removed as *calculation*.<sup>11</sup>

□

The artist Harry Holzman, who financed Mondrian’s immigration to the United States and later became his heir, confirmed Mondrian’s claim:

There was no program, no symbols, no “geometry” or system of measure; only intuition determined the total rhythm of the relationships, by trial and error. The given space of the canvas, the given tension of its proportion, its size, were likewise experimentally determined and varied. Intuitive experience for Mondrian could only be direct, immediate, sensual.<sup>12</sup>

□

The criteria that guided Mondrian’s experimentation were aesthetic. An artist who knew

Mondrian in Paris recalled watching him work in the 1920s: “if the black line was too thick, he’d take a piece of white paper, or a paper of about the same color as the color planes next to that line, and then he pasted it onto the canvas, and then held it at a distance to see ‘is the line the way I want it or not.’”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, a friend from his last years in New York explained that Mondrian proceeded visually: “He tests each picture over a long period by eye: it is a physical adjustment of proportion through training, intuition, and testing.”<sup>14</sup>

Mondrian’s art developed gradually over decades of experimentation. John Golding has pointed out that from an early stage of his career he worked in series, indicating that he was concerned with themes rather than individual motifs.<sup>15</sup> Michel Seuphor recalled that although the differences between two paintings might appear insignificant to a layman, Mondrian often considered the changes significant: “‘Even so, it’s another step,’ he once said to a friend who was studying a new picture of his, ‘or don’t you think so? Don’t you find that it represents even a little step forward?’”<sup>16</sup> Mondrian’s dogged persistence made the cumulative effect of these many little steps very great. As David Sylvester reflected, “A Mondrian retrospective is not just a procession of great pictures, but a progression which in itself is an aesthetic experience: the trajectory of the man’s art becomes as much a thing of beauty as the art.”<sup>17</sup> The observation is apt, for Mondrian’s lifelong quest came to have a goal more complex than simply making images. A scholar who recently studied a group of paintings that Mondrian executed during the last decade of his life concluded that “Mondrian’s painting practice in New York seems to reflect an accelerating doubt about whether it is possible, or even desirable, ever to finish a painting... Mondrian had not abandoned the idea of a product, just redefined it as a discovery or a solution, not a painting.”<sup>18</sup> Thus the painter Carl Holty wrote of visiting Mondrian’s studio in New York:

“Watching the pictures change into others as he worked, I asked him whether he wasn’t losing good pictures in numbers because of his exigence. He said, ‘I don’t want pictures. I just want to find things out.’”<sup>19</sup>

Mondrian’s method of constructing his paintings involved extended revision and correction, due to his uncertainty, but the geometric shapes and limited palette of primary colors that made up his finished work are often taken to imply that his completed paintings are impersonal and mechanical. So for example Clement Greenberg’s obituary of the painter predicted that “Mondrian will be reproached for the anonymity with which he strove for the ruled precision of the geometer and the machine in executing his paintings: their conceptions can be communicated by a set of specifications and dimensions, sight unseen, and realized by a draftsman.”<sup>20</sup> A number of artists and critics denied this, however. John Coplans observed that, particularly in Mondrian’s late works, “a very pronounced brushwork is an important compositional element of his painting.” Coplans contended that in fact the surface of Mondrian’s paintings subtly expressed the uncertainty and doubt that lay at the core of his art:

Perfection and imperfection lie side by side within his paintings, mutually contradicting one another - the razor-sharp edge of the black lines contrasted against the suffused surfaces. This conflict between means and ends transmits a psychic tension... [I]his duality serves as a check against ritualization and virtuosity and enables his work to transmit the drama of search and struggle without making a spectacle of it.<sup>21</sup>

□

Mondrian’s artistic goals, practices, and extended progress identify him as a quintessentially experimental artist. The key question is how this helps us to understand why *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* emerges as his most important individual work. The answer appears to be that in this late painting Mondrian combined a number of elements that he had developed



and painstakingly refined over the course of more than 30 years with several bold new devices. Meyer Schapiro pointed out the elements of *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* that Mondrian drew from his own earlier work: “We see again the stabilizing grid; the molecular scattered units; the repeated arrays of primary color as in his Neo-Impressionist phase; and the composition of large squares applied as separate planes of color.”<sup>22</sup> All these components had first appeared in Mondrian’s paintings between 1909 and 1917. To these long-established elements of his vocabulary Mondrian then added significant new departures. Thus in *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* he eliminated the network of black lines that had characterized his work since his first encounter with Cubism. As he explained to a curator, in 1943 he had decided that his use of black lines to define planes constituted drawing rather than painting: “In drawing, the lines are the principal means of expression; in painting, the color planes.”<sup>23</sup> At the same time Mondrian introduced a new illusion of three-dimensionality into his work: “At certain crossings of the grid, he has extended the color of the square unit to a neighboring unit of one or the other band. Distinguished by this accent, one band seems to come forward in crossing its perpendicular.”<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the stable, architectural effects of his paintings of the previous two decades, in his great late paintings Mondrian achieved new depth, dynamism, and movement. This was a product of the wisdom he had gained through four decades of research, based on both a profound knowledge of his craft and an understanding of the value of the willingness to experiment with bold new changes: “at the age of seventy-one he was quite prepared to begin his artistic life anew.”<sup>25</sup> Both his expertise and his openness to new approaches were direct consequences of the experimental nature of Mondrian’s approach to art.

\_\_\_\_\_ In 1965, while he was a student at New York’s School of Visual Arts, Joseph Kosuth

made a work titled *One and Three Chairs*. It consists of a wooden folding chair, flanked on one side by a life-size photograph of the same chair, and on the other by an enlarged photograph of a dictionary definition of the word "chair." Nearly four decades later, Kosuth is approaching the age of 60, but *One and Three Chairs* remains by far his best-known work. A recent study found that it is in fact the single work made by an American artist during the 1960s that is most often reproduced in textbooks of art history.<sup>26</sup> How did Joseph Kosuth produce a work this important when he was just 20 years old?

In 1964, Kosuth decided that painting was dead: "It was my belief that painting had been dried up, used up."<sup>27</sup> He later explained that painting had served to enrich the visual experience of people who lived prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but that the development of modern technology - movies, television, and transportation - had made this function obsolete: "The visual experiences of the modern day man make paintings impotent and pathetic trophies to forgotten aristocracies."<sup>28</sup> For Kosuth, Marcel Duchamp's innovation of the unassisted readymade - the presentation of unaltered manufactured objects as works of art - had decisively shifted the emphasis of art from appearance to conception.<sup>29</sup>

As a 20-year-old art student, Kosuth consequently decided that being an artist necessarily involved questioning the nature of art. This could not be done using traditional means: "If you make paintings, you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art."<sup>30</sup> He needed to find an alternative means that emphasized conception and ideas rather than execution and objects: "the artist's duty is really to present new ideas - new ideas about what art is - not just to make new *works* within the accepted framework."<sup>31</sup> Part of Kosuth's solution to this problem lay in the use of language: "I chose language for the 'material' of my work because it seemed the

only possibility with the potential for being a neutral non-material.”<sup>32</sup> Another part of his solution lay in using photography “as a non-art device as an alternative to painting *within* the art context; I used photography in a way which was detached and indexed to the *general* use of photography in the culture, rather than the craft of a ‘fine art’ of photography.” To emphasize the insignificance of the craft of the photographic process, Kosuth never took his own photographs.<sup>33</sup>

*One and Three Chairs* was one of the first products of this combination of language and photography. Each time it was exhibited, Kosuth would have a new photograph of the chair taken in its new location. He explained that the change in the object was part of its meaning:

I liked that the work itself was something other than simply what you saw. By changing the location, the object, the photograph and still having it remain the same work was *very* interesting. It meant that you could have an art work which was that *idea* of an art work, and its formal components weren’t important. I felt I had found a way to make art without formal components being confused for an expressionist composition. The expression was in the idea, not the form - the forms were only a device in the service of the idea.<sup>34</sup>

□

Kosuth’s emphasis on avoiding “expressionist composition” places him squarely within a movement that had begun a decade earlier, in which Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, Andy Warhol, and others had sought to create new forms of art that eliminated the emotional and psychological symbolism of Abstract Expressionism, which had dominated American art in the late 1940s and early ‘50s. Yet *One and Three Chairs* was among the most radical attempts of the time to move art beyond physical objects into a more purely conceptual realm. In doing this, it struck a responsive chord with many young artists who wished to separate art from the commercialism of the market. As Kosuth later recognized, his early innovations were part of a growing artistic protest against American society: “It is impossible to understand

this without understanding the sixties, and appreciate [Conceptual art] for what it was: the art of the Vietnam war era.”<sup>35</sup> Kosuth’s work quickly affected other artists, as both the role of language and the use of photography became central elements of many of the most important developments in fine art in the late 1960s and beyond.

As Kosuth grew older, his views of art became somewhat more nuanced, and he qualified his youthful categorical dismissal of painting. Thus for example at a symposium in 1982, he explained that “Actually, when I first described [painting] as dead I was a kid - and I was projecting into the future.”<sup>36</sup> But in fact it was apparently the confidence and simplicity of his youthful view of art that allowed him to make the radical departures from traditional artistic practices that gained influence with other young artists who were seeking ways to present ideas without making conventional art objects. That Kosuth could produce a contribution to fine art as influential as *One and Three Chairs* at such an early age was a result of his success at creating a form of art that embodied a complex idea without requiring the command of traditional artistic methods and materials that required extensive study and practice.

### Novelists

Yes, that was and ever is my greatest torment - I never can control my material. Whenever I write a novel, I crowd it up with a lot of separate stories and episodes; therefore the whole lacks proportion and harmony.

Fyodor Dostoevsky to Nikolay Strachov, April 23, 1871.<sup>37</sup>

I want to write something *new*, something extraordinary and beautiful and simple and intricately patterned.

F. Scott Fitzgerald to Maxwell Perkins, July, 1922, about his plans for *The Great Gatsby*.<sup>38</sup>

There is widespread agreement with the judgment of Edward Wasiolek that “When Dostoevsky completed *The Brothers Karamazov* in November of 1880 - less than three months before his death - he was at the height of his creative powers.”<sup>39</sup> There is also general agreement that this final novel was Dostoevsky’s greatest achievement: Konstantin Mochulsky considered it to be “not only a synthesis of Dostoevsky’s creative work, but also the culmination of his life,” and Sigmund Freud declared that “*The Brothers Karamazov* is the most magnificent novel ever written.”<sup>40</sup>

Why Dostoevsky produced his greatest work at the age of 59, in the final year of his life, can be understood by an artistic examination of his artistic goals and the methods he devised to seek them. Dostoevsky devoted his art, and his life, to a pursuit of the unattainable: W. J. Leatherbarrow observed that for him “truth was infinite, commensurate with the wisdom of God’s creation, and the search for it was an unfinalizable spiritual - not merely intellectual - quest.”<sup>41</sup> The great novels of Dostoevsky’s final two decades presented a series of innovations aimed at communicating this belief, and at gaining a deeper understanding of it.

Mikhail Bakhtin argued that in these late works “Dostoevsky is the creator of the polyphonic novel. He created a fundamentally new novelistic genre.”<sup>42</sup> This innovation constituted a new way to represent the indeterminacy and uncertainty of human life.<sup>43</sup> In place of the single controlling voice of earlier novelists, Dostoevsky created novels with “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices.”<sup>44</sup> One consequence of this was that no single character became the organizing focus of the novel: thus “the work seems to oscillate between several possible novels, each somehow intended by a different character. It is this peculiar plurality that creates that special sense of

palpitating contradictoriness we recognize as quintessentially Dostoevskian.”<sup>45</sup>

Dostoevsky believed in free will: as one scholar explained, he believed that “the future is unpredictable not only because of innumerable casual factors but also because the past does not wholly determine the present. It shapes, but does not make, our choices.”<sup>46</sup> He employed a series of devices to avoid a narrative structure that presented a linear sequence of events, and in so doing made them appear inevitable. The polyphonic novel was a means of allowing the characters of a novel “to be truly free, capable of surprising not only other characters but also the author.” Dostoevsky’s creative process was “designed specifically to provoke unexpected events or ideas, and the process would be a failure if it did *not* produce them.”<sup>47</sup> Bakhtin approvingly quoted the analysis of the critic Victor Shklovsky:

Fyodor Mikhailovich loved to jot down plans for things; he loved even more to develop, mull over, and complicate his plans; he did not like to finish up a manuscript... As long as a work remained multi-leveled and multi-voiced, as long as the people in it were still arguing, then despair over the absence of a solution would not set in.<sup>48</sup>

Bakhtin observed that the same was true for individual characters: “As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word... In [Dostoevsky’s] major heroes, ... the profound consciousness of their own unfinalizability and indeterminacy is realized in very complex ways, by ideological thought, crime, or heroic deed.”<sup>49</sup> In Bakhtin’s view, Dostoevsky’s plots were devised to make possible this open-endedness: “Plot in Dostoevsky is absolutely devoid of any sort of finalizing functions. Its goal is to place a person in various situations that expose and provoke him, to bring people together and make them collide in conflict - in such a way, however, that they do not remain within this area of plot-

related contact but exceed its bounds.”<sup>50</sup>

      Gary Saul Morson has observed that many novelists are surprised by the actions of their characters, as the authors’ initial plans are disrupted by the developing personalities of their actors. Yet he noted that most authors then revise their manuscripts to hide their surprise from readers, often by rewriting earlier sections so the characters’ actions no longer appear inconsistent. Dostoevsky specifically avoided doing this, for he wanted readers to see that he had not determined his characters’ fate in advance.<sup>51</sup> One way he did this was through the serialization of his novels. He avoided planning his novels beyond the episodes that he was currently writing. Once these were published, and unexpected developments appeared in later installments, readers would see that the characters’ fate “was open or, rather, they had no fate. The work’s sections were to be understood as tending to no predetermined result, not as the mere unfolding of a plan in several parts.”<sup>52</sup>

      From at least the time of *The Idiot*, which he published in 1868, Dostoevsky avoided predetermining the outcomes of his novels. Joseph Frank wrote that after Dostoevsky completed the first part of *The Idiot*, “it is clear from Dostoevsky’s notebooks and letters that he had no satisfactory idea of how to continue the action. This uncertainty persists all through the middle sections of the book, ... where Dostoevsky is obviously writing from scene to scene with only the loosest thread of any central narrative line.”<sup>53</sup> As Shklovsky observed, “Dostoevsky’s plans contain by their very nature an open-endedness which in effect refutes them as plans.”<sup>54</sup> Dostoevsky’s point was to communicate through the very composition of his novels the belief declared by one of his characters in *The Idiot*: “It’s life that matters, nothing but life - the process of discovering, the everlasting and perpetual process, not the discovery itself at all.”<sup>55</sup>

Dostoevsky was a quintessential experiment seeker: as Malcolm Jones observed, “Dostoevsky himself always insisted that the important thing was not the achievement of the goal but the process of trying to reach it.”<sup>56</sup> It is therefore not surprising that his greatest work is valued for questions rather than answers: “*The Brothers Karamazov* matters not for its assertions and not for its denials but for its questions, to which there are no easy answers... Dostoevsky is important because of the questions he asks about his society and about the beliefs held by men in it, and above all because of his ability to dramatize the questions and show that they are real ones.”<sup>57</sup>

That this greatest work came at the end of Dostoevsky’s career was not an accident, for its greatness was a product of both his increasing technical mastery of his craft and his greater insight into the human condition. Thus Mochulsky describes his earlier books as the laboratory in which Dostoevsky developed the philosophical and artistic elements of *Karamazov*, with the ideology taken from *Diary of a Writer*, the structure of the family chronicle from *A Raw Youth*, the conflict between religious faith and disbelief from *The Devils*, and the scheme of a novel about a major crime from *The Idiot*. Similarly, Mochulsky traces prototypes of *Karamazov*’s central characters to the earlier novels.<sup>58</sup> And beyond these literary survivals, *Karamazov* drew on Dostoevsky’s personal struggles, not only his long reflection on religious belief but also his experience of tragedy. Thus early in 1878 Dostoevsky’s work on *Karamazov* was interrupted by the death of his three-year-old son Alyosha. In an attempt to assuage the writer’s grief, his wife convinced him to visit the monastery of Optina Pustyn, where he met with the elder, Father Ambrosius. Dostoevsky used his vivid knowledge of a parent’s grief in his poignant account in *Karamazov* of the devastation of a peasant woman at the death of her child, and Dostoevsky’s



wife believed that the words Father Zosima used to console the woman in the novel were the same ones that Father Ambrosius had asked Dostoevsky to convey to her in sending her his blessing after the death of their son.<sup>59</sup> From his survey of the sources of *The Brothers Karamazov*, it is consequently not surprising that Mochulsky concludes that “spiritually [Dostoevsky] had worked on it his entire life... Everything that he experienced, thought, and created finds its place in this vast synthesis.”<sup>60</sup>

F. Scott Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby* in 1925, when he was just 29 years old. Although the book initially met with a mixed critical reception, and its sales greatly disappointed Fitzgerald, since the writer’s premature death in 1940 *Gatsby*’s reputation has risen greatly.<sup>61</sup> Today not only is there a broad consensus that it is Fitzgerald’s best work, but many scholars consider it to be one of the greatest novels ever written by an American.<sup>62</sup> Over time, as recognition of the magnitude of Fitzgerald’s achievement in *Gatsby* increased, the discontinuity it represented in his career became clear. Thus in 1966 a scholar observed that “One of the most difficult problems in Fitzgerald scholarship in the nineteen-fifties and sixties has been the attempt to explain the sudden maturing of Fitzgerald in 1925, with the publication of *The Great Gatsby*. Nothing in Fitzgerald’s earlier writing prepares for the authority and the aesthetic control over material that is so impressive in his third novel.”<sup>63</sup> Perhaps equally puzzling is Fitzgerald’s subsequent failure to match the quality of *Gatsby*. Thus John Berryman observed that “Suddenly he was able, not yet thirty, to lay out and execute a masterpiece. He was happily married, widely admired, and had made money. One might have expected such a career of production as American artists rarely have achieved. What happened then?”<sup>64</sup>

Fitzgerald’s sudden rise and fall can be understood as consequences of the conceptual

basis of his best fiction, which used lyrical prose, simplified characters, and symbolic stage props and settings in the service of allegorical plots. So for example after Fitzgerald's death, Lionel Trilling reflected that the significance of *The Great Gatsby* lay in the ingenuity of its form, which derived from its "intellectual intensity." He observed that the book's characters and settings were all simplified symbols used to serve the story's central idea:

the characters are not "developed": the wealthy and brutal Tom Buchanan, haunted by his "scientific" vision of the doom of civilization, the vaguely guilty, vaguely homosexual Jordan Baker, the dim Wolfsheim, who fixed the World Series of 1919, are treated, we might say, as if they were ideographs, a method of economy that is reinforced by the ideographic use that is made of the Washington Heights flat, the terrible "valley of ashes" seen from the Long Island Railroad, Gatsby's incoherent parties, and the huge sordid eyes of the oculist's advertising sign.

□

Trilling added parenthetically: "It is a technique which gives the novel an affinity with *The Waste Land*."<sup>65</sup> T. S. Eliot himself appears to have appreciated the parallels between his own poetry and the themes and techniques of Fitzgerald's prose, for in 1925 he wrote to tell Fitzgerald that *Gatsby* "excited me more than any new novel I have seen, either English or American, for a number of years," and that he considered it "the first step American fiction has taken since Henry James."<sup>66</sup> More recently, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury described *Gatsby* as "a symbolist tragedy" told with "a symbolist mode of writing that informs everything - Gatsby's dreams, parties, even his shirts - with an enchanted glow."<sup>67</sup>

*Gatsby* is elegant in both style and structure, and it is no surprise that lyric poets are prominent among its admirers. When it was published Conrad Aiken called it "a highly colored and brilliant little novel which, by grace of one cardinal virtue, quite escapes the company of most contemporary American fiction - it has excellence of form," and two decades later John

Berryman judged that “*The Great Gatsby* is in Chekhov’s sense a purely graceful book (“When a man spends the least possible number of movements over some definite action, that is grace”).”<sup>68</sup>

Fitzgerald’s own confidence in his accomplishment similarly serves to identify *Gatsby* as a conceptual breakthrough, for when he completed the book he wrote to his editor “I think my novel is about the best American novel ever written.”<sup>69</sup>

The technical basis for Fitzgerald’s maturation in *The Great Gatsby* has been traced to his newfound ability to distance himself from the story. Like his earlier books, *Gatsby* was based on Fitzgerald’s own experiences and feelings, but in *Gatsby* he used two specific literary devices to achieve greater objectivity. One was what he called “composite characterization,” as Fitzgerald explained that Jay Gatsby “started as one man I knew and then changed into myself - the amalgam was never complete in my mind.”<sup>70</sup> The second, which Fitzgerald apparently borrowed from Joseph Conrad, was his use of an observer, rather than the author, as the book’s narrator.<sup>71</sup> Both devices allowed Fitzgerald to attain a feeling of greater objectivity in *Gatsby* than in his earlier novels, and thus to give a more universal significance to his own experiences and feelings.

The experience and feelings in question, however, were those of a young artist, and in this lay the source of both the power of Fitzgerald’s achievement in *Gatsby* and his subsequent inability to go beyond it. Critics have long been aware that the strength of Fitzgerald’s vision in *Gatsby* came from its youthful simplicity and clarity. Lionel Trilling observed that “A writer’s days must be bound each to each by his sense of his life, and Fitzgerald the undergraduate was father of the best in the man and the novelist.” Trilling remarked that Fitzgerald was perhaps the last significant writer to believe in the Romantic fantasy of heroism, and commented that “To us

it will no doubt come more and more to seem a merely boyish dream.”<sup>72</sup> Alfred Kazin agreed, noting that “Fitzgerald was a boy, the most startlingly gifted and self-destructive of all the lost boys, to the end.” As such, he was able to create a small world, clearly perceived: “Fitzgerald’s world is a little one, a superior boy’s world - precocious in its wisdom, precocious in its tragedy.”<sup>73</sup>

But Fitzgerald could not retain the simplicity of his vision throughout all of even his relatively brief life. John Aldridge recognized this when he wrote that “*Gatsby* was written during that fragile moment when the drive of youth meets with the intuitive wisdom of first maturity, and before either the diseases of youth or the waverings of age begin to show through.”<sup>74</sup> J. B. Priestley appears to have had this same phenomenon in mind when he analyzed what he called the two contrasting and opposed strains within Fitzgerald. The first, which dominated his early work, was that of the optimistic and romantic adolescent who passed through Princeton into the apparently unlimited opportunities of the 1920s, believing his life would always be charmed. The second strain, a detached and cool observer who gained control as the romantic boy withered in the face of disappointments and failures, was an adult artist-priest dedicated to his craft but lacking in exuberance. Neither strain alone could produce the highest art, and Priestley believed that *Gatsby* was Fitzgerald’s finest achievement “because it seems to me to represent the one point of balance between these two conflicting strains in him, the brief period when they were able to collaborate successfully.”<sup>75</sup>

Interestingly, Fitzgerald appears to have understood not only the distinction drawn here between conceptual and experimental artists, but also the difference in their creative life cycles. Thus late in his life, in giving advice to his daughter about how she should prepare for a literary

career, he wrote that “The talent that matures early is usually of the poetic, which mine was in large part. The prose talent depends on other factors - assimilation of material and careful selection of it, or more bluntly: having something to say and an interesting, highly developed way of saying it.”<sup>76</sup> His own explanation of the declining quality of his work after *Gatsby* does not appear to have drawn on this analysis, however. Thus for example in 1929 he wrote to his friend Ernest Hemingway that he believed that he had written too much in the five years prior to the publication of *Gatsby*, and that he had used up all his material: the three novels, dozens of stories, and many articles and movie scripts “may have taken all I had to say too early.”<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere he offered a more poetic explanation:

I have asked a lot of my emotions - one hundred and twenty stories. The price was high, right up with Kipling, because there was one little drop of something - not blood, not a tear, not my seed, in every story, it was the extra I had. Now it has gone and I am just like you now.<sup>78</sup>

□

From the vantage point of the present study, however, Fitzgerald was unable to match the achievement of *The Great Gatsby* in the last 15 years of his life neither because he lacked subject matter nor because he had used up his stock of some magical emotional elixir of artistry. Instead the source of his artistic decline may simply have lain in the inevitable impact of accumulating experience and aging, for the growth over time in the complexity of his perception of the real world deprived him of the ability to recapture the simplicity and clarity of the allegorical world he had created in his youth.

## Poets

I accustomed myself to pure hallucination: I saw quite frankly a mosque in place of a factory, a school for drummers attended by angels, carriages on the roads in the sky, a living-room at the

bottom of a lake, monsters, mysteries.

Arthur Rimbaud, 1873<sup>79</sup>

□

No matter what theories one may have, I doubt very much that they are in one's mind at the moment of writing or that there is even a physical possibility that they could be.

Elizabeth Bishop, 1950<sup>80</sup>

□

André Breton, the poet and founder of Surrealism, considered Arthur Rimbaud the father of modern poetry.<sup>81</sup> Remarkably, Rimbaud completed his career as a poet at the age of 19, when he renounced literature; although he lived another 18 years, until his death at 37, he never again wrote verse. Rimbaud had written what would become his most famous poem, "Le Bateau ivre," in 1871, when he was 16.<sup>82</sup> A recent scholar called this "the first great Symbolist poem," and it has received considerable attention from poets as well as critics - among those who have translated it into English, for example, are Samuel Beckett and Robert Lowell.<sup>83</sup> These striking facts about Rimbaud's remarkable career dramatically raise the question of how he could make so great an achievement so young, in such a brief span of time.

Rimbaud grew up in the provincial town of Charleville, in northeastern France. He had an unhappy childhood, and by his own account took refuge in imaginary adventures. He was a brilliant student, and became a rebellious adolescent. At 15, with the encouragement of Georges Izambard, a young poet who was one of his teachers, Rimbaud began to write poetry. The next year Rimbaud wrote two letters, one to Izambard, the other to another young poet, which have become known as the "Lettres du voyant." In them Rimbaud proposed nothing less than a new theory of poetry. Edmund Wilson observed that this theory, "though more violent and apocalyptic than most expressions of Symbolist doctrine, prophesied the advent of Symbolism." Rimbaud believed that "one must be a *visionary* - one must make oneself a *visionary*." This

would be achieved systematically through hallucination: “The poet makes himself a *visionary* through a long, immense and reasoned *derangement of all the senses*.”<sup>84</sup> By suppressing his conscious senses, the poet would find a new voice. Thus Rimbaud declared that “It is wrong to say: I think. One ought to say: I am being thought. I is Another.” Rimbaud effectively wanted the poet to become the medium of an oracle, but rather than a divine oracle that spoke from without, his goal was to find an oracle that came from within himself, the voice of the poet’s own subconscious.<sup>85</sup>

“Le Bateau ivre” was the first major work based on Rimbaud’s new theory. Wallace Fowlie observed that it is “not only a successful poem in itself, it is the archetype of all future work. It contains his principal themes, the order of his experiences, the evolution of his work and his poetics.”<sup>86</sup> The language of the poem literally describes the voyage of a drunken boat, narrated by the boat, describing both its adventures and emotions, as it passes from servitude to liberty, and finally to debilitation and disintegration. The poem is obviously allegorical, but the symbolism is never clearly identified, and as a result there have been many different interpretations of the poem.<sup>87</sup> Like Rimbaud’s other poetry, “Le Bateau ivre” uses esoteric and inventive language to produce vivid and complex images.

The greatest literary influence on “Le bateau ivre” was Charles Baudelaire, who Rimbaud considered “the first seer, king of poets.”<sup>88</sup> Yet Marjorie Perloff has argued that Rimbaud made a key departure from Baudelaire. Whereas the symbolism of Baudelaire’s poetry remained anchored to his perception of external reality, Rimbaud’s “Le Bateau ivre” was no longer concerned with providing links between his images and the outside world, but instead with recording the processes of exploration of his own consciousness. This would constitute the

beginning of a powerful force, not only in modern poetry but in the arts in general, by creating an art based not on perception but on conception. The artists who would follow this practice include not only many Symbolist poets but also many leading painters of the twentieth century: thus for example Picasso declared that he painted not what he saw, but what he knew based on his acquaintance with specific real objects. Yet Rimbaud's departure was even more radical, for in presenting directly the products of the poet's subconscious Perloff observed that he advocated using the poem "as language construction in which the free play of possible significations replaces iconic representation."<sup>89</sup> Thus, perhaps for the first time, Rimbaud produced modern art that was not based in any way on representation of actual or even possible objects or experiences. Rimbaud's belief in the autonomous use of language and images accounts for the enigmatic nature of the symbolism of "Le Bateau ivre," and the many contending critical readings of the poem. It also accounts for Rimbaud's choice of an ocean voyage as the central subject of the poem despite the fact that he had never seen an ocean.

The importance of "Le Bateau ivre" thus appears to derive in large part from its role as the first embodiment of a radical new theory of poetry, a work executed by a self-proclaimed prophet whose goal was not only to revolutionize poetry, but to inspire other poets to become visionaries and change society.<sup>90</sup> Anna Balakian has attributed Rimbaud's ability to make such a bold departure specifically to his youth: "At heart, the deviation that his poetry represents is akin to the sensations experienced in childhood. Every child in his dreams plays that delightful game of creating a world which is as far removed from this one as possible, a world that becomes more and more absurd as his efforts to pass the limits of the known are increased." For Balakian, Rimbaud's poetry can be explained as a peculiar anomaly: "by a miracle - that imagination of



childhood, somewhat prolonged in him, was still his when he developed the philosophical and verbal power which should have come much later, after that excessively imaginative impulse had been attenuated.” This unlikely juxtaposition created in Rimbaud’s poetry “the only image perhaps ever recorded of the world as seen through children’s eyes, a world wholly incompatible with the age of reason.”<sup>91</sup>

After retiring from literature at 19, Rimbaud went on to a career as an adventurer and sometime African trader in a variety of commodities, including contraband guns and slaves, that would make him an inspiration for twentieth-century artistic rebels ranging from Henry Miller and William Burroughs to Bob Dylan and Jim Morrison. More remarkable than these later escapades, however, was his ability to create new poetic forms, that would inspire major twentieth-century movements in poetry and other arts, between the ages of just 16 and 19. This ability was a direct consequence of the radically conceptual nature of his work, which combined the vivid imagination of a child with the verbal skills of an adult.

Elizabeth Bishop published her first poems in a high school magazine at the age of 14.<sup>92</sup> Unlike Rimbaud, however, she continued to write verse in her 20s, and well beyond. In 1976, at the age of 65, she published “One Art,” which is the second most frequently anthologized of all her poems.<sup>93</sup>

Bishop’s poetry is celebrated for its visual qualities. Randall Jarrell wrote that “all her poems have written underneath, *I have seen it*,” and Robert Lowell declared in 1969 that “I am sure no living poet is as curious and observant as Miss Bishop.”<sup>94</sup> Bishop herself told a critic that “the settings, or descriptions, of my poems are almost invariably just plain facts - or as close to the facts as I can write them.”<sup>95</sup> Her poems were crafted thoughtfully and painstakingly. In a

1947 review, Lowell described her poems as “unrhetorical, cool, and beautifully thought-out,” and called Bishop “one of the best craftsmen alive.”<sup>96</sup> In a poem written for Bishop in 1973, Lowell compared her to the experimental painter Albert Ryder: “His painting was repainting, / his tiniest work weighs heavy in the hand.” Ryder’s endless revision of his paintings, which left them heavy from accumulated layers of paint, was Lowell’s analogy for Bishop’s extended searches for just the right words to complete her poems: “Do / you still hang your words in air, ten years / unfinished, glued to your notice board, with gaps / or empties for the unimaginable phrase.”<sup>97</sup>

Another friend of Bishop’s, Marianne Moore, praised her poetry for its understatement: “With poetry as with homilectics, tentativeness can be more positive than positiveness, and in *North & South* [1946] a much instructed persuasiveness is emphasized by uninsistence.”<sup>98</sup> Bishop’s own statements of her goals often reflected her diffidence, as for example when she told an interviewer that “I always *try* to stick as much as possible to what *really* happened when I describe something in a poem.”<sup>99</sup>

The descriptive intent of her poetry, its visual nature, her careful craftsmanship, and her tentativeness all identify Bishop as an experimental artist. A biographer recognized this in observing that Bishop was “a poet whose *method* was her message.”<sup>100</sup> Bishop herself emphasized that poetry was not merely a part of her life, but her way of living: “Writing poetry is a *way of life*, not a matter of testifying but of experiencing. It is not the way one goes about interpreting the world, but the very process of sensing it.”<sup>101</sup>

Like other great experimental artists, Bishop developed her art gradually. In spite of her instinctual reticence, over time her poetry became more personal, and drew more heavily on her

own thoughts and experiences.<sup>102</sup> Reading the openly autobiographical poems her friend Robert Lowell published in his landmark book *Life Studies* was one of the events that prompted her to reconsider her own work.<sup>103</sup> Thus in 1957, when Bishop was 46, in a letter to Lowell about his new work she expressed her admiration for his achievement and frustration at her own timidity: “Oh heavens, when does one begin to write the *real* poems? I certainly feel as if I never had. But of course I don’t feel that way about yours - they all seem real as real - and getting more so.”<sup>104</sup> Gradually thereafter Bishop’s own poetry became more autobiographical, and more assured. In a review of a new volume of her poems in 1969, John Ashbery observed that Bishop’s work had recently gained new maturity:

Perhaps some of the urgency of the *North & South* poems [1946] has gone, but this is more than compensated by the calm control she now commands. Where she sometimes seemed nervous... she now is easy in a way that increased knowledge and maturity allow.<sup>105</sup>

□

Similarly, in a more recent review of Bishop’s career, Jacqueline Vaught Brogan concluded that “Bishop’s verse matured as she did, so that her late work is her best.”<sup>106</sup>

“One Art” appeared in the last of Bishop’s books published during her lifetime. It takes the form of a villanelle, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century form made up of a series of three-lined stanzas and a final quatrain, in which the first and third lines of the first stanza are repeated alternately in the succeeding stanzas as a refrain, and together form a final couplet in the quatrain. Written ten years after the suicide of Lota de Macedo Soares, who had been Bishop’s lover for more than 15 years, in “One Art” Bishop expressed both the enormity of her loss and her belief that the need to write about it was the greatest source of her ability to bear that loss. Beginning with the apparently innocuous statement that “The art of losing isn’t hard to master,” the poem effectively

portrays life as a series of losses, which grow as the poem proceeds, from trivial household items to mementos, to houses, to cities, to continents, and finally to a loved one. The irony of the opening statement grows with each repetition, as the increasing magnitude of the losses makes them more and more painful to the author. The contrast between the rigid requirements of the villanelle form and the poem's intensely emotional subject serves to heighten the sense of pain, for as the poem progresses the reader becomes increasingly aware of the enormous effort the author is making to hold her emotions in check.<sup>107</sup> In the poem's final line Bishop violates the villanelle's strict form, interrupting the final refrain with a parenthetical instruction to herself - "(Write it!)" - that underscores her recognition that it is only in producing her art that she can endure her greatest loss. Bishop's papers contain no less than 17 drafts of "One Art," in the course of which she not only searched for the right words, but carefully explored her emotions.<sup>108</sup> The poem reveals a mature artist subtly adapting a complex poetic form to her purposes, firmly using the skill she has acquired over decades to help her understand and survive her pain. The title of the poem implies that for Bishop her poetry and her life were one and the same.

In a eulogy for a friend, Elizabeth Bishop wrote: "There are some people whom we envy not because they are rich or handsome or successful, although they may be any or all of these, but because everything they are and do seems to be all of a piece, so that even if they wanted to they could not be or do otherwise."<sup>109</sup> The observation applies equally to Bishop herself, with the integration of her life and art, and her consistent efforts to achieve "clarity and simplicity."<sup>110</sup> The greatness of her late work was a consequence of her increasing technical mastery, born of years of experimentation, combined not only with a growing understanding of her emotions, but

also a growing willingness to express that understanding in her art.

### Sculptors

The only principle in art is to copy what you see.

Auguste Rodin<sup>111</sup>

We must take the object which we wish to create and begin with its central core. In this way we shall uncover new laws and new forms which link it invisibly but mathematically to an EXTERNAL PLASTIC INFINITY and to an INTERNAL PLASTIC INFINITY.

Umberto Boccioni, *Technical*

*Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture,*

1912<sup>112</sup>

□

In 1891 Emile Zola, as president of the Société des Gens de Lettres, awarded a commission to Auguste Rodin for a sculpture of the novelist Honoré de Balzac, who had been a founder of the literary society. When Rodin finally completed a plaster version of his *Monument to Balzac*, seven years later, he was 58 years old. He considered the sculpture to be his most important work, "the sum of my whole life, result of a lifetime of effort, the mainspring of my aesthetic theory."<sup>113</sup> Yet when the sculpture was exhibited at the Salon of 1898 it caused a storm of protest by critics. The Société des Gens de Lettres voted to dishonor its contract and refuse the statue, and a group of young artists actually plotted to vandalize it.<sup>114</sup> Stung by the criticism, Rodin withdrew *Balzac* from the Salon, and moved it to his home outside Paris. The statue was not cast in bronze until 1939, more than two decades after Rodin's death. George Heard Hamilton observed of *Balzac* that "the true originality of the work was reflected in the fact that there were no proper words to confine it;" Alfred Barr described it as "one of the very great sculptures in the entire history of Western art."<sup>115</sup>

Rodin's career developed slowly. His early failure in three attempts to gain admission to the prestigious Ecole des Beaux Arts caused him to spend nearly two decades as an assistant to

other sculptors, and he did not begin to enjoy real professional success until the age of 40. His art also developed slowly. Rainer Maria Rilke, who worked for several years as Rodin's secretary, observed that "his work developed through long years. It has grown like a forest."<sup>116</sup> The reason for this was clear to Rilke, for he explained that Rodin's art "depended upon an infallible knowledge of the human body" that he acquired slowly and painstakingly: "His art was not built upon a great idea, but upon a craft."<sup>117</sup> It was not only Rodin's craft that grew slowly, but also individual works: "I am unfortunately a slow worker, being one of those artists in whose minds the conception of work slowly takes shape and slowly comes to maturity."<sup>118</sup>

Rodin's experimental art was avowedly visual: "I strive to express what I see with as much deliberation as I can."<sup>119</sup> Ideas did not precede, but followed, form: "One must never try to express an idea by form. Make your form, make something, and the idea will come."<sup>120</sup> The realism of Rodin's figures was such that early in his career he was dogged by charges that he had cast his sculptures from life. Infuriated by these rumors, he subsequently took care to make his figures larger than life size. He did not work from imagination or memory, but always in the presence of a model: he confessed that "I have no ideas when I don't have something to copy."<sup>121</sup> Unlike some sculptors who made figures that were intended to be seen only from the front, or who might make a figure from a single front and single back view, Rodin created figures that were to be seen in the round. His working process was iterative and incremental:

I place the model so that light, outlining it against a background, illuminates the contour. I execute it, I change my position and that of my model, and thus I see another contour, and so on successively all around the body.  
I begin again; I come closer and closer to the contours, and I refine them.  
Since the human body has an infinite number of contours, I

multiply them as far as possible or so far as I think useful.<sup>122</sup>

□

Rodin's awareness of the body's infinite number of contours makes it unsurprising that he often had difficulties with completing his sculptures. He was incapable of planning his projects in advance, and usually began his works without any clear conception of their final appearance.<sup>123</sup> He admitted that "I often begin with one intention and finish with another."<sup>124</sup> He often reached an impasse and put a work aside for a time: "I lay my work aside while it is yet unfinished, and for months I may appear to abandon it. Every now and then, however, I return to it and correct or add a detail here and there. I have not really abandoned it, you see, only I am hard to satisfy."<sup>125</sup> Nor did this process always result in a successful outcome, particularly with large and complex works that would have benefited from careful planning. Thus George Heard Hamilton voiced a common criticism of Rodin when he remarked that he was "not strictly a monumental sculptor, for he had difficulty in imposing a formal unity upon many separate elements."<sup>126</sup>

Rodin in fact became known, by some admirers as well as many detractors, as a sculptor of unfinished works. In 1889 Edmond de Goncourt criticized Rodin's figures for incomplete execution, and compared his sculpture to recent developments in painting: "Amidst the present infatuation with Impressionism, when all of painting remains in the sketch stage, [Rodin] ought to be the first to make his name and *gloire* as a sculptor of unfinished sketches."<sup>127</sup> Rodin defended his fragmentary works against the charge that they were unfinished: "When my works do not consist of the complete body ... people call it unfinished. What do they mean? Michelangelo's finest works are precisely those which are called 'unfinished'."<sup>128</sup> Rudolf Wittkower has argued that Rodin's fragmentary sculptures were in fact finished: "The discovery

that the part can stand for the whole was Rodin's, and Brancusi along with scores of other sculptors accepted the premise. In contrast to Michelangelo, whose unfinished works were unfinished, Rodin created partial figures which are the finished product."<sup>129</sup> Years of study of Rodin's methods, however, led Albert Elsen to a different conclusion about both the fragments and the complete figures: "What now seems heroic and contemporary about Rodin is ... his passion for the act of *making* rather than *completing* sculpture... His personal problem was in setting for himself impossible absolutes of perfection toward which he dedicated a lifetime of striving. It is doubtful that at his death he would have pronounced any of his works finished or immutable."<sup>130</sup> Rodin himself recognized that he often sacrificed good works to the pursuit of perfection: "Wishing to do better, one sometimes demolishes even what one has done well; but one must be possessed by the demon of the best."<sup>131</sup>

Characteristically, Rodin produced the *Monument to Balzac* through a long process of trial and error. Elsen's analysis of the many works that made up this project prompted him to observe that "One must look at the whole long series to see how slowly and naturally Balzac's posture and the position of his limbs evolved, rather than resulting from a sudden decision."<sup>132</sup> Rodin failed to meet several deadlines for delivery of the statue, and on one of these occasions he expressed his frustration: "As if it were possible, *while one is searching*, to be ready on a fixed date!"<sup>133</sup> Even when he finally delivered the work in 1898, Rodin would have liked to keep it longer:

I should prefer to contemplate it every day for a while, and wait until a sudden inspiration, such as occasionally flashes through the brain, came to flood my imagination and enable me to perfect and idealize my work. For a work, even when achieved, is never perfect; it is always susceptible to a modification that can increase



its beauty.<sup>134</sup>

□

The *Monument to Balzac* made striking use of Rodin's central contributions to sculpture. Rodin wanted his sculptures to represent figures in movement, and he often animated them by fixing transitory gestures and poses. Thus he portrayed Balzac not in formal dress or in quiet reflection, but instead in the monk's robe he wore while working, in a dramatic stance, his head thrown back in a moment of creative inspiration:

By convention, a statue in a public place must represent a great man in a theatrical attitude which will cause him to be admired by posterity. But such reasoning is absurd. I submit there was only one way to evoke my subject. I had to show Balzac in his study, breathless, hair in disorder, eyes lost in a dream, a genius who in his little room reconstructs piece by piece all of society in order to bring it into tumultuous life before his contemporaries and generations to come.<sup>135</sup>

□

Rodin was also concerned with creating atmospheric effects that would integrate his figures with their environment. The jagged profile of *Balzac*, the deep cavities of the face and hair, and the rough surface of the robe all created strong contrasts of light and shadow that called attention to the relationship between the figure and its surroundings. Throughout Rodin's career he had used subjects that were not conventionally beautiful, but in the rough treatment of the *Monument to Balzac* he "created the first authentically 'ugly' work of modern art."<sup>136</sup> The effectiveness with which Rodin combined these characteristic concerns and practices was a direct consequence of the maturity of this late stage of his career. As Rilke declared in tribute to his friend, "it is an underlying patience in Rodin which renders him so great."<sup>137</sup>

Futurism was founded as a literary movement in 1908 by the Italian poet F. T. Marinetti, and the next year it was extended into painting, under the leadership of a young artist named

Umberto Boccioni. In 1912 Boccioni decided to learn to make sculptures, and he devoted a year to that art before returning to painting. World War I effectively brought Futurism to an end in 1916, and in that year Boccioni was killed while serving in the Italian army. John Golding has observed that in its brief career Futurist visual art produced a single major masterpiece, a sculpture by Boccioni titled *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*.<sup>138</sup> A recent survey confirmed Golding's judgment, finding that this sculpture is illustrated in more textbooks of art history than any single work by such great modern sculptors as Rodin, Henry Moore, Alberto Giacometti, and David Smith.<sup>139</sup> Remarkably, therefore, although Boccioni's total production of sculptures has been estimated at just a dozen, one of these, which he executed at the age of 31, is among the most celebrated sculptures of the modern era.

Futurism was a conceptual movement from the outset. Marinetti stated one of its central themes in his first Futurist manifesto in 1909 when he declared that "the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed."<sup>140</sup> A central concern of Futurist painting would consequently be the representation of motion. When Boccioni and four other painters joined the movement, they explained that they wanted not to portray "a fixed *moment* in universal dynamism," but rather "the *dynamic sensation* itself"; to represent movement over time, they intended to create visual syntheses of "*what one remembers* and of *what one sees*."<sup>141</sup>

A central feature of Futurism was its self-consciously revolutionary attitude. Marinetti's founding statement in 1909 described itself as a "violently upsetting incendiary manifesto," and the painters who joined him the next year opened their first manifesto with a declaration that theirs was a "cry of rebellion."<sup>142</sup> A closely associated theme was the youth of the participants, as Marinetti's first manifesto remarked that "the oldest of us is thirty, so we have at least a decade

for finishing our work” before they would be surpassed by younger artists.<sup>143</sup>

In a number of respects Futurism became a prototype for later art movements, perhaps as much for its novel practices as for its art. Malevich and many other advanced artists learned the Futurist lesson that written texts could be a valuable tool in expanding the audience for innovative conceptual art. In less than a decade Futurist artists produced dozens of pamphlets, usually specifically titled as manifestos, on subjects ranging from poetry and painting to theater and film, and even to new forms of men’s clothing.<sup>144</sup> Historians have observed that the Futurists’ publication of manifestos typically preceded the execution of the relevant works of art, and have remarked that this effectively made the manifestos blueprints for works of art.<sup>145</sup> Marjorie Perloff also made the observation that with this practice the Futurists made the manifestos a part of their art: “to talk about art becomes equivalent to making it.”<sup>146</sup> It appears that the influence of Futurism was increased not only by the function of written texts as supporting documents for works of art, but in some cases directly by the texts, even in the absence of associated works of art.<sup>147</sup> The texts could in fact have an impact even on artists who rejected the Futurists’ art. So for example in 1912 Franz Marc wrote to his friend Kandinsky of the Futurists that “I cannot free myself from the strange contradiction that I find their ideas, at least for the main part, brilliant, but am in no doubt whatsoever as to the mediocrity of their works.”<sup>148</sup>

In 1909 Boccioni was an ambitious young painter working in a conventional Post-Impressionist style when he met the dynamic Marinetti, who described himself as the “caffeine of Europe.”<sup>149</sup> Marinetti inspired Boccioni, and proceeded to “drag him, technically unprepared and with a torrent of only partially formulated ideas, into the mainstream of modern art.”<sup>150</sup>

Boccioni quickly adopted a highly conceptual approach to art. Thus he wrote to a friend that a new painting was “done completely without models, and all the tricks of the trade are sacrificed to the ultimate cause of emotional expression ... [T]he emotion will be presented with as little recourse as possible to the objects that have given rise to it.”<sup>151</sup>

Boccioni and the other Futurist painters aimed to portray motion as a dynamic process that occurred and was experienced over time. They also wanted to represent the tendency of both light and motion to destroy the concreteness of forms, thus emphasizing the interplay between objects and their environment.<sup>152</sup> Late in 1911 Boccioni spent a month in Paris, where he saw new Cubist techniques that he quickly adapted to Futurist ends in his paintings.<sup>153</sup> While in Paris Boccioni appears to have become aware that there was not yet a Cubist school of sculpture, and that sculpture had consequently lagged behind painting in the development of advanced art. A consequence of this was that he might make an immediate impact on the art world by extending the concerns of Futurist art to sculpture.<sup>154</sup> In March of 1912 Boccioni wrote to a friend that “I am obsessed these days by sculpture. I think I can perceive a complete revival of this mummified art.”<sup>155</sup> The next month he published a manifesto proposing a Futurist sculpture that would both represent movement and portray the interaction of the figure and its environment.<sup>156</sup>

Boccioni then began to make sculptures.<sup>157</sup> In June of 1913 he exhibited 11 sculptures at a Paris gallery. Guillaume Apollinaire’s review praised his achievement: “Varied materials, sculptural simultaneity, violent movement - these are the innovations contributed by Boccioni’s sculpture.” Apollinaire closed the review with a facetious reference to *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*: “*Flash*: We have been informed that Boccioni’s “muscles at full speed” have taken to the road. As of this writing, they have not been recaptured.”<sup>158</sup>

In *Unique Forms*, the surfaces of an advancing figure are broken into parts, but instead of the straight lines and sharp angles of Cubism they have been transformed into irregularly curved planes that blend together in a graceful composition. Their orientation and aerodynamic shapes create forms that appear bulky and muscular at the same time that they seem to flow in response to strong winds blowing in the face of the figure. In this sculpture Boccioni produced a novel synthesis, drawing on plastic forms taken from classical Greek sculpture and techniques of spatial organization borrowed from advanced modern painting, to create a three-dimensional representation of the effects, in both vision and memory, of a combination of power and speed.

Boccioni considered *Unique Forms* “the most liberated” of his sculptures.<sup>159</sup> He apparently gave up sculpting after he executed it, and Golding concluded that “with its completion, Boccioni seems to have realized that he had achieved the definitive masterpiece for which he longed.”<sup>160</sup> Not only did Boccioni succeed in making a major contribution to modern sculpture at the age of just 31, but he did it just a year after making his first sculptures. Even then, he believed that he could have achieved much more, and at an earlier age, under the proper circumstances. Thus when he reported to a friend Apollinaire’s praise for his 1913 exhibition, he added that in spite of his excitement at his success, “I end up sad and discouraged. I think about what I would have done by now if I had grown up with Paris or Berlin as my environment.”<sup>161</sup>

### Playwrights

My task has been the *description of humanity*.

Henrik Ibsen, 1898<sup>162</sup>

□

You are free to see in Monsieur Ubu all the multiple allusions you wish, or a simple puppet, the deformation by a schoolboy of one of his teachers who represented for him all that is grotesque in the world.

Alfred Jarry, December 10, 1896<sup>163</sup>

□

A recent survey called *Hedda Gabler* “perhaps the most perfectly structured play of the modern theater.”<sup>164</sup> It was written by Henrik Ibsen in 1890, when he was 62 years old, and was one of a series of plays that made Ibsen the preeminent dramatist of the late nineteenth century.

Ibsen is commonly described as the founder of the modern theater.<sup>165</sup> He is celebrated for the innovation of the realistic drama. Ibsen once explained that “My object was to make the reader feel that he was going through a piece of real experience.”<sup>166</sup> George Bernard Shaw observed that when Ibsen began writing, the theater dealt largely with contrived situations, “and it was held that the stranger the situation, the better the play.” Ibsen changed this: “He gives us not only ourselves, but ourselves in our own situations. The things that happen to his stage figures are things that happen to us.”<sup>167</sup> In his first published article James Joyce had made the same observation: “Ibsen has chosen the average lives in their uncompromising truth for the groundwork of all his later plays.”<sup>168</sup>

Ibsen achieved this realism by beginning with his characters: “Always I proceed from the individuals; the stage-setting, the dramatic ensemble, all that comes naturally, and causes me no worry, once I feel sure of the individual in every aspect of his humanity.”<sup>169</sup> Once Ibsen had his characters in mind, writing a play was a process of getting to know them, and he did this in a series of stages:

As a rule, I make three drafts of my dramas which differ very much from each other in characterization, not in action. When I proceed to the first sketch of the material I feel as though I had the degree of acquaintance with my characters that one acquires on a railway journey... With the next draft I see everything more clearly, I know the characters just about as one would know them after a few weeks’ stay in a spa; I have learned the fundamental

traits in their characters as well as their little peculiarities; yet it is not impossible that I might make an error in some essential matter. In the last draft, finally I stand at the limit of knowledge; I know my people from close and long association - they are my intimate friends, who will not disappoint me in any way.<sup>170</sup>

□

Ibsen developed his characters during this process not only through their speeches, but also their actions: "Many of the details occur to me during the process of composition, bit by bit as I get along."<sup>171</sup> Their physical appearance could also change, for Ibsen had to visualize the characters as he wrote: "To write is to *see*."<sup>172</sup> In view of the central role of characterization in Ibsen's process of composition, it is not surprising that Henry James would predict that Ibsen would always be loved by actors: "He cuts them out work to which the artistic nature in them joyously responds - work difficult and interesting, full of stuff and opportunity."<sup>173</sup> Just a few years later, a leading actor confirmed James' view: "It is easier, I think, to get inside the skin of an Ibsen part than any other, for the simple reason that the characterization is so minute and elaborate, the words are so full of suggestion, that the actor has infinite scope for the exercise of his best qualities."<sup>174</sup>

The primary importance of characterization points to the experimental nature of Ibsen's art, as does another central feature of his plays, their focus on change. Arthur Miller concluded that "If his plays, and his method, do nothing else they reveal the evolutionary quality of life. One is constantly aware, in watching his plays, of process, change, development."<sup>175</sup> Eric Bentley explained that this awareness was a product of Ibsen's method of exposition: "Generally, with Ibsen, we feel we are his companions in a search and therefore... are not given summaries of what has been thought already but are present at the thinking."<sup>176</sup> In his major late plays the endings were often not fully resolved, reflecting "a conception of life which Ibsen considered

more true than that represented by the stage convention of a conclusively happy or tragic end as the curtain falls.”<sup>177</sup> Elizabeth Hardwick observed that in Ibsen’s late plays “His people are not fixed. They are growing, moving, uncertain of their direction in life.” She traced this quality to an uncertainty in the playwright: “We feel Ibsen himself created certain characters out of a musing wonder and deep, intriguing uncertainty.”<sup>178</sup>

Ibsen developed his mature art in an extended series of major works, ranging from *A Doll’s House* (1879) and *The Wild Duck* (1884) through *Hedda Gabler* (1890) to *The Master Builder* (1892) and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896). All of these plays embodied his distinctive innovations, including the use of discussion as a primary focus of interest, and the portrayal of realistic characters, and actions, that had the effect of “making the spectators themselves the persons of the dramas.”<sup>179</sup> The plays’ subject matter directly treated major social issues of their time. True to his experimental nature, Ibsen’s work did not change abruptly but evolved gradually: “Ibsen chose the path of constant development ... Not the smallest fascination of Ibsen is the unity of his work, the profound meaning in the relation of play to play.”<sup>180</sup>

No single play dominates Ibsen’s career, but *Hedda Gabler* was among his greatest achievements. In a contemporary review, Henry James remarked that the study of an exasperated woman would not have seemed a promising subject, but that the play demonstrated “the folly of quarreling with an artist over his subject. Ibsen has had only to take hold of this one in earnest to make it, against every presumption, live with an intensity of life.”<sup>181</sup> For many critics Hedda was Ibsen’s greatest character; thus Harold Bloom declared that “What Anna Karenina was to Tolstoy, and Emma Bovary to Flaubert, Hedda was to Ibsen.”<sup>182</sup> Elizabeth Hardwick observed that “Hedda Gabler challenges and pleases and is the most fascinating, humanly interesting of



Ibsen's women. Actresses long to play the role."<sup>183</sup> John Northam explained that Ibsen's success in this characterization was a result of his subtle use of his full experience as a playwright: "our informative details have been infinitely small, and ordinary; but they have been organized so precisely, into patterns so self-consistent that through them we have become aware of the development of a character whose main failing was inarticulateness... Through visual suggestion we have come to know the stifling pressures and the fierce reaction... We have been reached, not by the novelist's techniques operating solely through the mind, but through the eyes; never was Ibsen more a practicing playwright than he was when he created *Hedda Gabler*."<sup>184</sup>

Ibsen's innovations made his plays extremely controversial in his own time. The loudest complaints came from those who believed that the theater should provide amusing entertainment in ways that would not challenge prevailing social values. These complaints most often denounced the ugliness of Ibsen's subjects. So for example one London critic declared that "*Hedda Gabler* is the study of a malicious woman of evil instincts, jealous, treacherous, cold-hearted, and, as it seems to us, wholly out of place on the stage," while another reflected that "to conceive of the Ibsen drama gaining an extensive or permanent foothold on the stage is hardly possible. Playgoing would then cease to be an amusement and become a penance."<sup>185</sup> Other critics complained that their evening's entertainment lacked any edifying resolution: "If [Ibsen] is a prophet, he is one who has no mission, no message to give us ... He only puts the destroying question; never does he furnish even a hint of the saving answer."<sup>186</sup> Yet to many young artists Ibsen's dramas were intensely exciting, as they laid the foundations for a theater that would explore important social and psychological problems, and in so doing become a more integral part of modern intellectual life. In recognition of this Luigi Pirandello, one of the leading

playwrights of the next generation, declared that “After Shakespeare, without hesitation, I put Ibsen first.”<sup>187</sup>

In 1961, a critic named Martin Esslin published a book defining a movement he called the Theater of the Absurd, which included such playwrights as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter. Esslin declared that this theater “strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought.” Esslin dated the beginning of this movement very precisely, to the evening of December 10, 1896, when a Paris theater company first presented *Ubu Roi*, a play written by Alfred Jarry.<sup>188</sup>

Jarry was 23 years old when *Ubu Roi* opened in Paris. The origins of the work went back eight years, to when the 15-year-old Jarry and two school friends in a provincial lycée first wrote a puppet play about their physics teacher. The obese and incompetent teacher had long been ridiculed by his students, and Jarry and his friends drew on a rich oral tradition in satirizing Monsieur Hébert, whose name had variously been transformed into Heb, Hébé, and eventually Ubu. Unlike his classmates, Jarry persisted in developing the epic history of the imaginary adventures of Ubu even after he left school.

At 17 Jarry moved to Paris, where he soon abandoned his plans to attend college in favor of becoming a writer. He became part of a literary group that included the leading Symbolist poets and novelists of the time, and began to publish stories about Ubu and his supposed science of “Pataphysics.” Although Jarry’s language was often bombastic, he in fact worked methodically in developing Pataphysics into a system:

Pataphysics is the science of the realm beyond metaphysics... If

will study the laws which govern exceptions and will explain the universe supplementary to this one...

Definition: "Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions."<sup>189</sup>

□

Jarry wanted to create a theater purely of the imagination, that made no appeal to facts or logic.

As a recent biographer explained, in Jarry's conception "theater should imitate the logic of dreams, and should therefore employ symbolism, condensation, disconnection of images, and displacement; it should have an elusive, ephemeral and haunting quality."<sup>190</sup>

In *Ubu Roi*, the greedy and cowardly Ubu becomes King of Poland, tortures and kills many of his subjects, and is ultimately chased out of the country. The monstrous character of Ubu drew liberally upon that of Falstaff and the inspiration of Rabelais, and the staging of the play was based on the marionette forms in which Jarry had first performed it. When *Ubu Roi* was first presented to the public in 1896, the play had been widely advertised and its opening night was attended by many of Paris' leading critics and eminent literary figures. Controversy began immediately. When the curtain was raised, the actor portraying the gross Ubu stepped forward and spoke his first line, a common obscenity that Jarry had appropriated to "Pataphysics" by adding a single letter. The audience erupted into shouting, whistling, and even fighting as admirers and detractors expressed their approval, shock, and anger. The actors had to wait 15 minutes before the play could resume, and many more interruptions followed in the course of the evening.<sup>191</sup>

*Ubu Roi* was given a second performance the next evening, but then closed, and was never again performed in Jarry's lifetime. Yet the impact of its opening night gave Jarry immediate fame in literary circles, as for weeks afterward favorable and unfavorable views of the

play were debated in Paris' major newspapers. This proved to be the high point of Jarry's career. He continued to write about Ubu, and over time began to assume the character's manner of speaking. Not unlike Rimbaud, Jarry attempted to stimulate his imagination through hallucination, which eventually proved self-destructive.

Roger Shattuck observed that "at thirty Jarry had completed his best years, enjoyed a unique notoriety in the literary world of Paris, and was already looked up to by a new generation."<sup>192</sup> Among his young followers were the symbolist poet Guillaume Apollinaire and Apollinaire's friend Pablo Picasso, who became fascinated by Jarry and appropriated many of his eccentricities, even, after Jarry's death, carrying around the gun that Jarry had always kept with him. John Richardson, the most exacting biographer of Picasso's early career, has argued that Picasso's breakthrough into Cubism in 1907 was inspired not only generally by the iconoclastic example of Jarry's efforts to blend fantasy and reality in *Pataphysicks*, which aimed to abolish traditional standards of beauty and good taste, but even more specifically by a particular illustration that Jarry gave for his new science. Thus Richardson argues that Jarry anticipated the multiple viewpoints of Cubism in a *Pataphysickal* treatise of 1898: "to claim the shape of a watch is round [is] a manifestly false proposition - since it appears in profile as a narrow rectangular construction, elliptical on three sides; and why the devil would one only have noticed its shape at the moment of looking at the time?"<sup>193</sup>

Jarry died at the age of just 34, of tuberculosis aggravated by his drinking. His major achievement, *Ubu Roi*, had already made a powerful impression on many Symbolist artists. So for example immediately after the play's first performance Stéphane Mallarmé had written to Jarry that in Ubu he had created "a prodigious personage of rare and resistant texture, and you

have done it as a sure, sober, dramatic sculptor. He has joined the repertory of the best taste and already haunts me.”<sup>194</sup> Many years later, another playwright who had also attended that first performance reflected that “the schoolboy Jarry, to mock a professor, had without knowing it created a masterpiece in painting that somber and oversimplified caricature with brushstrokes in the manner of Shakespeare and the puppet theater.”<sup>195</sup> Whether or not Jarry recognized the importance of his achievement, in Roger Shattuck’s apt words “the schoolboy imagination had succeeded in throwing dung in the public eye.”<sup>196</sup> Jarry’s ability to do this appears to have depended critically on his youth, for both the simplicity of his artistic vision and the confident iconoclasm with which he presented it to the public are hallmarks of the youthful conceptual innovator.

### Architects

Each day we feared that he’d change what he had settled the day before. We’d point out as he started revising a drawing, “But Mr. Wright, yesterday you decided it *this* way.” His answer was standard. “That was all right yesterday, but it’s not right today.” He never left anything alone. He no sooner got a system going than he’d upset it all.

Edgar Tafel on his  
apprenticeship to Frank Lloyd  
Wright<sup>197</sup>

□  
My idea appears very quickly and is fully formed when it arrives. I do not work and rework the idea.

Maya Lin<sup>198</sup>

□

Frank Lloyd Wright began his career as an architect in 1887, at the age of 20. Over the course of the next 72 years he produced designs for more than 1000 buildings, of which more than 400 were constructed. No single building has clearly emerged as his greatest work, but among those that have received the greatest attention is Fallingwater, a house Wright built at

Bear Run, Pennsylvania, in 1937, when he was 70 years old. When the house was completed, *Time* featured Wright on its cover, with a drawing of the house behind him - the first time the magazine had an architect on its cover.<sup>199</sup> A recent survey of American architecture described Fallingwater as “Wright’s most famous building of all,” and a leading architectural scholar called it “one of the complete masterpieces of twentieth-century art.”<sup>200</sup>

Early in his career Wright formulated a set of propositions to define his concept of organic architecture, which “evolved from a set of architectural principles in the 1890s into a lifestyle by the 1930s.”<sup>201</sup> These principles emphasized the importance of simplicity of form, harmony between a building and its natural setting, the use of natural colors, and using materials to express their own nature rather than imitating other materials. Wright wanted buildings to share the human virtues of sincerity, truthfulness, and graciousness. Within these basic guidelines Wright developed distinctively new architectural forms, which never ceased to change as he continually experimented throughout his long career. Yet Wright’s style evolved gradually, and a recent survey concluded that “when we look at the totality of his oeuvre, we see in his form language a remarkable coherence, continuity, and recurrence of motifs.”<sup>202</sup>

By 1900, Wright had developed his celebrated Prairie Style. Its distinctive features included an emphasis on long horizontal lines, relating its buildings to the open spaces of the Midwestern plains, and a blurring of the distinction between interior and exterior spaces, achieved through covered but open areas around a building’s perimeter.<sup>203</sup> Over time Wright continued to experiment and to simplify the style, and the most famous of the Prairie houses, Chicago’s Robie House, was completed in 1910.

Wright’s experimental approach is revealed not only in the continual evolution of his

style but also in his reluctance to determine his buildings' final forms. He advised architects to let their ideas grow slowly:

Conceive the building in the imagination, not on paper but in the mind... Let it live there - gradually taking more definite form before committing it to the draughting board. When the thing lives for you - start to plan it with tools... Working on it with triangle and T-square should modify or extend or intensify or test the conception.<sup>204</sup>

□

During the time the design was taking shape, or “germinating,” Wright needed to have its setting firmly in mind: “A building should appear to grow easily from its site and be shaped to harmonize with its surroundings.”<sup>205</sup> Wright not only avoided committing himself to plans on paper as long as possible, but he typically made changes in his projects until the actual materials were set in place, and sometimes even after. A biographer observed that “his impromptu methods of designing, which led to his continual failure to prepare complete working drawings, made it necessary for him to be on the site as often as possible during the time that a building was under construction.” Although this annoyed many builders, and dismayed many clients as alterations during construction raised their costs, it never fazed Wright, for “to him the process of construction was a process of refinement as well.”<sup>206</sup> A former student of Wright’s recalled that “he always changed everything. A perpetual state of flux. ‘The last change is made when the boom comes down,’ he’d snort.”<sup>207</sup> Wright explained his attitude more gently when a client complained to him of the delays, and expenses, that resulted from Wright’s constant changes during the construction of one of his most important projects: “You see the building grows as it is built and is none too easy, therefore, to keep up with always.”<sup>208</sup>

Wright came to be considered as the leading modern architect for the innovative work he

produced during 1890-1910, but during the next two decades he was eclipsed by a number of younger European architects, including Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe. By the time of the Depression he had few clients, not only because of the economic climate but because, then past the age of 60, Wright was felt to be out of date. When the Pittsburgh department store owner E. J. Kaufmann approached Wright to design his weekend house near a stream at Bear Run, Wright seized the opportunity to make a bold statement that would revive his career. He succeeded spectacularly.

Wright's design of Fallingwater drew heavily on his own earlier buildings, including Robie House and his own home at Taliesin. Thus the house features his trademark terraces, overhangs, rough stonework, and a variety of other features that had developed from the Prairie Style. Yet true to his experimental nature, in his desire to outdo the leading European modern architects Wright was also willing to borrow their major innovations. So from the work of Mies, Gropius, Le Corbusier, Schindler, and Neutra, Wright took such prominent features of Fallingwater as cantilevers, extensive use of concrete and glazing, and an overall Cubist plan.<sup>209</sup> Wright used these innovations, however, for his own purposes - to underscore the superiority of his own organic architecture over the rigidity of the severe functionalist style of the Europeans. Thus a scholar recently observed that Fallingwater "used the modernist vocabulary of floating planes, but everything about it contradicted the functionalism of the style: its color, its definition by and of the landscape, its framing of vistas from within, and its metaphorical interpretation of human confrontation with nature, symbolically summed up in the stairs that descend from the living room to the water. Each material - stone, glass, concrete - was assigned a function, yet each was consonant with the site over a waterfall."<sup>210</sup>



Fallingwater drew on the full experience of Wright's five decades as an architect. He first visited Bear Run in December, 1934, but did not produce his first known plans for the house until September of the next year. Before presenting these plans to the client Wright made at least three, and perhaps four, visits to the site. In a recent study Franklin Toker concluded that the traditional story that Wright drew his first plans for Fallingwater in just a few hours, on the morning of September 22, 1935, as E. J. Kaufmann drove from Milwaukee to Taliesin, is probably a myth, and that he had likely made drawings for his own use before that date.<sup>211</sup> Toker observed that Fallingwater contains two dramatic features that above all others made it famous - the visual illusion that the stream actually runs through the house, and the extension of the upper balcony beyond the one below it. Toker's study of Wright's drawings of the plans for the house led him to conclude that one of these, the oversailing balcony, was not part of the plan Wright initially drew on September 22, but that at some point that morning "he erased its original parapet line and set a new one 19 feet farther out, which made the upper balcony oversail the living room by 6 feet." The effect was striking: "Fallingwater now took on a totally new image, with the famous crisscross of its two main balconies." One of Fallingwater's most famous features, which "defies all structural and functional logic," was thus an improvisation that Wright added after nine months of study of the project. Nor did Wright's changes cease with his construction drawings. In June of 1936, for example, with construction of Fallingwater already under way, from Taliesin Wright sent new plans that changed the shape of the three massive concrete bolsters that served as the building's main source of support - several days *after* the bolsters had been poured. Wright's assistant who was supervising construction promptly "tore down the just-completed bolsters and helped construct a new set in late July. Wright was

determined to give Fallingwater a thrilling profile, whatever the cost.”<sup>212</sup>

Fallingwater became the focus of a great flood of publicity, including feature articles in hundreds of newspapers and magazines, and an unprecedented exhibit devoted to the house at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. It quickly became “the most famous private house in the world.”<sup>213</sup> Wright also received “the biggest PR boost of his career, and the perfect vehicle to hype his comeback,” in the form of a special issue of *Architectural Forum* devoted to the architect, “which has no rival as the most famous issue of any architectural magazine in any language.”<sup>214</sup>

Wright’s success was the result of producing a bold and dramatic design that synthesized major elements of his own past art with key innovations from the work of his leading European rivals, all in the service of his own organic principles: hovering over two waterfalls, and anchored among three large boulders, Fallingwater was an unmistakable example of the integration of modern architecture and nature. Approaching the age of 70, Wright produced “the most complex house of the twentieth century” through an extended and painstaking experimental process that drew on his vast working experience and mature aesthetic judgment.<sup>215</sup>

In a recent survey of 40 textbooks of art history, two works were found to be tied for the distinction of being reproduced more often than any others made by American artists during the 1980s. One of these was *Tilted Arc*, executed in 1981 by the sculptor Richard Serra, who was then 42 years old and widely recognized as one of the most important living American artists. The other was the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, dedicated in 1982, which had been designed by Maya Lin at the age of 21, during her senior year in college.<sup>216</sup>

Lin originally made her design for the memorial as an assignment in an architecture

seminar she took at Yale. After thinking about the purpose of the memorial, she wanted to see the site, so Lin and a few friends traveled to Washington, D. C. She later recalled that “it was at the site that the idea for the design took shape”:

I had a simple impulse to cut into the earth.  
I imagined taking a knife and cutting into the earth,  
opening it up, an initial violence and pain that in time would  
heal.<sup>217</sup>

Lin’s plan was to have two long walls of polished black granite, arranged in a V shape, placed in the ground to form an embankment. One of the walls was to point to the Lincoln Memorial, the other to the Washington Monument: “By linking these two strong symbols for the country, I wanted to create a unity between the country’s past and present.”<sup>218</sup> Lin realized that the strength of her design lay in its simplicity:

On our return to Yale, I quickly sketched my idea up, and it almost seemed too simple, too little. I toyed with adding some large flat slabs that would appear to lead into the memorial, but they didn’t belong. The image was so simple that anything added to it began to detract from it.<sup>219</sup>

□

After Lin had completed her design, she decided to enter it in the national competition for the veterans memorial. She found that the most difficult part of the entry was producing a one-page description of the project: “It took longer, in fact, to write the statement that I felt was needed to accompany the required drawings than to design the memorial.”<sup>220</sup> Lin explained that the description was “critical to understanding the design,” because the *Memorial* reflected her conceptual approach to art. Lin’s artistic goals are explicitly ideational:

Each of my works originates from a simple desire to make people aware of their surroundings, not just the physical world but also the psychological world we live in.<sup>221</sup>

□

The *Memorial* prominently features the carved names of all the soldiers killed or missing in

Vietnam, reflecting Lin's belief that "writing is the purest of art forms... Words can be the most direct means of sharing our thoughts."<sup>222</sup> The resemblance of the walls of the *Memorial* to an open book is not accidental, as Lin explained that "the memorial is analogous to a book in many ways."<sup>223</sup> In creating art, Lin generally begins with words:

I begin by imagining an artwork verbally. I try to describe in writing what the project is, what it is trying to do. I need to understand the artwork without giving it a specific materiality or solid form. I try not to find the form too soon. Instead, I try to think about it as an idea without a shape.<sup>224</sup>

□

The most important thing is to begin with a good concept: "a simple clear idea or moment of inspiration is the soul of the piece." The *Memorial* satisfied this criterion, for it "was born of an instantaneous idea to cut open the earth."<sup>225</sup>

Architectural projects are inevitably collaborative, for architects must consider the wishes of clients. Any collaboration can require compromises and deviations from an architect's original plans, but the potential for interference with Lin's design was enormous because of the public role of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, and the many controversies that still surround the Vietnam War. Thus even after her design was chosen by an eight-person selection committee, it had to go through an extended process of review by government agencies and public scrutiny, in the course of which many strenuous objections were raised, by Vietnam veterans and others, to the non-representational nature of Lin's model. In an eventual compromise, a sculpture of three male soldiers was placed some distance from Lin's monument, and later a sculpture of three female figures and a wounded soldier was also placed further away. Yet when the *Memorial* was dedicated in the fall of 1982, Lin found it did reflect her original intention: "the place was frighteningly close to what it should be."<sup>226</sup>

Lin's design was a radical departure from earlier memorial architecture, for the *Memorial* was influenced much more strongly by Minimalist sculpture than by traditional memorials. Her use of abstract forms initially shocked veterans and others who had expected a realistic portrayal of soldiers in combat, which would explicitly pay tribute to their heroism and patriotism. Yet when the *Memorial* was completed, it quickly came to be recognized as a moving tribute to the soldiers who had died in Vietnam. Today it is not only the most visited memorial in the capital, but it is widely considered to have established a new level of excellence for memorial architecture. So for example when the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation held a competition for a memorial to the victims of the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, Maya Lin was appointed to the five member jury. When the eight final designs were presented to the public, the architecture critic for the *New Yorker* remarked that although all of these were intelligent and sophisticated, they received a lukewarm reaction from critics and the public because "in the post-Vietnam-memorial age, we may have come to expect too much of a memorial." The problem was that Lin had set a new standard: "Lin's Vietnam memorial set the bar very high."<sup>227</sup>

In the two decades since she designed the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, Lin has pursued a career as an architect and sculptor. A recent profile observed that "Now a beneficiary of a stream of commissions, this still-young master is riding her good fortune, turning out institutional and private projects while also making the individual sculptures to which she attaches such importance."<sup>228</sup> Yet the survey of textbooks found no other work by Lin reproduced in even a single book.<sup>229</sup> Thus from the vantage point of art scholars Lin's contribution consists of a single work, that one scholar describes as "one of the most compelling monuments in the United

States.”<sup>230</sup> That a 21-year-old artist could conceive an idea that would be fully expressed in one enormously successful project, and that would be followed by no others deemed significant by art scholars, is a quintessentially conceptual phenomenon. Unlike the aging Frank Lloyd Wright, who worked surrounded by assistants and apprentices at an academy dedicated to making his art, the young Maya Lin worked alone: the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* was first given solid form in mashed potatoes at her college dining hall.<sup>231</sup> And unlike Wright’s extended and painstaking revisions, the *Memorial* “was born of an instantaneous idea.”<sup>232</sup> These features of Lin’s method, and the success of her design, may all have been consequences of her youth and lack of experience. As one of the jurors for the competition commented on seeing Lin’s unorthodox entry, the architect “must really know what he is doing to dare to do something so naive.”<sup>233</sup>

#### Movie Directors

Q: During the shooting [of *Citizen Kane*], did you have the sensation of making such an important film?  
Welles: I never doubted it for a single instant.

Interview with Orson Welles,  
1964<sup>234</sup>

I do think that there is an art to the making of a motion picture.  
There are some great artists in the business. I am not one of them.  
John Ford, 1973<sup>235</sup>

There is remarkably widespread agreement that *Citizen Kane* is the most important American movie ever made. Thus for example *Citizen Kane* ranked first in a “definitive selection of the 100 greatest American movies of all time,” as determined by a poll of more than 1,500 members of the American film community conducted in 2000 by the American Film Institute.<sup>236</sup> *Citizen Kane* also placed first in a ranking of the 100 best films of the 20<sup>th</sup> century compiled by *The Village Voice* from a poll the newspaper conducted of 50 distinguished film critics. The

screenplay for *Citizen Kane* similarly ranked first in a 2001 survey of the members of the Writers Guild of America.<sup>237</sup> Nor is *Kane*'s fame limited to the United States. Once every decade, the British film magazine *Sight & Sound* conducts an international poll of critics and directors to determine the 10 best movies ever made. *Citizen Kane* placed first in this poll in 1962, and repeated this success in every subsequent decennial poll, including the most recent one in 2002.<sup>238</sup> When *Sight & Sound* recently reprinted a paperback edition of Pauline Kael's book on the making of *Citizen Kane*, titled *Raising Kane*, the only print on the book's front cover read "Pauline Kael on the best film ever made."<sup>239</sup> Francois Truffaut recalled the enormous impact of *Citizen Kane*: "This film has inspired more vocations to cinema throughout the world than any other."<sup>240</sup> Among the most celebrated facts about *Citizen Kane* is that it was directed and coauthored by the boy-wonder Orson Welles, who also played the title role, when he was just 25 years old. It was Welles' first film.

The importance of *Citizen Kane* derived in large part from its technical virtuosity. So for example a recent survey of film history explained its contribution:

It enabled the spectator not only to look through the frame at a make-believe world, but to see once again, so to speak, the frame as a constructed image... [N]o single aspect of *Citizen Kane* was entirely original or unknown to filmmakers, but the work's startling impact came from its total effect, the concentration, comprehensiveness, and unity of its stylistic effort... Welles strove with his collaborators to utilize multiple innovations in nearly every shot and scene throughout the whole film.<sup>241</sup>

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*Citizen Kane*'s technical sophistication was not accidental, but was a result of exceptionally careful planning. Both the film's composer and its photographer emphasized that they were given exceptional amounts of time to plan and achieve the novel aims they and Welles had

formulated. Thus Bernard Herrmann wrote that he and Wells agreed that “the dynamics of all music in the picture should be planned ahead of time.” Contrary to the normal Hollywood procedure in which musical scores were not written until filming was completed, Herrmann was given time to write his score before filming began, and was then allowed to work on the film as it was being shot and edited. In a number of scenes, film sequences were actually tailored to match the music. Herrmann observed of the completed movie that “the result is an exact projection of the original ideas in the score.”<sup>242</sup> Similarly, Gregg Toland explained that “the photographic approach to *Citizen Kane* was planned and considered long before the first camera turned.” This allowed Toland time not only to formulate novel plans, but to make extensive experiments with equipment and sets to make the plans possible. In this he had Welles’ full support: “Orson Welles was insistent that the story be told most effectively, letting the Hollywood conventions of movie-making go hang if need be.” Toland credited Welles for the opportunity: “Such differences as exist between the cinematography in *Citizen Kane* and the camera work on the average Hollywood product are based on the rare opportunity provided me by Orson Welles, who was in complete sympathy with my theory that the photography should fit the story.”<sup>243</sup>

The meticulous planning of Welles and his collaborators produced a movie that contained many innovations involving both sound and sight. A number of the sound innovations reflected Welles’ earlier experience in radio. These included musical bridges - the introduction of music in the middle of a scene, to change the mood and foreshadow the transition to the next scene; sound montages - series of short bursts of speech, that revealed the reactions of a number of characters in quick succession; and overlapping dialogue tracks that mimicked the interruptions of real conversation, with variation in sound levels that allowed one voice to be heard at a time. The



visual innovations in *Citizen Kane* have become even more famous. A number of these were used to attain what Toland called “human-eye focus,” with much greater depth of field than movies normally afforded. Contributing to this was the staging, with construction of exceptionally deep sets, so the action of a scene could occur simultaneously at different distances from the camera; the use of extremely wide-angle lenses, with high-speed films, and very high levels of illumination, which allowed sharp focus throughout the deep space of the sets, and often created the startling effect of having important action in the background; and long camera takes that allowed greater freedom of movement and extended ensemble acting for the players. The greater realism produced by the novel device of building ceilings over the sets also permitted the dramatic low-angle shots that became one of the movie’s technical trademarks.

*Citizen Kane* became celebrated for its many innovative technical devices, but Welles’ greatest achievement probably lay in the integration of these many devices in the service of the film’s story.<sup>244</sup> The dramatic use of chiaroscuro in lighting, the fragmentation of the film’s action in physical depth, staccato bursts of spoken words, and many other technical effects all served to underscore the symbolic content of the film. Jorge Luis Borges recognized this when he observed that *Citizen’s Kane’s* subject is “the discovery of the secret soul of a man,” and explained that “In astonishing and endlessly varied ways, Orson Welles exhibits the fragments of the life of the man, Charles Foster Kane, and invites us to combine and reconstruct them.”<sup>245</sup> The variety of technical means used to tell the story parallels the variety of views of Kane presented by different characters, which evolved from the original idea motivating the film: thus Welles recalled that the story of *Kane* began with “the idea of telling the same thing several times - and showing exactly the same scene from wholly different points of view. Basically, the idea

*Rashomon* used later on.”<sup>246</sup>

Welles’ conceptual approach to making movies is reflected in his emphasis on the primacy of dialogue over images or action. Thus in a 1964 interview he declared: “I know that in theory the word is secondary in cinema but the secret of my work is that everything is based on the word. I do not make silent films. I must begin with what the characters say. I must know what they say before seeing them do what they do.”<sup>247</sup> For Welles, a good script was necessary for a good film: “I’m sure I can’t make good films unless I also write the screenplay.”<sup>248</sup>

*Citizen Kane* is a conceptual masterpiece, a great early work executed by an important conceptual innovator. It dominates Welles’ career. Thus Gerald Mast observed that “unlike Hitchcock, Lubitsch, Chaplin, Hawks, or Ford, whose reputations rest on a great number of impressive films, critical respect for Orson Welles rests primarily on one film, *Citizen Kane*.”<sup>249</sup> Andrew Sarris stressed the allegorical nature of the film: “*Kane* develops two interesting themes: the debasement of the private personality of the public figure, and the crushing weight of materialism. Taken together, these two themes comprise the bitter irony of an American success story that ends in futile nostalgia, loneliness, and death.”<sup>250</sup> Francois Truffaut recognized that Welles had achieved what all young directors hope to do: “To shoot *Citizen Kane* at twenty-five years of age, is this not the dream of all the young habitués of the cinémathèques?”<sup>251</sup>

A great deal of critical energy has been devoted to explaining how a young director could produce such a great masterpiece as his first movie. Although Welles had no prior experience as a film director, he had behind him a great deal of experience, and success, as an actor and director in the theater and radio: as Truffaut put it, *Kane* is “the only first film made by a man who was already famous.” For Truffaut, the movie bore witness to Welles’ iconoclasm: “Wells,

with extraordinary arrogance, had rejected the rules of cinema, the limits of its powers of illusion.”<sup>252</sup> *Citizen Kane* drew liberally on the expertise Welles had acquired in the other arts. Peter Bogdanovich reflected that “*Citizen Kane* is like watching a consummate artist grappling for the first time with the intoxication of his found vocation. All his passions - theatre, magic, circus, radio, painting, literature - suddenly fused into one... No other director discovering the medium was as ready or as mature.”<sup>253</sup> Pauline Kael stressed the importance of an attitude in Welles that Bernard Herrmann and Gregg Toland had both described: “He was young and *open*... Welles was so eager to try out new ideas that even the tough, hardened studio craftsmen were caught up by his spirit, just as his co-workers in the theatre and in radio had been.”<sup>254</sup> Welles himself had a slightly different explanation. When asked where he’d gotten the confidence to make such a major effort so young, he replied: “Ignorance, ignorance, sheer ignorance - you know there’s no confidence to equal it. It’s only when you know something about a profession, I think, that you’re timid or careful.”<sup>255</sup>

Many movie critics consider John Ford to have been a great director. In 1973, when the American Film Institute established its Life Achievement Award to honor individuals “whose talent has, in a fundamental way, advanced the film art, and whose accomplishments have been acknowledged by scholars, critics, professional peers, and the general public,” the first award was given to Ford. The Institute’s citation declared that “No individual has more fully explored on film the American experience.”<sup>256</sup> Ford has been the subject of monographs not only by the distinguished critic Andrew Sarris, but also by the directors Lindsay Anderson and Peter Bogdanovich. Anderson considered that Ford was “probably the greatest film director working in the world’s richest film making tradition.”<sup>257</sup> When Orson Welles was asked which American

directors he most admired, he replied “the old masters. By which I mean John Ford, John Ford and John Ford.”<sup>258</sup>

Ford directed more than 140 movies, and won six Oscars. Curiously, however, no one of his movies has emerged clearly as a masterpiece. No Ford film was ranked among the top 20 American movies of all time in the American Film Institute’s survey conducted in 2000, and only three of his films were ranked in the top 100. The Institute’s citation for Ford’s Life Achievement Award did not mention any specific movie, but instead referred collectively to Ford’s films as “a creative tapestry representing over 50 years of work.”<sup>259</sup> Although there is considerable disagreement even among Ford’s admirers over what constitutes his best work, a number of experts have named *The Searchers* as his greatest achievement. So for example John Baxter called it “Ford’s most perfect philosophical statement,” and Gerald Peary considered it “the pinnacle of Ford’s cinematic accomplishment.”<sup>260</sup> Ford directed *The Searchers* in 1956, at the age of 62.<sup>261</sup>

That Ford may have been a master without a masterpiece and that his work was excellent late in his career both appear to have been consequences of the fact that his approach to art was experimental. Ford’s work is consistently praised for its visual qualities. Alfred Hitchcock stated that “A John Ford film was a visual gratification.”<sup>262</sup> Elia Kazan declared that Ford “taught me to tell it in pictures.”<sup>263</sup> Orson Welles made a similar statement when asked how he learned his visual style:

I’ve only been influenced by somebody once: prior to making *Citizen Kane* I saw [Ford’s] *Stagecoach* forty times. I didn’t need to learn from somebody who had something to say, but from somebody who would show me how to say what I had in mind; and John Ford is perfect for that.<sup>264</sup>

¶  
 Federico Fellini stressed Ford's direct appeal to another one of the senses: "When I think of Ford, I sense the smell of barracks, of horses, of gunpowder."<sup>265</sup>

Ford's films are known for their stories and for ensemble acting. Thus a recent history of film cited Ford as "a good example of the studio director who defined himself over a long career by way of story and performance. It is possible to speak of a kind of Fordian world... peopled by a repertory group of players."<sup>266</sup> Unlike Welles, Ford did not consider the script to be a critical determinant of the quality of a movie. Thus he explained that "After all, you've got to tell your story through the people who portray it. You can have a weak, utterly bad script - and a good cast will turn it into a good picture."<sup>267</sup> Gerald Mast observed that "Ford's method emphasized visual images rather than talk," and Ford agreed, stating that "Pictures, not words, should tell the story."<sup>268</sup> 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.<sup>269</sup>

¶  
 Ford's goal was 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."<sup>270</sup> He distrusted not only extensive dialogue but also complex technical devices: "I like, as a director and a spectator, simple, direct, frank films. Nothing disgusts me more than snobbism, mannerism, technical gratuity... and, most of all, intellectualism."<sup>271</sup> Lindsay Anderson remarked that Ford achieved a wide range of emotional effects through technical mastery, but that he never allowed technique to obtrude on narrative: "Ford remains

always a story-teller.”<sup>272</sup>

Although Ford began directing movies at the age of 23, his early work was undistinguished. Thus Andrew Sarris commented that if Ford’s career had ended in 1929 - when he was 35, and had already directed more than 65 films - “he would deserve at most a footnote in film history.”<sup>273</sup> Like that of other experimental artists, Ford’s work developed gradually, and with considerably continuity: Peter Bogdanovich remarked 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.”<sup>274</sup> Ford is widely considered to have improved his work until late in his life. Andrew Sarris judged that “the last two decades of his career were his richest and most rewarding.”<sup>275</sup> Similarly, Peter Bogdanovich considered Ford’s late films his best, “not only in execution but in depth of expression.”<sup>276</sup>

The explanation of why Ford’s work improved as he aged may be the same as the answer he himself gave when asked how he chose where to place his cameras: “You shoot what would look best on the screen. Experience, instinct. That’s it.”<sup>277</sup> Andrew Sarris considered *The Searchers* a stylistic summation of “all the best of what Ford had been,” and emphasized its beauty: “*The Searchers* is rich in all the colors and textures of the seasons and the elements, from the whiteness of winter snows to the brownness of summer sands.”<sup>278</sup> Sarris believed that Ford’s experience was the key to his late achievements: “The economy of expression that Ford has achieved in fifty years of film-making constitutes the beauty of his style.”<sup>279</sup>

#### Young Geniuses and Old Masters

There is, it seems, a graph of creativity which can be plotted

through an artist's career.

Sir Alan Bowness, 1989<sup>280</sup>

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This consideration of important contributions made either very early or very late in an artist's career in seven different artistic disciplines demonstrates not only that there are dramatic differences in basic characteristics of the work of conceptual and experimental innovators, but also that there are significant similarities within each of these categories across disciplines.

Conceptual innovators historically have been those artists most often described as geniuses, as their early manifestations of brilliance have been taken to indicate that these individuals were born with extraordinary talents. Conceptual innovators normally make their most important contributions to a discipline not long after their first exposure to it. These early innovators are often perceived as irreverent and iconoclastic. Among the cases examined here, Kosuth, Rimbaud, Boccioni, and Jarry offer examples of artists whose lack of respect for, or lack of interest in, earlier work in their disciplines figured prominently in their ability to make bold new departures from existing practices. Conceptual innovations are often very simple. Although Kosuth, Boccioni, and Lin had not spent long periods of time acquiring the complex skills common to many practitioners of their disciplines, the radical simplifications they made in their art allowed them to avoid the need for those skills. Kosuth, Rimbaud, Boccioni, Jarry, and Lin all shared the extremely rapid formation of ideas that characterizes many conceptual innovations, as the central elements of their major contributions arrived in brief moments of inspiration. Conceptual innovations often involve radical leaps, producing work that not only does not resemble other artists' work, but equally does not resemble the innovator's own earlier work. All seven major conceptual innovations considered here share this characteristic, as in each case the

specific work examined marked a sharp discontinuity in the career of the artist. A consequence of the sudden declaration of conceptual innovations together with their radical nature is their frequent landmark status. In six of the seven cases considered here, the work examined in this paper clearly dominates the innovator's career. Thus the mention of Kosuth, Fitzgerald, Boccioni, Jarry, Lin, or Welles immediately brings to mind a single trademark work. Perhaps most fundamentally, this examination of seven major conceptual contributions underscores the certainty of these important conceptual innovators. All seven of the artists had great confidence in the validity and significance of their innovations, and this allowed them to put forward radical contributions early in their careers in spite of their knowledge that many, if not most, practitioners of their disciplines would be hostile to their ideas.

Experimental innovators are most often praised for their wisdom and judgment. All the experimental innovations examined here are considered prime examples of superb craftsmanship, the result of experience acquired over the course of long careers by their creators. All seven experimental innovators considered here are celebrated for their deep understanding and respect for the traditions of their disciplines. With the exception of Wright's Fallingwater, the major works considered here were not intended as definitive statements, but were instead provisional, subject to later modification or further development, reflecting their author's lack of certainty in their accomplishment. It is this uncertainty that is the most basic common characteristic of these great experimental innovators. Bishop, Rodin, Ibsen, Wright, and Ford all continued beyond the specific contributions examined here, progressively modifying their innovations in later works through further experimentation; Mondrian and Dostoevsky were prevented from doing this only by death. The work of these experimental innovators not only



makes explicit statements of uncertainty and ambiguity, but in some cases has implicit expressions of uncertainty built into its fabric. Notable examples of this include the irregular brushstrokes of Mondrian's late paintings and Dostoevsky's innovation of the polyphonic novel.

This paper's examination of seven major conceptual innovators has interesting implications for a familiar problem that has previously been considered almost exclusively in relation to one artist at a time, of why some important artists decline precipitously after making a great early contribution. Some conceptual artists become tied to an early important innovation, and produce later work that effectively repeats it in subject or technique. Jarry is an extreme example of an artist who became the captive of his early achievement, but to a lesser degree Kosuth, Lin, and Welles all revisited their early innovations in their later work. In some cases a conceptual innovator loses the power of his early approach by aiming to produce later works that are more complex. Kosuth and Lin have both made later contributions that are more involved but less influential than their early masterpieces, and the failure of *Tender is the Night* to match the importance of *The Great Gatsby* is probably due to Fitzgerald's attempt to write a more complex novel. In each of these cases, the artist's decline appears to have been a consequence of the failure to recognize that the key to the success of an early landmark contribution lay in its simplicity. In yet other cases, a brilliant conceptual innovator may lose interest in his discipline. It is often difficult to determine whether this plays a role in the career of a particular innovator, but among the most dramatic instances of it is surely Rimbaud's definitive decision to abandon poetry at the age of 19.

This paper clearly demonstrates the generality of the distinction between conceptual and experimental innovators in artistic disciplines. In a wide range of very different activities it is

readily apparent that some artists are conceptual, and others experimental. Examination of their contributions furthermore allows us to understand why it is that important conceptual innovations are generally made by the young, and major experimental contributions by the old.

# Footnotes

□

I thank Robert Jensen and Joshua Kotin for discussions, participants in a seminar at the American University of Paris for comments on an earlier draft, and the National Science Foundation for financial support.

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1. \_\_\_\_\_ Woolford and Karlin 1996, 31.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Welles 2002, 81.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Galenson 2001; 2003a; 2004a; Jensen, 2004.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ Sylvester 1995, 431.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ Kosuth 1989, 44.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ Galenson 2004b.

7. \_\_\_\_\_ Blotkamp 1995, 15.

8. \_\_\_\_\_ Mondrian 1986, 224.

9. \_\_\_\_\_ Blotkamp 1995, 94.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ Mondrian 1986, 224.

11. \_\_\_\_\_ Blotkamp 1995, 81.

12. \_\_\_\_\_ Cooper and Spronk 2001, 18.

13. \_\_\_\_\_ Cooper and Spronk 2001, 49.

14. \_\_\_\_\_ Seuphor 1956, 181.

15. \_\_\_\_\_ Golding 2000, 12-13.

16. \_\_\_\_\_ Seuphor 1956, 151, 198.

17. \_\_\_\_\_ Sylvester 1995, 434.

18. \_\_\_\_\_ Cooper and Spronk 2001, 53-54.

19. \_\_\_\_\_ Holty 1957, 21.

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20. Greenberg 1986, 189.
  21. Coplans 1996, 32-34.
  22. Schapiro 1979, 256.
  23. Mondrian 1986, 356.
  24. Schapiro 1979, 256-57.
  25. Golding 2000, 41.
  26. Galenson 2003b.
  27. Kosuth 1989, 125-26.
  28. Kosuth 1991, 36.
  29. Kosuth 1991, 18.
  30. Kosuth 1989, 13.
  31. Kosuth 1989, 31.
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45. Morson 1994, 94.
46. Leatherbarrow 2002, 233.
47. Morson 1994, 91, 98.
48. Bakhtin 1984, 39.
49. Bakhtin 1984, 58.
50. Bakhtin 1984, 276-77.
51. Morson 1994, 98.
52. Leatherbarrow 2002, 229.
53. Morson 1994, 136.
54. Bakhtin 1984, 39.
55. Leatherbarrow 2002, 228.
56. Leatherbarrow 2002, 172.
57. Lary 1973, 147-48.
58. Mochulsky 1967, 596-97.
59. Mochulsky 1967, 571-73; Dostoevsky 1975, 294.
60. Mochulsky 1967, 596.
61. Claridge 1991; II, 181-94.
62. Wagner 1988, 882; Claridge 1991; II, 209.
63. Claridge 1991; II, 456.

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64. Claridge 1991; IV, 46.
65. Trilling 1951, 252. On the conceptual nature of *The Waste Land*, see Galenson 2003a.
66. Fitzgerald 1945, 310; Claridge 1991; IV, 396.
67. Ruland and Bradbury 1991, 299-30.
68. Claridge 1991; II, 179; IV, 44.
69. Brucoli 1994, 80.
70. Turnbull 1963, 309, 358.
71. Claridge 1991; IV, 423; Miller 1962, 92, 106.
72. Trilling 1951, 246, 249.
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74. Aldridge 1985, 51-52.
75. Claridge 1991; IV, 201-03.
76. Brucoli 1994, 455.
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82. Fowlie 1965, 24; Cohn 1973, 156.
83. Brereton 1965, 194.
84. Wilson 1959, 270.
85. Perloff 1999, 60-61.

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86. Fowle 1965, 112.
87. Weinberg 1966, Chap. 5; Frohock 1963, Chap. 5
88. Perloff 1999, 64; Starkie 1939, Chap. 10.
89. Perloff 1999, 64-66.
90. Charvet 1967, 79.
91. Balakian 1947, 77-78.
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94. Schwartz and Estess 1983, 181, 206.
95. Bishop 1994, 621.
96. Lowell 1990, 76.
97. Schwartz and Estess 1983, 207. On Ryder as an experimental painter see Galenson 2002.
98. Kaistone 1989, 101.
99. Monteiro 1996, 42.
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102. Schwartz and Estess 1983, 253; Kaistone 1989, 222.
103. Kaistone 1989, 190.
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106. Serafin 1999, 101.

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108. McCabe 1994, 33.

109. Schwartz and Estess 1983, 277.

110. Monteiro 1996, 99.

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113. Elsen 1963, 89.

114. Grunfeld 1987, 374-77.

115. Hamilton 1967, 68-69; Elsen 1963, 202.

116. Elsen 1965, 110.

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117. Elsen 1965, 115.

118. Lampert 1986, 135.

119. Elsen 1965, 154.

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123. Elsen 1963, 35, 39.

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125. Lampert 1986, 135.

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130. Elsen 1963, 145.
131. Elsen 1965, 168.
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135. Elsen 1974, 28.
136. Hamilton 1967, 68-69.
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138. Golding 1972, 3.
139. Galenson 2004c.
140. Apollonio 1973, 21.
141. Apollonio 1973, 27, 47.
142. Apollonio 1973, 22, 24.
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150. Golding 1972, 4.

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151. Coen 1988, 94.
152. Taylor 1961, 12-30; Haftmann 1965, 109.
153. Golding 1972, 12.
154. Golding 1972, 14; also see Coen 1988, 205.
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156. Apollonio 1973, 51-65.
157. Coen 1988, 203.
158. Apollinaire 1972, 321.
159. Coen 1988, 216.
160. Golding 1972, 28.
161. Coen 1988, 204.
162. Miller 1968, 20.
163. Stillman 1983, 56-57.
164. Magill 1989, 362.
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165. E.g. Miller 1968, 1; Templeton 1997, 323.
166. Miller 1968, 45.
167. Lyons 1987, 32.
168. Lyons 1987, 49.
169. Lucas 1962, 43.
170. Miller 1968, 44.
171. Tennant 1965, 17; Miller 1968, 45.
172. Lucas 1962, 43-44.

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173. Egan 1972, 242.
174. Egan 1972, 328.
175. McFarlane 1994, 227.
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177. Tennant 1965, 116.
178. Hardwick 2001, 37-38.
179. Lyons 1987, 33.
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181. Egan 1972, 240.
182. Bloom 2002, 232.
183. Hardwick 2001, 52.
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185. Egan 1972, 223, 219.
186. Egan 1972, 324-25.
187. Lucas 1962, 1.
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191. Esslin 1991, 356-60; Shattuck 1958, 159-64.
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194. Shattuck 1958, 177.

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196. Shattuck 1958, 163.
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199. Toker 2003, 267.
200. Gelernter 1999, 258; Scully 1960, 26-27.
201. Riley 1994, 32-22.
202. Riley 1994, 32.
203. Gelernter 1999, 216-18.
204. Toker 2003, 142-43.
205. Riley 1994, 33; Toker 2003, 142.
206. Gill 1987, 189, 250-51.
207. Tafel 1979, 165.
208. Gill 1987, 367.
209. Toker 2003, 164-71; Levine 1996, 240-43.
210. Riley 1994, 46.
211. Toker 2003, 180.
212. Toker 2003, 186, 190, 207.
213. Toker 2003, 299.
214. Toker 2003, 253.
215. Toker 2003, 7.
216. Galenson 2003b.

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217. Lin 2000, 4:10.
218. Lin 2000, 4:11.
219. Lin 2000, 4:11.
220. Lin 2000, 4:11.
221. Lin 2000, 2:03.
222. Lin 2000, 2:03.
223. Lin 2000, 4:14.
224. Lin 2000, 3:05.
225. Lin 2000, 4:44-45.
226. Lin 2000, 4:16.
227. Goldberger 2003, 50.
228. Munro 2000, 485-86.
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230. Stokstad 1995, 1162.
231. Lin 2000, 7:03.
232. Lin 2000, 4:45.
233. Lin 2000, 4:12.
234. Welles 2002, 123-24.
235. Ford 2001, 158.
236. Ash 2003, 192.
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238. Ash 2003, 194-95.

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  240. Truffaut 1994, 279.
  241. Sklar 1993, 222.
  242. Gottesman 1971, 69-72.
  243. Gottesman 1971, 73-76.
  244. Nichols 1976, 274-75.
  245. Gottesman 1971, 127.
  246. Welles and Bogdanovich 1992, 53.
  247. Welles 2002, 102.
  248. Welles 2002, 46.
  249. Mast 1986, 266.
  250. Gottesman 1971, 103.
  251. Gottesman 1971, 131.
  252. Truffaut 1994, 281-83.
  253. Welles and Bogdanovich 1992, 91.
  254. Kael 2002, 131-32.
  255. Welles 2002, 80.
  256. American Film Institute 1973.
  257. Anderson 1981, 9.
  258. Welles 2002, 135.
  259. In contrast, when Orson Welles received the third Life Achievement Award two years later, the citation mentioned by name just one movie, *Citizen Kane*, which it described as “a benchmark in world cinema, an achievement against which other films are still measured.”

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260. Baxter 1971, 144; Ford 2001, x.
261. Although Ford's date of birth has often been given as 1895 - even by Ford himself - recent scholarship has established that he was born in 1894. Gallagher 1986, 2.
262. Ford 2001, ix.
263. Ford 2001, ix.
264. Welles 2002, 76.
265. Ford 2001, ix.
266. Fell 1975, 209.
267. Ford 2001, 16.
268. Mast 1986, 252; Ford 2001, 64.
269. Ford 2001, 47.
270. Ford 2001, 85.
271. Ford 2001, 71.
272. Anderson 1981, 110-13.
273. Sarris 1976, 34.
274. Bogdanovich 1978, 31.
275. Sarris 1976, 124.
276. Bogdanovich 1978, 24.
277. Ford 2001, 87.
278. Sarris 1976, 170, 174.
279. Sarris 1968, 47.
280. Bowness 1989, 51.

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