

# Critical Neglect of Ayn Rand's Theory of Art

*Michelle Marder Kamhi and Louis Torres*

As we argue in *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand* (Torres and Kamhi 2000), Rand's philosophy of art is distinctive and substantial. It offers compelling answers to fundamental questions regarding the nature of art, its broadly cognitive function, and its relation to emotion. Moreover, in conjunction with her ideas on concept formation and the nature of definition, it provides powerful arguments for discrediting the most disturbing trends in the arts of the twentieth century—trends epitomized by the assumption that anything is art if a reputed artist or expert says it is.

In contrast with Rand's thought on ethics, politics, and epistemology,<sup>1</sup> however, her philosophy of art has received little critical or scholarly attention, even among her admirers. The reasons for this oversight are both external and internal, ranging from the ideological biases of the critical establishment to Rand's idiosyncracies of style and emphasis. In this paper, which is a revised version of a chapter omitted from our book,<sup>2</sup> we examine the scant literature on Rand's aesthetics,<sup>3</sup> analyzing the ways in which her theory has been misinterpreted and underappreciated, and indicating some of the reasons contributing to its neglect. Our purpose is not only to document the neglect of an important body of ideas in Objectivism but also to highlight the key principles of Rand's philosophy of art—which has too often been confused with her literary theory and her personal literary aims and preferences.

## **Reviews of *The Romantic Manifesto***

Rand's four essays setting out her philosophy of art were initially

---

*The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2000): 1–46.

published in Objectivist periodicals (which she co-edited with Nathaniel Branden),<sup>4</sup> and were introduced to the larger reading public as the opening chapters of *The Romantic Manifesto*, a volume that also includes essays she wrote on literature and popular culture. The sparse critical response to this volume was generally superficial and disparaging, at times even hostile. Rand's theory of art itself drew virtually no substantive comment. The prevailing impression conveyed by reviewers was that the book deals almost exclusively with literature—in particular, with Romantic fiction—and that, in any case, Rand's ideas are utterly devoid of merit.

The requisite brief items in the leading publishing and library trade journals were, on the whole, critical of Rand for what was variously characterized as her “contralto pronunciamientos” (*Kirkus Reviews* 1969) and her “tiresome clichés” and “sweeping judgments in quasi-philosophical jargon” (*Publishers' Weekly* 1969). The book was dismissed as being of interest only to “[f]ollowers of the ‘objectivist’ philosophy” and to “avid Rand fans” (*Library Journal* 1970). The *Kirkus* review was especially negative. Beginning with an allusion to Rand's earlier political essays championing capitalism, it closed with a gratuitous innuendo, “\$\$\$\$ or sense?” Rand's theory of art was dismissively alluded to by the mere mention of two chapter titles and two disconnected quotes.<sup>5</sup>

Nor did the three general periodicals that allotted review space—the *Christian Science Monitor*, *The New Leader*, and *The New Republic*—have anything favorable to say, much less anything of substance, regarding Rand's philosophy of art. Of the three reviewers, only Richard Cattani in the *Monitor* (1970) steered clear of extraneous political, economic, or social issues, to deal instead with the *literary* theory Rand presents in the volume. Yet he, like the others, failed to mention the theory of art propounded in the book's three opening essays. (Since Rand's fourth essay, “Art and Cognition,” appeared only in the second paperback edition, neither Cattani nor the other reviewers we cite saw it.) Characterizing Rand as “contentious, crabby, and cerebral” (not without some justification), he charged that her view of contemporary writers was “singlemindedly narrow.” And, regarding her definition of Romanti-

cism, he faulted her for ignoring Romantic poetry.<sup>6</sup>

John W. Hughes, writing in *The New Leader*, excoriated Rand as a “sterile” elitist whose “polemic sputtering, inflated with a phallic giantism,” revealed a “Nietzschean nostalgia” for Apollonian “clarity and cleanliness” (1970, 21). Like Cattani, he censured her for overlooking Romantic poetry. He was also critical (with good reason) of her total neglect of the Dionysian side of Greek culture. Both omissions were due, in his view, to her failure to come to terms with “the human condition, the tension between [the] ideal and [the] imperfect” (22). Hughes concluded that *The Romantic Manifesto* represents the “angry, threatened conscience of a censor,” and he charged that it “could only have been written by the leader of a cult” (22). He said nothing of Rand’s theory of art.

By far the longest review (about 2,500 words) appeared in *The New Republic* under the derogatory title “Fictive Babble.” The reviewer, Peter Michelson (1970) was relentlessly negative. “Not to put too fine a point upon it,” he began, “this is a crummy book . . . [, which] augments ignorance with incoherence” (21). The only reason it was being published and reviewed, he opined, was that “Ayn Rand is a ‘phenomenon’” (22). Like the *Kirkus* reviewer, who derisively alluded to Rand’s concept of *sense of life*, Michelson referred to Rand’s philosophy of art only to ridicule it. Merely citing the titles of the essays “The Psycho-Epistemology of Art” and “Philosophy and Sense of Life,” without commenting on their substance, he impugned Rand for “masquerad[ing her] solipsism as a philosophical essay,” and quoted her definition of art solely as an example of her “pretentious jargon” (21). He also criticized, as an instance of “empty dialectic,” her contention that “art confirms or denies the efficacy of a man’s consciousness” (21)—a criticism in which we largely concur (see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 57). The bulk of Michelson’s review purported to deal with Rand’s ideas on literature, but his underlying political agenda was evident in references to “chauvinistic capitalism,” “murderous technocratic imperialists” (22), and “the stagnant sloughs of capitalism” (24), as well as to “war and capital” as “institutions designed for anti-human ends” (23). Finally, when he discussed Rand’s attitude toward the culture of her youth, he even resorted to

deliberate distortion of her meaning. Michelson quoted her as stating: “As a child I saw a glimpse of the pre-World War I world, the last afterglow of the most radiant cultural atmosphere in human history . . . [ellipsis Michelson’s].” Having omitted Rand’s crucial parenthetical phrase, “achieved not by Russian, but by Western, culture,” Michelson went on to recite some of the horrors of Czarist Russia, as if they constituted part of the culture she admired.<sup>7</sup> This is a particularly blatant instance of the distortion of Rand’s thought at the hands of critics motivated by political concerns.<sup>8</sup>

A notable exception to the critical dismissal of *The Romantic Manifesto* was a respectful review by Gordon W. Clarke, in *Magill’s Literary Annual, 1972*. Although he mischaracterized the book as presenting Rand’s “personal analysis of art,” Clarke correctly observed that she “builds a rational approach to esthetics,” especially in literature. While focusing on Rand’s theory of literature, and her argument for Romanticism, he also emphasized “the significance she gives to the difference between ‘a sense of life’ and a rational philosophy of life,” and he briefly explained her view of art as “the ‘voice’ of the sense of life.” In addition, he cited her argument that the *primary* purpose of art is neither didactic nor moral but, rather, the objectification of “[the artist’s] view of man and of existence.”

### **An Early Philosophic Critique**

The only writer to consider Rand’s theory of art in any detail before our own efforts (Torres and Kamhi 1991–92) was William F. O’Neill, who published the first comprehensive examination of Objectivism, entitled *With Charity Toward None*. Although he was extremely critical of (and often misinterpreted) Rand’s ideas, O’Neill (1971) characterized her as a courageous and significant thinker, who is worthy of serious consideration. Noting that the “scope and impact” of her thought was “very impressive” (4), he further observed that

she had succeeded in presenting a philosophy which is simple, original, clearly defined and (at least implicitly)

systematic. Within its own established context of assumptions, it is also surprisingly comprehensive, coherent and consistent. It addresses itself to the solution of significant problems, and it culminates in a practical plan of action. If it were *true*, it would be a masterpiece. (16)

As indicated by the unflattering title of his book, O'Neill strongly objected to what he perceived (however mistakenly) to be the negative social and ethical implications of Objectivism. In contrast, his brief account of the fundamentals of Rand's theory of art was largely favorable, raising no major objections (153–57). Moreover, he properly treated her ideas on literature as illustrative of, and subordinate to, her basic aesthetic principles (though he failed to criticize Rand for employing the inclusive term “Romantic *art*” in contexts appropriate only to fiction and drama<sup>9</sup>). O'Neill's account of Rand's aesthetics had no discernible impact on other philosophers, however.

### Infelicities of Presentation

Though critical bias, often politically motivated, has no doubt contributed to the neglect of Rand's aesthetic theory, she herself was also to blame in no small measure, for she did little to call attention to her theory of art, or to engage readers not already sympathetic to Objectivism. Moreover, her writing style was at times embarrassingly crude.

To begin, the very title of *The Romantic Manifesto* is misleading. It ignores Rand's essays on the nature of art, and much of the volume is decidedly not a “manifesto.” Nor is it devoted primarily to the subject of Romanticism. In total pages, nearly half of the book (more in the revised edition)—that is, the three essays (four in the later edition) presenting Rand's theory of art, her essay “Basic Principles of Literature,” and “The Simplest Thing in the World” (a short story about a fiction writer that depicts how sense of life guides the creative process)—is devoted to broader considerations of art and literature. The remainder does deal with Romanticism, almost exclusively from a literary perspective.<sup>10</sup> Attention is further deflected from Rand's

theory of art by the book's subtitle, "A Philosophy of Literature"—carried on both the jacket and the title page of the original, hardcover edition, and on the title page but, notably, not on the cover of the paperback editions. Only the second, revised paperback edition of the book (1975) gives any hint of Rand's theory of art on its front cover: it carries, in small type, the notice "Revised and Updated to Include 'Art and Cognition.'"

Nor does Rand's ill-conceived Introduction accurately represent the content of the book. Beginning with a dictionary definition of the term "manifesto," she refers to the volume as "this manifesto," yet concedes in her next paragraph that "the actual manifesto—the declaration of my personal objectives or motives [as a novelist]—is at the end of this book [in "The Goal of My Writing"]." Further, she treats her essays on the nature of art as subordinate to her primary goal of championing Romanticism in literature. Scarcely referring to the substance of those essays, she remarks only that the book contains "the base of a rational esthetics" (vi). And she appears, in this context at least, to view her philosophy of art as merely part of the "theoretical grounds" (v) justifying her personal manifesto as a novelist. Ironically, the description on the jacket flap for the first edition ascribed more fundamental value to Rand's theory of art than she did in her Introduction. It fittingly stressed that in the book Rand "defines the nature of art and lays the foundation of a new, *rational* esthetics as revolutionary as her theory of ethics" and "demonstrates . . . that the roots of art lie in the nature and requirements of man's mind."<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, discrepant views of the book's focus were expressed in two brief notices on the page preceding the title page in the paperback editions. The first item, set in capital letters, quotes from Rand's Introduction, stressing her notion of the book as a Romantic manifesto:

This Manifesto is not issued in the name of an organization or a movement. I speak only for myself. There is no Romantic movement today. If there is to be one in the art of the future, this book will have helped it come into being.

(i)

Following that excerpt, a second astute statement from the publisher aptly calls attention to Rand's theory of art: "In this searching and courageous work, Ayn Rand cuts through the haze of sentimentality and vague thinking that surrounds the subject of art. For the first time, a precise definition is given to art, and a careful analysis made of its nature." That emphasis is echoed on the back cover of the early paperback editions. Yet it has not outweighed, in the minds of many readers (including some leading Objectivists, as we shall see below), the stress placed on Romanticism by the book's title and Introduction.

A further impediment to serious consideration of Rand's aesthetic theory is her idiosyncratic presentation. Having written the original essays for a sympathetic audience well-schooled in her philosophy, she failed to revise them in any significant respect for publication in book form, in order to reach a broader readership. Characteristically, she cites no other thinkers (with the noteworthy exception of Aristotle and, scathingly but superficially, Kant), and she sweepingly disparages her intellectual adversaries in vague allusions to "modern philosophy" and "the philosophers' war against reason" (76, 77, 127). Though such charges are not without foundation, Rand loses credibility by failing to substantiate them. More damaging perhaps, she occasionally indulges in crude polemics—as in this passage from the Introduction:

As for the present, I am not willing to surrender the world to the jerky contortions of self-inducedly brainless bodies with empty eye sockets, who perform, in stinking basements, the immemorial rituals of staving off terror, which are a dime a dozen in any jungle—and to the quavering witch doctors who call it "art." (viii)

Or consider this passage from her essay "Bootleg Romanticism":

The composite picture of man that emerges from the art of

our time is the gigantic figure of an aborted embryo, whose limbs suggest a vaguely anthropoid shape, who twists his upper extremity in a frantic quest for a light that cannot penetrate its empty sockets, who emits inarticulate sounds resembling snarls and moans, who crawls through a bloody muck, red froth dripping from his jaws, and struggles to throw the froth at his own non-existent face, who pauses periodically and, lifting the stumps of his arms, screams in abysmal terror at the universe at large. (130)

Such invective has not only provided an easy target for critics,<sup>12</sup> it has very likely repelled many ordinary readers as well.

In view of these impediments, it is perhaps little wonder that the philosophy of art presented in *The Romantic Manifesto* has languished in relative obscurity. Ill-disposed to Rand from the start, many intellectuals would scarcely be inclined to probe beyond the obstacles she placed in their path.

### **Comments by Followers and Admirers**

Far more surprising than the neglect of Rand's theory of art by the critical and scholarly establishment is the extent to which that theory has been ignored, dismissed, or misunderstood by her principal interpreters, notwithstanding their embrace of the basic tenets of Objectivism. For example, in her biography of Rand, Barbara Branden merely lists *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature* as one of several published collections of Rand's articles (1986, 324–25). She indicates nothing of the theory of art it presents. Similarly, Nathaniel Branden, in his memoir of his years with Rand, explicitly characterizes *The Romantic Manifesto* as “her book on the aesthetics of literature” (1989, 210).

Harry Binswanger purportedly includes Rand's aesthetics in a brief overview of her philosophic achievement, which he published shortly after her death. An uncritical admirer, he sheds little light on either the virtues of her theory of art or its problematic aspects, however. Of the seven items he lists as “highlights” of her “wide-

ranging contributions to the field [of aesthetics],” only one—her concept of sense of life—is, in fact, germane to it. The other items he enumerates include Rand’s “definition of Romanticism vs. Naturalism in terms of free will vs. determinism, and her passionate defense of Romanticism,” as well as “her analysis of literature (especially of plot)” (1982, part IV, 1–3, 7–8). All of these pertain more narrowly to her *literary* theory.<sup>13</sup>

Yet Binswanger does offer one illuminating observation: he correctly notes that the fundamental “key to the Objectivist esthetics” is Rand’s theory of concepts—which he pointedly contrasts with the Platonic theory of Forms. As he explains, Plato holds that abstractions, or concepts, exist as real “Forms” in an imperceptible, otherworldly sphere, and that the concrete entities we perceive are but a shadow of their respective Forms, whereas Rand views concepts as cognitive integrations of qualities observed in, and mentally abstracted from, real entities. According to Plato, art is at best only a shadow of a shadow of the Forms, and therefore of little value to man, while Rand maintains that art, as a concrete embodiment of fundamental metaphysical concepts and values, provides man with the most vivid awareness he can possess of those core ideas (3). The contrast is instructive—although Binswanger mistakenly applies his comments only to the embodiment of philosophic ideals (in particular, of the “ideal man”) in “great” art, and does not note that the principle applies to all concepts concretized in all art, whether great or not.

A capsule summary of *The Romantic Manifesto* appears in *The New Ayn Rand Companion*, by Mimi Reisel Gladstein. A professor of English and a Rand specialist (though not an Objectivist), she generously characterizes the book as “perhaps the most unified and coherent of Rand’s nonfiction works,” and she points out, more astutely than the book’s original reviewers, that in it “Rand explains the importance of art to human consciousness.” Yet she adds only that “Art concretizes abstractions and thereby provides images that integrate an incalculable number of concepts,” and she devotes the remainder of her summary to Rand’s literary theory (1999, 82–83).<sup>14</sup>

Finally, Rand’s theory of art has regrettably been passed over by

philosophers who have disseminated or developed other aspects of her thought within the academic community. In *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*, for instance, Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen present a valuable first (and, to date, only) collection of essays by academic philosophers on diverse aspects of Rand's work, yet they fail to consider her aesthetic theory—dealing only with what they regard as “the three central divisions of Rand's philosophy,” that is, “metaphysics and epistemology, ethics, and political and social theory” ([1984] 1986, xi).<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, they omit *The Romantic Manifesto* from their list of her “major nonfiction works” (xi).

### **Hospers and Rand**

In view of the almost total critical and scholarly neglect of Rand's aesthetic theory, it is of particular interest to note her brief friendship with John Hospers, one of the most prominent academic aestheticians of his time. When Rand met Hospers, in 1960, he was a professor at Brooklyn College with already substantial credentials as a philosopher.<sup>16</sup> For the subsequent two and a half years, they pursued frequent in-depth discussions on both art and aesthetics, among other philosophic subjects.

In her biography of Rand, Barbara Branden quoted the following testimonial by Hospers:

“Ayn Rand was one of the most original thinkers I have ever met. There is no escape from facing the issues she raised. . . . At a time in my life when I thought I had learned at least the essentials of most philosophical views, being confronted with her, and having the privilege of extended discussions with her . . . , suddenly changed the entire direction of my intellectual life, and placed every other thinker in a new perspective. Whatever subject one discusses thenceforth, one always has to take account of Ayn Rand.” (in B. Branden 1986, 413; see also 323–24)

Branden reported that “in scholarly journals [Hospers] has edited

over the last twenty years, he has arranged for the publication of numerous articles on aspects of [Rand's] philosophy, firmly entrenching her name and importance in the philosophical literature" (413).

While Branden's statement is true for Rand's ethical and political ideas, it does not hold for her theory of art.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, though Hospers is an aesthetician, he has taken very little account of Rand's aesthetics. To our knowledge, he has publicly called attention to her aesthetic theory on just two occasions, only one of them in print. In 1962, he invited her to present her not-yet-published ideas on "art and sense of life" at the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics (of which he later served as president).<sup>18</sup> Twenty years later, in *Understanding the Arts*—an introductory textbook which he regards as his "best philosophical work" (1998a, 8)—he included a perfunctory discussion of those ideas, along with brief quotations from several key passages (1982, 255–56). Despite his close personal engagement with Rand as a philosopher, in his text he identifies her merely as a "contemporary novelist." Moreover, he discusses her theory of *sense of life* solely with regard to "truths about the artist" that may be learned from a work of art—a context so limited as to trivialize the concept (256).<sup>19</sup> Hospers correctly stresses that the artist's "sense of life" differs from an articulated philosophy and "is often at odds with the explicit moral and philosophical tenets" he holds. But he adds that it cannot "be expressed in some kinds of art, such as music"—an erroneous assertion for which he offers no evidence or explanation, and which clearly contradicts Rand's position.<sup>20</sup>

From his own writing on aesthetics, it is clear that, in spite of a professed "general agreement with principal points in Rand's aesthetic" (1990a, 24), Hospers disagrees with fundamental aspects of her theory of art.<sup>21</sup> Though he takes up the question "What is a work of art?" early in his textbook (1982, chap. 1), for example, he refers neither to Rand's definition nor to other aspects of her theory.<sup>22</sup> Consider, too, this statement from his memoir: "[Ayn] had no use for non-representational painting, though I liked Mondrian a lot—and I tried vainly to convince her that a line could be expressive even though that line was no part of a represented person or object"

(1990a, 26). The central issue for Rand, of course, would not have been whether a line alone could be “expressive” but whether it could concretize fundamental values or a view of life. She went much further than merely having “no use” for abstract painting: she offered compelling reasons why it does not qualify as art, reasons which we amplify in *What Art Is* (Torres and Kamhi 2000, chap. 8).

Barbara Branden further notes (1986, 323) that the principal area of disagreement between Hospers and Rand was *epistemology*—an observation confirmed by Rand’s letters and by Hospers himself.<sup>23</sup> As we stress in our book, Rand’s epistemology constitutes the very foundation of her theory of art. It informs every major aspect of that theory, from her understanding that art plays a crucial role in the human cognitive need to concretize abstractions to her approach to the definition of art. Not least, it justifies her contention that the visual arts are necessarily representational. Of particular relevance to her definition of art is her conviction that conceptual knowledge depends upon a process of abstraction from the data of sense perception, and that language properly reflects this objective reality. In contrast, Hospers fully accepts the philosophic premises of linguistic analysis, viewing all word usage as equally valid, without regard to the concrete referents underlying the original concepts.<sup>24</sup> In that light, it is clear that at least some of Rand’s aesthetic differences with Hospers were not just a matter of personal taste; they were symptomatic of a profound philosophic disagreement. Nonetheless, in view of his prominence as an aesthetician, and his express regard for Rand’s intellect, it is most unfortunate that he has not dealt with her aesthetic theory, even to dispute it, in any of his numerous books and articles.<sup>25</sup>

### **Merrill’s Interpretation**

That Rand’s ideas on art have, on balance, been poorly served even by her admirers is further evidenced by the brief discussion of the “Objectivist Esthetics” in *The Ideas of Ayn Rand*, by Ronald Merrill. While his intentionally nonscholarly examination of her thought offers provocative insights on certain aspects of her philosophy and

fiction (such as the Nietzschean tendencies of her early work), his interpretation of her philosophy of art is, in our view, fundamentally mistaken. He even misconstrues the main *purpose* of her aesthetic theory. Although Rand did attempt to put aesthetics “on a firm logical foundation” (as Merrill notes), she did not seek *mainly* “to make it possible to make esthetic judgments on the basis of objective standards.” The primary purpose of her philosophy of art—as of any such philosophy, in our view—is to explain *what art is* and what role it plays in human life.<sup>26</sup> Merrill, however, treats the nature of art as merely the first of “three subdivisions” of the Objectivist aesthetics—as if it were of no greater concern to Rand than the other “subdivisions,” which he identifies as the “ethical evaluation of art” and the “esthetic evaluation of art” (1991, 122–26).

Merrill’s analysis of the connection between ethics and aesthetics in Rand’s thought is especially confusing. He misleadingly asserts, for example, that “Rand does not attempt to connect esthetics to ethics.” As we indicate in *What Art Is*, however, Rand is inconsistent on this issue (Torres and Kamhi 2000, 30–31). At times she does appear to link aesthetics and ethics, although her most definitive propositions clearly indicate that the basic function of art is neither normative nor didactic and is therefore independent of ethics.<sup>27</sup> In any case, Merrill’s assertion contradicts his own prior claim that, according to Rand, “one’s views on ethics . . . *constrain one’s views on . . . esthetics*” (91, emphasis ours).

Moreover, despite his assertion that Rand does not connect aesthetics to ethics, Merrill holds that the second “subdivision” of Rand’s aesthetics is the “ethical evaluation of art, which for Rand boils down to the conflict between Romanticism and Naturalism” (123). He thus makes the common mistake of considering that Rand’s conception of Romanticism is applicable to all art.<sup>28</sup> To compound the error, he adds that “Romantic *art* exhibits . . . ethical themes, . . . strong plot, . . . [and] larger-than-life characters” (124, emphasis ours)—attributes of some forms of literature, not of all art.

The third and last “subdivision” of the Objectivist aesthetics, according to Merrill, is “the esthetic evaluation of art, which is a matter of judging effective craftsmanship and technique” (123). This

area is, in fact, barely touched upon by Rand.<sup>29</sup> In any case, it is properly a technical concern, regarding which philosophy determines only the basic principles, not the criteria specific to each medium. Yet Merrill implies that this “subdivision,” too, is on a par with philosophic questions pertaining to the nature of art.

Although Merrill recognizes that the concept of *sense of life* is “absolutely central to the Objectivist esthetics” (123), he misconstrues what Rand means by the term and how it relates to her philosophy of art. For example, contrary to his suggestion that, in her view, an artist “expresses his sense of life—or at least a sense of life,” she conceives of sense of life as a uniquely personal, subconsciously integrated (and held) appraisal of reality, which the artist does not, indeed cannot, controvert in order to adopt another in its place.<sup>30</sup>

Merrill also disregards Rand’s emphasis on the essential relationship between art and the conceptual, integrative nature of human consciousness. Questioning whether her definition of art as “a selective re-creation of reality” can apply to music, for example, he merely asserts that music does not re-create, or represent, reality,<sup>31</sup> and then mistakenly concludes that “non-representational” (abstract) painting and sculpture, like music, also “challenge the Objectivist esthetics,” because they, too, are art—since they “can convey a sense of life.” Thus, he ignores Rand’s argument that such work tends to reduce perception to meaningless sensory experience, and is therefore not art. Merrill’s subsequent suggestion that abstract painting be classified as “decoration,” rather than as “important art,” further implies that he rejects Rand’s valuable distinction between art (even “unimportant” art) and decoration. He certainly misses Rand’s basis for that distinction: the difference between the sort of conceptual meaning conveyed by the major (“fine”) arts and the primarily “sensory” character of “decorative art.” And he wrongly infers that Rand “seems to regard [the decorative arts] as a ‘borderline case.’” She offers no basis whatever for such an inference.<sup>32</sup>

Most troubling is Merrill’s scuttling of Rand’s entire definition of art. In place of her “selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments,” he proposes that the “correct definition is: *A man-made object or process the function of which is to induce*

*a sense of life in the observer*" (126, emphasis ours). He claims that Rand's definition is "fundamentally flawed" because it violates the principle that "every man-made entity is properly defined in terms of its function" (125). Artifacts need not always be defined according to their function,<sup>33</sup> however, and there are good reasons for not so defining art (see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 105). Moreover, the function of art is subtly implicit in Rand's definition, as is the concept "man-made." Finally, whereas Rand's *genus* ("a selective re-creation of reality") succinctly identifies the essential characteristics of the larger category of man-made objects and activities to which art belongs, Merrill's alternative ("a man-made object or process"<sup>34</sup>) is far too broad, conveying no such information.

Merrill's *differentia* ("the function of which is to induce a sense of life in the observer") is equally inadequate, revealing several misconceptions. "For what purpose do we use art?" he asks—implying, contrary to Rand, that art has a primarily instrumental function. "What we seek from a work of art," he proposes, "is to be induced to feel an emotion—specifically a sense of life." A sense of life, as defined by Rand, is not an emotion, however; it is "an emotional . . . appraisal of man and of existence" (Rand 1975, 25). Nor can it be "induced," properly speaking—though it may be *evoked*, as it were, by being summoned forth to full consciousness through art. To imply that one's sense of life could be altered merely by the experience of a work of art is to misunderstand completely Rand's concept of sense of life and the role it plays in governing one's response to art. How one responds to a given work is determined not merely by the nature of the work but by the sense of life each responder brings to it. Moreover, Merrill's definition mistakenly implies that the artist's primary aim is to "induce" a sense of life through his work. Such an aim would entail something closer to propaganda than to art. Merrill also ignores that a work of art first serves a need of its creator, or maker, before that of the "user" (a term that, in itself, belies the distinctive nature of art compared to other human artifacts).

Finally, Merrill's defining focus on the emotional *response* to art, rather than on the intrinsic characteristics of art works, disregards one of Rand's major insights: that the *primary* function of art, for both

artist and responder, is to concretize fundamental values or a view of life so that they can be grasped directly, “as if they were percepts.” This function is subtly implicit in Rand’s definition, for in selectively re-creating reality according to his “metaphysical value-judgments,” the artist concretizes them in a directly perceptible form. The emotional response that may be elicited (according to one’s sense of life) is *secondary*—not in the sense of being less important, but in the sense that it is dependent on the primary function. Though the emotion is psychologically inseparable from the experience, it derives from the primary function—just as the pleasure experienced in eating evolved in relation to, and was ultimately dependent upon, the body’s need for nutritional sustenance. In so maintaining, we are by no means opposing the body to the mind or reason to emotion, as Merrill previously suggested.<sup>35</sup> We are simply affirming Rand’s view that the contents (both cognitive and emotional) of a properly functioning consciousness derive from existence—not vice versa.

### **Kelley’s View**

In an attempt to define the “essential content” of Objectivism—those ideas which one may not challenge and still qualify as an Objectivist—David Kelley offered, a decade ago, a brief outline of the philosophy’s basic principles (1990, 68–69).<sup>36</sup> Much like Den Uyl and Rasmussen, however, he omitted aesthetics—“just as Ayn Rand did,” he noted, citing her brief summary of the central principles of Objectivism (Rand 1962, 35). The summary he cited was written several years before she wrote her essays on the nature of art, however. Remarkably, Kelley failed to cite a later essay, “Philosophy: Who Needs It” (written in 1974), in which Rand states that “the fifth and last branch of philosophy is *aesthetics*, the study of art” ([1982] 1984, 4)—a statement that surely warrants the inclusion of her own aesthetic theory in the main body of her philosophic thought.

Holding that Rand’s “most distinctive” ideas were in ethics and politics,<sup>37</sup> Kelley argued that, even when her basic principles in those areas were derived from previous philosophers, she offered an original defense of them (66). As we have indicated, comparable

claims can be made with equal force for Rand's aesthetics. Her ideas on the nature of art and its relation to man's conceptual mode of cognition are as distinct from previous aesthetic theories as her ethics and politics are from those of other philosophers, perhaps more so. Kelley further noted that he also omitted from his discussion "a number of points in epistemology, ethics, and politics," as well as Rand's ideas on such matters as the role of philosophy in history. He thus implied that aesthetics is on a par with mere "points" in other areas of philosophic concern. He maintained, moreover, that all these areas involve "principles of limited range and significance for the system as a whole" (69).

Following the publication of our serialized monograph on Rand's philosophy of art (Torres and Kamhi 1991–92), we wrote to Kelley to inquire if his thinking on the status of aesthetics in Rand's thought had changed. He replied:

There is no question that aesthetics is a branch of philosophy. The question is whether to classify it with the more fundamental branches such as metaphysics and ethics, or with the less fundamental branches such as philosophy of science. So far as I know, Ayn Rand did not offer a systematic rationale for her view that aesthetics is one of the fundamental branches, and I am not convinced by Peikoff's argument in his book [1991]. That art is a need of man is a proposition of ethics; it shows that art is an important value. The same may be said of love and friendship. It does not follow that the philosophy of art ranks as a fundamental branch on a par with ethics (any more than the philosophy of love and friendship does).

I believe that metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics are clearly the most fundamental levels in philosophy, and that politics is so close behind that one would normally include it on any short list.<sup>38</sup> Beyond that, I have never ranked the other branches on a single scale of fundamentality, largely because I don't consider the matter all that important.<sup>39</sup>

While it is true that Rand never offered a “systematic rationale” to justify considering aesthetics one of the five basic branches of philosophy, one can readily infer such a rationale from the principles of her aesthetic theory. Perhaps most significant is her conviction that art, like philosophy itself, serves to provide man with an integrated view of existence, but in an emotionally compelling manner. Indeed, one might argue that, in Rand’s view, art is the ultimate manifestation of the human cognitive and emotional need to grasp reality perceptually, not merely in terms of abstractions, and that aesthetics is therefore a field so closely allied to epistemology as to be of major concern to philosophy.<sup>40</sup> Since art is of fundamental importance for the individual, *in relation to consciousness itself*, according to Rand, the philosophy of art is logically antecedent to both ethics and politics. That is, because art pertains to the individual’s grasp of reality itself, aesthetics, properly understood, should be regarded as a more fundamental branch of philosophy than either of these.

The deficiencies of Kelley’s view of both Rand’s aesthetic theory and the philosophic significance of art are reflected in the activities of The Objectivist Center (formerly the Institute for Objectivist Studies), which he heads. For example, a subordinate position is often assigned to aesthetics in the Center’s publications and mailings, as well as in its annual summer seminars.<sup>41</sup> Also indicative is the article “Why Man Needs Art,” which Kelley co-authored with William Thomas (Thomas and Kelley 1999). The article—which was published in the Center’s journal, under the rubric “The Moral Tradition” (in itself telling)—exhibits some of the basic errors common to other interpreters of Rand. These include a tendency to confuse her theory of art with her literary aesthetic; a predominant concern with literature, to the neglect of other art forms; and a failure to distinguish between *philosophy* and Rand’s concept of *sense of life* (which Thomas and Kelley do not even mention)—coupled with implications of an essentially normative or moral role for all the arts.<sup>42</sup>

Regrettably, Thomas and Kelley are often careless in their reading of Rand. Their misquotation of her definition of art, for instance, while not substantive, is jarring.<sup>43</sup> Worse, they begin their essay by asserting that Rand “argued that art is intimately connected with

man's need to rely on reason in the service of his life in this world" (18). In fact, she argued no such thing, for she was well aware that many of the major works of art (music and literature, as well as painting and sculpture) throughout history have been intimately connected with man's presumed need to rely not on reason but on *faith*—in the service of a god, or gods, and of an afterlife, not of "life in this world."<sup>44</sup> Further, in attempting to identify "the issues that art is concerned with," Thomas and Kelley uncritically cite the questions that Rand posed in relation to her concept of "metaphysical value-judgments" (a key term of her definition of art)—questions such as "Is man, by nature, to be valued as good, or to be despised as evil?" (Rand 1975, 19). They do not pause to consider how or whether such questions could be relevant to art works other than literature (or works based on a literary text), overlooking our own comments on this issue a decade ago (Torres and Kamhi 1991–92 [part I], 3–4).

Thomas and Kelley's most egregious omission is their failure to discuss, or even mention, Rand's distinctive concept of *sense of life*—which she defines as "a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence" (Rand 1975, 25)—or her view of the crucial role of sense of life in the all-important *emotional* response to art. Indeed, they mention emotion itself only once in their essay, in a passing reference to "such stylized art forms as music and dance . . . using the media of sound and motion to present an emotion-like sense of the world and of life" (Thomas and Kelley 1999, 19). Yet one cannot meaningfully discuss why man needs art without reference to the emotions. Nor can one appreciate the subtlety or profundity of Rand's aesthetic theory apart from her analysis of the psychological phenomenon she termed "sense of life."

The crux of Thomas and Kelley's approach is an attempt to derive man's need for art from a rationalistic consideration of five basic philosophic premises, related to the "logical structure of Objectivism." As graphically rendered in a diagram of "Why Man Needs Art," their deductive analysis reduces art to a handmaiden of action-guiding philosophy. And their conclusion that man needs art because "[he] needs to experience his philosophy in a concrete form"

(item 5 in the diagram) mistakenly equates philosophy with Rand's concept of sense of life.<sup>45</sup> In any case, their diagram—intended to demonstrate that “art is an extremely important value”—only confuses matters, lacking as it does any evident logic in the numbering of items or the vectors drawn between them.

Though Thomas and Kelley allude (19) to the importance of “introspect[ing] on the role of art in our own lives” when considering the function of art, they do not appear to have engaged in such introspection in any depth themselves, especially in regard to art forms other than literature. Had they done so, we doubt that they would have suggested that all art (presumably including music, plotless ballet, and landscape painting, for example) helps philosophy to “guide man's actions.”<sup>46</sup> They might have even questioned whether all literature does this. As Rand in her best moments understood, the connection between art and philosophy is far more subtle and indirect.

Finally, Thomas and Kelley repeatedly refer to the *philosophic* content of art—arguing, for example, that

the artwork is a concrete embodiment of the artist's *philosophy*, and the viewer and listener responds to it as such. If the *philosophical* ideas implicit in the work are congruent with our own, we tend to feel a sense of recognition and affirmation that we experience as profoundly meaningful. [Much of the power of art] reflects a need of man's consciousness, a need that derives from man's need for *philosophy*. (18, emphasis ours)

Thus Thomas and Kelley (like Leonard Peikoff, as we note below) ignore Rand's valuable distinction between an explicit “philosophy” and an implicit “sense of life.” Here it is worth recalling that she wrote: “*Art brings man's concepts* [not his “philosophy”] *to the perceptual level of his consciousness and allows him to grasp them directly, as if they were percepts*” (1975, 20). To illustrate this point: what a painting of a mother and child might concretize, for instance, is the concept of maternal love and tenderness, not an entire “philosophy.”

### Peikoff's Summation

Rand's theory of art received its first extended summation in Leonard Peikoff's *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*. Peikoff's position is an equivocal one, however. Characterizing his book rather self-servingly as "the definitive statement of Ayn Rand's philosophy—as interpreted by her best student and chosen heir," he purports only to "present," not to critique, amend, or expand the substance of her thought (1991, xv). Yet he cautions that his book cannot be "properly described as 'official Objectivist doctrine,'" since Rand did not live to see it completed, although she did endorse the lecture series on which it is based (xv). He further states that some of his material is based on conversations he had with Rand over the years; but he provides no documentation (xiv).<sup>47</sup>

To his credit, Peikoff devotes an entire chapter to aesthetics. He is the first philosopher to fully articulate the importance of Rand's theory of art in the total framework of Objectivism, and to offer explicit justification for her view that aesthetics is one of "the five branches that make up a full system of philosophy." Whereas subjects such as the philosophy of law, education, or science deal with "the problems of a specialized professional field," he argues, "a branch of philosophy . . . is universal and timeless. It pertains to an intellectual need of man qua man." Aesthetics qualifies as a branch of philosophy because art fills a need of man's mind, of man "qua thinker and valuer." "That is why," he adds, "art has always existed among men, . . . and why animals have neither art nor any equivalent of it" (413–14).

According to Peikoff:

Esthetics asks: what is art? what is its role in man's life? by what standards should an art work be judged?

To answer these questions, a knowledge of fundamentals is necessary. Hierarchically, esthetics, like politics, is a derivative, which rests on the three basic branches of philosophy. Politics, as the application of ethics to social questions, is the

narrower of the two fields. Esthetics is more profound:  
 art's special root and concern is not ethics, but metaphysics.  
 (414)

Although Peikoff initially suggests that aesthetics depends, in part, on ethics (as one of the “three basic branches of philosophy”), he does not support that claim.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, such a claim is immediately contradicted by his conclusion that art is more fundamental than politics, because it pertains “not [to] ethics, but [to] metaphysics”—that is, to the nature of reality itself. Peikoff's conclusion regarding the hierarchical status of aesthetics contrasts sharply with Kelley's, but is the correct one, in our view.

Beyond his valuable opening statements and a useful discussion of aesthetic evaluation (see below), however, Peikoff does little to clarify Rand's theory. And he perpetuates a number of her errors, as well as her tendency to deal so sweepingly with her philosophic adversaries as to forfeit credibility.<sup>49</sup> He also muddies the water with odd reformulations of, or additions to, her published exposition. Especially questionable is his freewheeling use of the term “philosophy.” Rand carefully distinguishes between *philosophy* (the product of a “consciously directed process of cognitive integration” [1975, 29]), *religion* (which she characterizes as a “primitive form of philosophy” [1975, 25], based on “belief unsupported by, or contrary to, the facts of reality and the conclusions of reason” [1964, 40]), and *sense of life* (“a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence” [1975, 25], which finds expression and emotional resonance in art). Peikoff's careless use of the term “philosophy” (like that of Thomas and Kelley) tends to blur these important distinctions.

For instance, when Peikoff asserts that, like art, “*philosophy itself* . . . has always existed among men, from prehistory to the present” (1991, 414), he appears to be using the term loosely (probably alluding to early forms of *religion*), not in Rand's more rigorous sense of the “science that studies the fundamental aspects of the nature of existence” (1971, 107)—a science which, in her view, was born in Greece, less than three thousand years ago, not in prehistory. Peikoff

also remarks that “one can learn a great deal about life from a work of art (from its *philosophy* and theme)” (1991, 423, emphasis ours). Such a claim is misleading even with respect to literature (the art form closest to philosophy), and it is scarcely applicable to other forms of art. The vast majority of art works (even of fiction and drama) do not present an explicit “philosophy,” precisely speaking, though they do convey an implicit *sense of life*. Nor is one likely to “learn” anything new from art—in the fundamental sense of gaining certain knowledge of previously unknown truths about life. On an adult level, at least, one is always aware that a work of art reflects the particular artist’s view of life, and there is no reason to regard any artist as omniscient or infallible. Thus, one is not apt to accept an artist’s view as valid unless it is consistent with one’s own life experience. In this regard, the most that art can do is make one more fully aware of things one already “knows” on a subconscious or implicit level.

Further, Peikoff states: “*Philosophy by itself cannot satisfy man’s need of philosophy.*” In other words, he explains: “Man requires the union of . . . philosophy and art, the broad identifications and their concrete embodiment” (418). Here again he blurs Rand’s distinction between the fully conscious, rationally derived form of knowledge articulated by philosophy and the emotionally charged, subconsciously integrated preconceptual awareness she termed a sense of life. The distinction is crucial in the realm of art.

Although Peikoff purports to present Rand’s philosophy of *art*, he tends (as do most other commentators) to echo *The Romantic Manifesto*’s emphasis on literature<sup>50</sup>—with the concomitant misapplication of strictly literary principles to other art forms. He seems to be aware of the difficulty, however, and at times attempts to mitigate it—as, for example, when he comments on Rand’s claim that “art is the indispensable medium for the communication of a moral ideal” (1975, 21). After quoting a passage from “The Goal of My Writing” in which she compares ethics to moral “engineering” and art to “the technology of the soul” (1975, 169), Peikoff qualifies her proposition that “art . . . builds the [ethical] model.” Emphasizing that “[n]ot all art works perform this function,” he correctly argues that the “model-building aspect . . . is not a universal attribute of art; and even where

it is present, it is not a primary” (1991, 420–21).<sup>51</sup> Contrary to the broad disclaimer in his Preface, Peikoff is not merely clarifying, but is amending, Rand’s clear intent in this passage—though in other contexts, she does argue *against* a primarily didactic role for art. Moreover, though he again stresses, appropriately, that “*the primary concern of art, whatever its medium or viewpoint, is not ethics, but that on which ethics depends: metaphysics*” (420, emphasis ours), he nevertheless refers, in subsequent passages, to “art as model-builder” (436) and to “the model-building function of art” (443).

In a section entitled “Romantic Literature as Illustrating the Role of Philosophy in Art” (another instance of his using the term “philosophy” where “sense of life” would be more appropriate), Peikoff acknowledges that Rand “was concerned as an esthetician predominantly with her own field, the novel.” Yet he accepts, without comment, her definition of Romanticism as “a category of *art* based on the recognition of the principle that man possesses the faculty of volition,” and he twice cites her declaration that Romanticism is “the greatest achievement in *art* history” (428, 449, emphasis ours).<sup>52</sup> As we argue in *What Art Is* (31–33), however, and as Peikoff’s own comments on the “model-building function” of literature tend to confirm, Rand’s definition of Romanticism can apply, in the sense that she intended it, only to fiction and drama, not to all art.

A particularly regrettable aspect of Peikoff’s chapter on aesthetics is his equivocation regarding Rand’s misrepresentation of Aristotle’s famous contrast between history and poetry (*Poetics* 9). As noted in *What Art Is* (63–64), Rand’s misreading of Aristotle, which supported her own predilection for morally idealized fiction, was frequently repeated by her and was subsequently echoed by many Objectivists.<sup>53</sup> Yet, Peikoff glosses over Rand’s error. Although he accurately quotes the beginning of the relevant passage from the *Poetics*, he omits the concluding portion, which shows Aristotle’s meaning to be patently different from Rand’s, and he euphemizes her misquote as a “paraphrase.” Not only does he thereby appear to sanction her distortion of Aristotle, he also fails to point out a fundamental inconsistency on her part: her implication, in this context, that all fiction *must*

represent things as they “ought to be” is at odds with her stated view that the individual artist’s sense of life (whatever its character) is the central governing force in the creative process.<sup>54</sup>

Peikoff devotes an entire section, “*Esthetic Value as Objective*” (nearly a third of his chapter), to the question, “By what standards should an art work be judged?” He suggests that, while Rand “does not discuss esthetic evaluation systematically,” she indicates three principles: (1) “selectivity in regard to subject”; (2) “clarity,” or intelligibility; and (3) “integration”—that is, the internal consistency of all aspects of the work. Although his presentation gives greater prominence to the issue of aesthetic evaluation than Rand does, and is questionable in some details, it is a useful synthesis of key ideas that are scattered throughout her essays.<sup>55</sup>

With regard to the first principle, “selectivity in regard to subject,” Peikoff introduces a major qualification. Quoting a passage from “*The Goal of My Writing*” in which Rand argued that “that which is not worth contemplating in life, is not worth re-creating in art,” Peikoff comments: “I take her to be speaking here as an Objectivist, defining a crucial esthetic implication of her view that evil is impotent, but not as an esthetician prescribing standards of judgment for art as such.” To our mind, the context of Rand’s statement strongly suggests that she is indeed speaking as an esthetician and does intend her statement to apply to all art<sup>56</sup>—though it conflicts with her view that the artist’s choice of subject, like other aspects of the creative process, is governed by his own sense of life, not by Rand’s idea, or anyone else’s, of what is “worth contemplating.” In offering his own opinion (despite the disclaimer we noted in his Preface), Peikoff seems to be trying to rescue her from this inconsistency.

Regarding Rand’s emphasis on the principle of intelligibility, Peikoff astutely observes, contrary to the modern critical predilection for “ambiguity,” that the function of the artist is “to overcome the opacity of human experience—to confront a universe that does often seem baffling and, by judicious selectivity, to reveal its essence.” Although any artist is free to represent the universe as “incomprehensible,” his representation must be intelligible if it is to be art (1991,

444).<sup>57</sup> “Since art satisfies a need of man’s cognitive faculty,” Peikoff properly emphasizes, “*it must conform to the requirements of that faculty.*” Work that deliberately flouts those requirements is neither “new” nor “bad” art but, rather, “*anti-art.*”<sup>58</sup> “Metaphysically,” Peikoff continues, “it is the attempt not to re-create, but to annihilate reality. Epistemologically, it is the attempt not to integrate, but to disintegrate man’s consciousness.” An “objective” work of art “respects the principles of human epistemology.” Its meaning is graspable, independent of the artist’s claims or explanation (445).

With respect to the principle of artistic *integration*, Peikoff clearly articulates the reason for its importance. As a selective re-creation of reality from a singular viewpoint, art must be internally consistent if it is to be credible or compelling. Any contradiction “destroys the spell,” for it dissipates the illusion of an alternative reality; “anything accidental works to make the new reality unreal” (446).<sup>59</sup>

A glaring deficiency of Peikoff’s chapter on aesthetics is that he devotes but a single brief paragraph to “Art and Cognition,” the longest of Rand’s four essays on aesthetics. Although he notes that in that essay Rand explains “(to [his] knowledge, for the first time) what the valid forms of art are and why only these qualify (they derive from the nature of man’s cognitive faculty),” he does not elaborate on her analysis of the major art forms in relation to man’s perceptual and conceptual faculties. Remarkably, he cites only her “hypothesis concerning the nature and meaning of music” as “especially noteworthy,” because it “offers an unprecedented integration of epistemology and esthetics with the physiology of hearing.” As we have argued, however, some key aspects of that hypothesis are of dubious value (Torres and Kamhi 2000, 82–86).

In his final paragraphs, Peikoff seeks first to demonstrate that aesthetic appraisal has an objective basis, and then to defend Rand’s claim that Romanticism is the school of *art* most appropriate to man as a rational being. On the inapplicability of Rand’s concept of Romanticism to the nonliterary arts, we have already commented above. Regarding the objectivity of aesthetic appraisal, Peikoff appropriately observes:

As in ethics, so in esthetics, value is an aspect of reality in relation to man. Value means the evaluation of a fact (in this case, of a certain kind of human product) in accordance with rational principles, principles reducible to [the data of] sense perception. This is precisely the pattern one follows in esthetic evaluation. (1991, 448)

Having led the reader to expect a conclusion regarding aesthetic evaluation in general, Peikoff rather surprisingly shifts to a consideration of beauty, concluding: “Like goodness, therefore, beauty is not ‘in the object’ or ‘in the eye of the beholder.’ It is *objective*. It is in the object—as judged by a rational beholder” (448). While Peikoff’s emphasis on Rand’s distinctive conception of objectivity (as a relation between the perceiver and the perceived object) is appropriate, the prominence he gives to the concept of beauty, as if it were the prime consideration in aesthetic (or artistic) evaluation, is misleading. In our view, it is highly significant that Rand does not discuss the concept of beauty at all in her essays on the nature of art.<sup>60</sup> Contrary to the traditional focus, she apparently did not consider the issue of beauty to be of *fundamental* concern to the philosophy of art.<sup>61</sup> Since beauty is neither exclusive to art nor common to all art works, it cannot be an essential or defining attribute of art, and is therefore peripheral to the philosophy of art. In focusing on beauty with respect to the evaluation of art, however, Peikoff seems to imply that it is of primary importance.

Peikoff’s closing paragraphs contain two erroneous assertions. He claims that Rand “defined the nature and deepest roots of great art” and “was explaining such art while creating it.” In truth, she began writing her essays on art years *after* she completed her last work of fiction. What she defined, moreover, was not the nature and function of “great art” but, more fundamentally, of art as such.

### Sciabarra’s Analysis

Though his perspective is primarily that of a political theorist,

Chris Matthew Sciabarra offers in *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* an account of Rand's theory of art that, while all too brief<sup>62</sup> and occasionally mistaken in detail, recognizes the crucial position that art and aesthetics occupy in her philosophic system. Like Peikoff (and unlike Kelley), he understands that the psychological function Rand postulates for art entitles it to more basic philosophic consideration than politics. Whereas Peikoff nevertheless relegates his discussion of art and aesthetics to the final chapter of his book, almost as an afterthought, Sciabarra analyzes Rand's view of the function of art before he considers her ideas on the role of philosophy, and prior to his discussion of Rand's ethical and political thought. The sequence contributes to a more solidly integrated view of Rand's philosophic system, and of the crucial role she regards art as playing in human experience.

Sciabarra offers a cogent summary of the principles of Rand's theory of art. Stressing her focus on the conceptual nature of art, he explains her view of art's role in concretizing important abstractions about life and reality. Comparing her ideas to those of thinkers such as Hayek and Polanyi, Sciabarra is particularly attentive to the insight Rand offers into the way art serves to articulate the tacit levels of human consciousness. Moreover, he emphasizes that, while Rand acknowledged that culture influences artists, she "did not posit strict cultural determinism" (206). He also summarizes her view of the *indirect* process of communication effected between artist and responder through the work of art—though his understanding of that process is not sufficiently reflected in his later discussion of the function of art in society. In that discussion, he illuminates Rand's view of the way in which art functions on a social as well as a personal level, becoming a vehicle by which many of the implicit values of a culture are transmitted (254–55). But in diagramming the channels through which ideas filter through the culture, Sciabarra groups artists with journalists, under "Communications media" (358)—a grouping that seems to contradict his correct prior explication of Rand's view of the function of art and of the indirect nature of artistic "communication."<sup>63</sup>

The rightful position of Rand's philosophy of art in the hierarchy

of her thought is only partly reflected in Sciabarra's Introduction. He correctly notes that, since "each branch and principle depend[s] on [its] antecedents, one must first enter the lofty domain of metaphysics and work methodically toward Rand's epistemology, . . . aesthetics, ethics, and politics" (11). But he also accepts as valid the following "relational structure" (which he characterizes as prevalent in the work of her followers and detractors alike): "the law of identity, . . . epistemological realism, ethical egoism, [an] individualist-libertarian-capitalist social philosophy, and a 'Romantic-Realist' literary credo" (10).<sup>64</sup> The error of his subsequent reference to these items as "branches" of Objectivism is compounded by the fact that—whereas the other items do epitomize the content, respectively, of Rand's metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics—her "Romantic-Realist' literary *credo*" (emphasis ours) does not constitute even a part of her philosophy of art.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, in this relational structure, contrary to Sciabarra's appropriate emphasis elsewhere in his book (as well as in his article on Rand for Scribner's *American Writers* series, revised as a separate monograph in 1999), Rand's ideas on art are relegated to the last position, rather than preceding ethics and politics.

Sciabarra's stated purpose is "*not* to demonstrate either the validity or the falsity of Rand's ideas" but, rather, "to shed light on her philosophy by examining the context in which it was both formulated and developed." Like Kelley (and unlike Peikoff), he regards Rand's philosophy of Objectivism as an open-ended system of ideas whose full implications continue to be explored and developed by thinkers she influenced. Thus, his book "is as much an analysis of the tradition that Rand's philosophy has sparked as it is of the ideas she herself has expressed" (7).

With respect to art and aesthetics, however, Sciabarra occasionally fails to apply the critical discretion he exhibits regarding other aspects of Rand's thought. Some of his re-statements of Rand's principles are misleading, as when he explains that artists, under the guidance of their sense of life, "*automatically* isolate and integrate those aspects of reality which epitomize their unique views of the world" (205, emphasis ours)—a proposition suggesting, however inadvertently, that conscious choice is not involved in the creative process.

Of greater concern are the instances in which Sciabarra simply reports dubious propositions of Rand's, without noting published arguments challenging their validity. Most troubling is his inclusion of Rand's proposition (disseminated in an early lecture by Nathaniel Branden) that an artist's aesthetic choices and one's responses to art are tantamount to a "psychological confession" (206). Since this is one of her more infelicitous claims, it is surprising that Sciabarra does not cite Branden's later view regarding the psychologically damaging connotations of such terms as "confession" in that context, though in other chapters he is careful to point out criticisms by Branden and others of Rand's often inadequate views on psychology.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Sciabarra cites without qualification Rand's claim that an artist's subject reveals his metaphysics while his style reveals his psycho-epistemology (206)—categorical propositions whose validity is doubtful (as we suggested in our 1991–92 monograph and argue further in *What Art Is*).<sup>67</sup>

Throughout his study, Sciabarra emphasizes the profoundly integrative character of Rand's philosophic thought—a tendency he persuasively traces to the dialectical thrust of Russian intellectual life in the culture of her youth. Our specific objections notwithstanding, his recognition that her aesthetic theory occupies a key position in the totality of her thought is a significant step toward redressing its critical and scholarly neglect.

### **Recent Studies**

Like most earlier studies, recent books and articles on Rand's philosophic thought have tended to give short shrift to her aesthetics, while perpetuating many of the questionable emphases and interpretations we have noted above.<sup>68</sup> Allan Gotthelf's *On Ayn Rand*, for example, devotes barely a page and a half to "Esthetics: a brief look" (2000, 92–93), in a chapter entitled "Virtue, Self and Others (with a brief look at Politics and Esthetics)."<sup>69</sup> He begins by emphasizing the "*philosophical*" content and function of art, and he further claims that, notwithstanding the subconscious nature of *sense of life* as defined by Rand, art "remains a rational [enterprise], since one's sense of life is

the product of one's philosophic conclusions (as all emotions are)." Gotthelf thereby implies that one's sense of life is always directly dependent on a philosophy, whereas Rand clearly (and correctly) maintained that it is formed prior to an articulated philosophy and, for many individuals, continues to function in place of such an explicit system of thought (1975, 25–29). Finally, Gotthelf uncritically accepts Rand's definition of "romantic art" in terms of (as he puts it) "the implicit or explicit acceptance of man's free will." We have already noted the inadequacies of such a definition.

Tibor Machan's even briefer summary (less than one page) of Rand's aesthetics—tellingly entitled "A Romantic Realist"—omits her crucial analysis of the cognitive function of art, and focuses instead on her "substantive literary aesthetics," which he characterizes as "a bold romanticism with a realist rational basis to it" (1999, 24). In further stressing that aesthetics is a "normative discipline, seeking . . . standards of artistic excellence," he echoes traditional theorists rather than Rand, for whom this was (as we have noted above) not a primary concern. While she would have agreed with Machan's proposition that aesthetic "standards of excellence have to be established by reference to human nature and human [flourishing]" (25), she did not conceive such excellence merely in terms of "beauty," as Machan seems to suggest, again reflecting traditional aesthetic views.<sup>70</sup>

In a recent article in this journal, Kirsti Minsaas (2000) offers an often astute analysis of the role of tragedy in Rand's fiction, yet makes the all-too-common mistake of equating Rand's avowed preference for life-affirming art with her view of the function of art per se. Claiming that, for Rand, only the kind of work "that holds up a positive image of life" can fulfill art's psychological function, she repeatedly cites Rand's proposition (1975, 38) that art offers the "life-giving fact of experiencing a moment of *metaphysical* joy—a moment of love for existence." Minsaas ignores that Rand is thereby characterizing what she considers to be a "rational man's"<sup>71</sup> experience of art, and that she clearly stated in a preceding passage that the function of art is "confirmation of [man's] view of existence"—*whatever that view may be*—"in the sense of permitting him to contemplate his

abstractions outside his own mind, in the form of existential concretes” (1975, 38).

Roger Bissell’s analysis of music and perceptual cognition, in the premier issue of this journal, makes a valuable contribution to the refinement of Rand’s aesthetic theory by pointing out a crucial error in her account of the nature of musical perception, an error which prompted her to view the experience of music as more unlike the other arts than it actually is. In pressing the analogy between music and literature, however, Bissell goes much too far in equating the “purposefulness or goal directedness in music” with the progression of events in a plot—in particular, with “the presence of teleology or goal-directedness in Romantic literature” emphasized by Rand (Bissell 1999, 60). While the “events” in a work of music do have a certain internal logic and coherence, their progression seems much more like an organic evolution than a “goal-directed” movement, which implies anticipation by the composer (and, potentially, by the ordinary listener) of a particular end from the outset of the piece. Bissell’s view is perhaps one of the many instances, widespread in the field of aesthetics, in which the attempt to preserve the unity of the arts tends to blur their diversity. The analogy between melodic movement in music and plot in literature should not be pressed too far, just as the moral content of some literature should not be generalized to all works of art. Finally, while Bissell argues for music’s similarity to literature in its “goal-directedness,” he seems to echo Rand’s mistaken notion that music differs essentially from the other arts in that its value lies primarily in the *process* of cognitive integration it affords, rather than in the product of that integration.<sup>72</sup>

Departing even farther from Rand’s aesthetic theory than Peikoff and Machan do on the issue of *beauty*, Barry Vacker (1999) regards it as the primary concern of aesthetics, and attempts to weave an original and complex theory of its relation to culture. In his usage, the term *aesthetics* appears to refer not to the *philosophy of art*, as Rand understood it, but to *theories of beauty*, and also to the *experience of beauty*, though he never defines his key terms.<sup>73</sup> He argues (mistakenly, in our view) that Rand’s aesthetic theory “does not present a complete philosophy of fine art,” since it “stresses the moral-psychological

processes in creating and valuing art [and] present[s] no broad philosophy of beauty or aesthetics in which fine art resides” (152 n. 1).<sup>74</sup> Focusing instead on what he terms her “cultural aesthetics,” Vacker claims that, in her novel *The Fountainhead*, she “suggests a humane aesthetic in harmony with the new nonlinear worldview of the emerging Information Age, what futurist Alvin Toffler . . . refers to as “The Third Wave”” (116).<sup>75</sup>

Much of Vacker’s argument (which is difficult to follow, owing in part to often impenetrable prose and confusing terminology) depends on analogies between recent “chaos theory” and Rand’s descriptions of Howard Roark’s architecture in *The Fountainhead*—descriptions from which Vacker draws dubious inferences to support his broad thesis. In contrast with the earlier, “Second Wave” culture of the Industrial Age, he (apparently echoing Toffler’s view) characterizes the “Third Wave” in terms of “nonlinearity . . . , turbulence, . . . and, *above all, chaos*” (122, emphasis ours). Moreover, he suggests that in the not-too-distant future “new forms of art . . . will emerge to replace the technologically outmoded forms” of the past several centuries (120–21), and that they will reflect this Third Wave aesthos. Vacker thus ignores a fundamental principle of Rand’s aesthetic theory: that “all the arts were born in prehistoric times, and . . . man can never develop a new form of art,” since the “forms of art do not depend on the *content* of man’s consciousness, but on its *nature*—not on the extent of man’s knowledge, but on the means by which he acquires it” (1975, 73).<sup>76</sup> The chaotic, nonlinear “Third Wave aesthos” Vacker envisions sounds to us like nothing more than the postmodernist tendencies in all the art forms that we have traced in *What Art Is*—from the “music” of John Cage to the chance-based “choreography” of Merce Cunningham and the so-called poetry of John Ashbery.<sup>77</sup> According to Rand’s view, such work, which deliberately flouts the requirements of human cognition, is the very antithesis of art, and constitutes a lamentable degradation of culture—not a laudable development, as Vacker implies.

Finally, Vacker (like Thomas and Kelley) misleadingly implies that all art serves to guide man’s actions. He argues that, for Rand, “the beautiful” (presumably including the beauty he claims is inherent in

all works of art) “is not a sterile object of aesthetic contemplation; *it is the guide and end for virtuous action*” (132, emphasis ours). On the contrary, Rand in fact argued that art “serves no purpose other than contemplation” (1975, 16)—though it is true that she did not regard it as a “sterile” object. While some works of literature may serve as a “guide to virtuous action” or a moral ideal, to some degree, or may even be written with an intent to “transform the world” (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for example), such functions, as we have already noted, are by no means characteristic of all art, or even of all literature.

## Conclusion

In our survey of the scant critical literature on Rand’s philosophy of art, we have focused on omissions, distortions, misinterpretations, and errors of fact that have plagued it from the start. We trust that our remarks here, coupled with the analysis we offer in *What Art Is*, will stimulate further consideration of, and debate on, Rand’s philosophy of art by the writers we have cited and by other critics and scholars. In time, we fully expect, her aesthetic theory will gain its rightful place in the standard literature on the subject and in the culture at large.

## Notes

1. Though less broad in its influence to date than her thought on ethics and politics, Rand’s theory of knowledge has inspired at least one book-length study in epistemology—David Kelley’s *Evidence of the Senses*. It is also the subject of several essays in Den Uyl and Rasmussen, *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*.

2. Our discussion here is a much-expanded version of a section of our earlier monograph on Ayn Rand’s philosophy of art (Torres and Kamhi 1991–92).

3. The spelling of the term “aesthetics” throughout our article follows the preference of the editors of this journal. Ironically, Rand herself adopted the alternative spelling, *esthetics*—which we have long preferred, and which we use in the title and text of *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand*. Though “ae” is more common in academia than “e,” the latter has been used by such eminent scholars as the classicist Rhys Carpenter (*The Esthetic Basis of Greek Art*, 1959), and continues to be employed in the contemporary literature.

4. Rand presented the core of her philosophy of art in the following four essays: “The Psycho-Epistemology of Art,” first published in *The Objectivist Newsletter* (April 1965); “Philosophy and Sense of Life,” *The Objectivist* (February 1966); “Art and Sense of Life,” *The Objectivist* (March 1966); and “Art and Cognition,” *The Objectivist* (April–June 1971). The first three essays were reprinted as chapters 1–3 of the first

edition of *The Romantic Manifesto* (1969); “Art and Cognition” was added only to the revised edition of that volume in 1975.

5. The anonymous *Kirkus* reviewer (1969) began by quoting Rand and then added a snidely superficial comment. “One does not have to agree with an artist (nor even to enjoy him) in order to evaluate his work. In essence, an objective evaluation requires that one identify the artist’s theme.’ True enough, but this is very difficult to do when, in the early chapters, Miss Rand is writing on the ‘Psycho-Epistemology of Art’ or ‘Art and Sense of Life’ (‘A sense of life is a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence.’) If she lost you there, you’ll find her only too easy to follow when writing about romanticism, romantic art, and the basic principles of literature.”

6. As we have noted (Torres and Kamhi 2000, 354 n. 9), Rand’s knowledge of, and interest in, poetry was very limited. In any case, her definition of Romanticism in terms of “the recognition of the principle that man possesses the faculty of volition” is applicable only to fiction and drama, not to most poetry (31–32).

7. On Rand’s deep loathing for Russian culture, see B. Branden 1986, 23.

8. For a survey of the blatant distortions and misinterpretations of Rand’s fiction and nonfiction by left-leaning critics and reviewers, see Greenwood (1974), who also noted the instance we cite from Michelson’s review.

9. See our discussion of Rand’s concept of Romanticism in Torres and Kamhi 2000, 31–33.

10. The chapters of *The Romantic Manifesto* that deal with Romanticism are: “What Is Romanticism?”; three essays on popular culture (“The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age,” “Bootleg Romanticism,” and “Art and Moral Treason”); Rand’s “Introduction to [Victor Hugo’s] *Ninety-Three*”; and her personal credo as a “Romantic Realist” novelist, “The Goal of My Writing.”

11. The copy on the jacket flap continued with a brief summary of “The Psycho-Epistemology of Art” and “Art and Sense of Life,” before noting, on the back flap, that a “major part” of the book deals with Rand’s philosophy of literature. No mention was made of a “manifesto.”

12. Francis Sparshott, for example, alluding to brief excerpts from the beginning of “Art and Sense of Life” (including Rand’s reference to the hypothetical painting of a beautiful woman with a cold sore), complained of a style “more notable for [its] zeal than for its sensitivity” (1983, 335). One can only imagine what his reaction might have been to the far cruder passages we have quoted here. In another context, Sidney Hook (1961, 28) faulted Rand for her lack of “civility.” “The language of reason does not justify references to [those] with whom one disagrees as ‘frantic cowards,’ or to philosophers as ‘intellectual hoodlums who pose as professors,” wrote Hook. Nonetheless, as Randall Dipert (1985, 61–62) has emphasized, though other serious thinkers have exhibited far more objectionable personal qualities than Rand, their quirks have not diminished the serious attention devoted to their ideas.

13. Roger Bissell, too, confuses Rand’s philosophy of art with her literary aesthetic when he states that “Objectivism champions . . . romantic art” (1996, 82, emphasis ours).

14. Gladstein's account of *The Romantic Manifesto* in *The New Ayn Rand Companion* is identical to that in the earlier edition (1984, 76–77). Her reference to “images” unwittingly excludes music, which does not “provide” them, though it often *evokes* them. See Torres and Kamhi 2000, 79–82.

15. John Hospers reports that he offered to write an essay on Rand's aesthetics for *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*, but that it never materialized, both because he could not meet the publication schedule and because the editors “did not think it very important” at the time. Letter to *Aristos*, August 1993, 4. Since the publication of our critical introduction to Rand's philosophy of art in *Aristos* (Torres and Kamhi 1991–92), however, both Den Uyl and Rasmussen have acknowledged their oversight and have generously encouraged our efforts to redress the neglect. See Den Uyl, letter to *Aristos*, August 1993, 4.

16. By the time he met Rand, Hospers had already published numerous articles on aesthetics in professional journals—as well as *Meaning and Truth in the Arts*, a work Rasmussen notes is “considered a classic” in the field (1988, 7).

17. Regarding the neglect of Rand's aesthetics in the philosophic journals he edited, Hospers writes: “I would have loved to publish some articles . . . in *The Personalist* and *The Monist*, but none were ever submitted. Apparently there was very little interest in it, although I threw out some feelers” (1993, 4). For Hospers's reasons for not writing on Rand's work himself, see above, n. 15; and below, n. 25.

18. Rand's presentation at the American Society for Aesthetics ended her friendship with Hospers. At her request, he had been the session's official “commentator.” He reports that, following mildly critical remarks he made at the end of her talk, Rand “lashed out savagely” at him and subsequently broke off all contact (1990b, 52). See also B. Branden 1986, 324.

19. Hospers writes, in part: “Art ‘tells us something’ about the artist by communicating to us the artist's sense of life” (1982, 256).

20. Surprisingly, Hospers cites the first paperback edition (1971) of *The Romantic Manifesto*—not the revised edition (1975) containing “Art and Cognition,” in which Rand treats music at some length. (For our discussion of music as an expression of the artist's sense of life, see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 86–87.) Hospers's vague allusion to “some kinds of art, such as music” also raises the question of what other art (or non-art) forms he had in mind. In any case, as Rand clearly implied, if a work does not express (or project) a sense of life, it cannot be art.

21. Referring to a talk on aesthetics that Rand gave (as part of Nathaniel Branden's lecture series on Objectivism at the Nathaniel Branden Institute), Hospers relates that, despite his “general agreement,” he found “a lot to criticize” in her remarks. He does not specify what those points were. But he clearly disagreed with her criticism of certain artists—“I did not like to see Picasso and Faulkner (to take just two examples) relegated to the scrap-heap. . . . We [also] came to loggerheads on Tolstoy” (1990a, 24).

22. In a lengthy article in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Hospers (1967, 52) refers to one way of defining art as a “re-creation of reality,” but does not cite Rand.

23. Philosophic discussions between Rand and Hospers continued by letter when he was away from New York. Rand's portion of their correspondence occupies an entire chapter (sixty pages) of her published letters, and is devoted almost exclusively to issues of epistemology and ethics. Her only substantive remarks on art

appear in an early letter, and pertain to a paper Hospers had written and sent her entitled "Art and Emotion." After admiring the "clarity and precision" and "orderly rationality" of his analysis—which she refers to as his "psychological epistemology" (the term had not yet been contracted to "psycho-epistemology")—Rand comments on his theory of art: "Am I correct in gathering that you suggest that a clue to the emotional meaning of art may be found in a parallel between the physical form of an art work and man's physical states? If so, then man's mental processes in responding to an artwork would be purely perceptual and associational, rather than conceptual and logical. (The equation of horizontal lines with security, in the example you give, is associational.) If this is true, then how would your theory apply to literature?" Rand then urges him to read "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age," the text of a radio talk she gave, and adds: "It presents (. . . briefly) the essence of my theory of art." Letter to Hospers, 29 August 1960 (Rand 1995, 507). That essay, which was reprinted in *The Romantic Manifesto*, actually champions Romanticism over Naturalism in literature, however, and only mentions, in passing, Rand's view of art as the "concretizer of man's widest [metaphysical] abstractions," while her main focus is on a critique of "modern philosophy and modern art" (1975, 127). On Rand and Hospers, see also n. 25, below.

24. Regarding the influence of linguistic analysis on contemporary art theory, see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 95, 299, 372–73 n. 12.

25. Offering poignant testimony that Rand's personality tended to consign her philosophy to an intellectual limbo, Hospers writes: "I am sure that my final and totally upsetting experience with Ayn at the Aesthetics Society [see above, n. 18] traumatized me. . . . I never wrote on her theory further. . . . I felt that, if I wrote on her aesthetics, and made one small misrepresentation or misunderstanding, or got something that was (in their opinion) wrong, I would be flayed alive by her ardent supporters, even while my colleagues would say that I was wasting my energy (as they thought that fateful October evening in 1962 when she spoke at the American Society for Aesthetics in Boston)." He adds: "Yes, there were fundamental epistemological differences between us" (1993, 4). On these issues, see also Hospers 1998a and 1998b.

Regarding the break between Hospers and Rand, Rasmussen judiciously observes: "[It] was tragic—tragic for Hospers because Rand was a thinker whose broad brush strokes could assist him in developing an integrated world view and tragic for Rand because Hospers' probing, wonderfully detailed strokes were just the sort of thing anyone who attempts grand syntheses should face" (1988, 6).

26. Although early aesthetic theorists were concerned mainly with matters of taste and quality in art, Rand's emphasis (with which we agree) was certainly not without precedents. The Russian literary critic and theorist V. G. Belinsky (1811–48), for example, wrote: "The task of true aesthetics is not to decide what art should be, but to define *what art is*" (quoted in Plekhanov [1910] 1980, 512, emphasis ours). Similarly, the French literary historian and critic Hippolyte Taine (1828–93) argued that "aesthetics . . . treats with sympathy all forms of art and all schools, even those which seem most opposite: it considers them to be different manifestations of the human spirit" (quoted *ibid.*, 513). For additional similarities between Rand's thought and that of Taine, see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 38, 338 n. 33, and 342 n. 14. We are indebted to George Kline for generously providing information on Plekhanov's

references to Taine and to Belinsky.

27. Yet Rand also makes clear that, in judgments of the *ultimate* value of a given work of *literature*, one may reasonably apply an ethical standard. See Torres and Kamhi 2000, 58–59; also n. 42, below; and Peikoff 1991, 448.

28. On this error, see our discussion in Torres and Kamhi 2000, 31–33.

29. In “Art and Sense of Life,” Rand states: “The esthetic principles which apply to all art . . . , and which must guide an objective evaluation, are outside the scope of this discussion. I will mention only that such principles are defined by the science of esthetics” ([1969] 1971, 42–43). We do not take her to mean that her essay is itself outside the realm of aesthetics (as she seems to imply) but, rather, that it is an aspect of aesthetics that she chooses not to deal with.

30. The inability of an artist to betray his own sense of life is the theme of Rand’s short story “The Simplest Thing in the World.” See our discussion under “‘Communication’ in Art” in Torres and Kamhi 2000, 45–47.

31. For our argument that music does re-create reality, see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 87–91.

32. On Rand’s view of the decorative arts, see “Art and Cognition” (1975, 74–75); and our discussion in Torres and Kamhi 2000, 202–3.

33. In his textbook on logic, David Kelley notes that “the essential attribute of a man-made object is *usually* its function[, which] . . . explains why [it] is designed the way it [is]” (1988, 21, emphasis ours). With regard to the rules of definition, Kelley states that “the differentia should name the most essential attributes that are fairly well understood” (47). In the case of man-made objects and institutions, he recommends (but does not cite as a requirement) that the defining attribute be their “basic function” (40).

34. Merrill’s term “process” is inappropriate. “Activity” would be more apt.

35. Regarding Merrill’s view that our denial of his claim (that art serves to “induce” an emotional response) implies a mind-body dichotomy, see his letter (1993, 5); and our reply (1993, 6). As we argue there, art *evokes* (rather than “induces”) an emotional sense of life only when the perceiver’s sense of life is consonant with the fundamental values projected by the artist. To quote E. M. Forster: “The Arts are not drugs. They are not guaranteed to act when taken” (cited by Oliver Sacks [1973] 1990, 283). (Sadly, Merrill’s premature death in 1998 has cut off the possibility of further dialogue between us on these and other issues.)

36. As Kelley notes in his Introduction, *Truth and Toleration* was written in response to Peikoff’s “Fact and Value,” which argues that Objectivism is a closed system of ideas and that the Objectivist movement should exclude those who do not accept the philosophy in its entirety.

37. It is surprising that Kelley omitted Rand’s epistemology in this context, given the value he has placed on Rand’s views on the subject in his writing and lecturing.

38. Kelley’s classification departs not only from Rand’s but also from that adopted in the 1970’s by the American Philosophical Association’s Eastern Division, which considers “metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and logic” (the last of which branches Rand would have classified as a subcategory of epistemology) to be the “traditional divisions,” or branches, of philosophy. In addition, the following are

considered “special fields”: philosophy of language, philosophy of law, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, philosophy of mathematics, and philosophy of religion. “Politics” is not listed as a branch; instead, “social and political philosophy” is included under the special fields. See the first issue each year of the APA’s *Proceedings and Addresses*. Neither the APA Eastern Division nor any other source, to our knowledge, cites the “philosophy of love” or the “philosophy of friendship,” even as lesser fields; but all the sources we have consulted consider aesthetics to be a major branch.

39. Kelley, letter to the authors, 21 March 1994. For an indication of Kelley’s low estimation of Rand’s definition of art, see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 376 n. 37.

40. In his prefatory note to *The Evidence of the Senses*, Kelley acknowledges Rand as the philosopher having the greatest influence on his thinking on the subject, and notes his conviction that her theory of knowledge “represents a profound, and profoundly important, alternative to traditional theories.” Yet he does not appear to recognize the crucial nexus between Rand’s epistemology and her view of the cognitive function of art.

41. An article in the Objectivist Center’s journal about the Center’s then forthcoming summer seminar noted, for example, that “the intellectual feast comprises more than just philosophy offerings. . . . Each afternoon offers a smorgasbord of sessions on aesthetics, performance, and physical and mental fitness” (*Navigator*, March 2000, 3).

42. Like many other Objectivist writers, Thomas and Kelley claim that the artist, unlike the historian, represents the world “as it might be and *ought* to be” (18, emphasis ours)—an unthinking echo (and extension) of Rand’s misquotation of Aristotle *Poetics* 9, which we discuss later in this paper, under “Peikoff’s Summation.”

43. Thomas and Kelley misquote Rand’s “a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments” as “*the selective recreation of reality in accordance with the artist’s metaphysical value-judgments*” (18, emphasis ours). In addition, they cite “Art and Cognition” as the source for Rand’s definition, rather than “The Psycho-Epistemology of Art,” in which it originally appeared.

44. See, for example, Rand’s observation that “in mankind’s history, art began as an adjunct (and, often, a monopoly) of religion. . . . [T]he art of those primitive cultures was a concretization of their religion’s metaphysical and ethical abstractions” (1975, 20).

45. On the distinction between *philosophy* and *sense of life*, see our further comments under “Peikoff’s Summation.”

46. Thomas and Kelley (1999, 18) argue: “If philosophy is to guide man’s actions, the truth of its principles must be experienced as real.” See also Item 2 of their diagram.

47. Peikoff states: “where no reference is given, the material in all likelihood is taken from the lengthy philosophic discussions that I had with Miss Rand across a period of decades” (1991, xiv). But he does not indicate whether such material was documented in any way or, rather, depends entirely on his recollection.

48. In holding that aesthetics “rests on the three basic branches of philosophy,” Peikoff echoes Rand’s statement: “The fifth and last branch of philosophy is *aesthetics*, the study of art, which is based on metaphysics, epistemology,

and ethics” ([1982] 1984, 4). But Rand never substantiated the dependence of aesthetics on ethics; to the contrary, the basic principles of her theory of art indicate that only metaphysics and epistemology, not ethics, are fundamental to aesthetics. According to Rand’s theory, moral principles figure in the content of some art (namely, literature, or works in other art forms based on or alluding to literary texts), not in the very nature of all art. They may also pertain to the ultimate evaluation of art works. Rand appears to consider such evaluation as belonging to a different level of philosophic inquiry, however, beyond the realm of “purely esthetic appraisal.” See “Art and Sense of Life” ([1969] 1971, 42); also our discussion under “Esthetic Judgment” in Torres and Kamhi 2000, 57–59.

49. Rand asserts, for example, that “the father of modern art is Immanuel Kant (see his *Critique of Judgment*)” (1975, 77). Instead of pointing out which of Kant’s propositions lend credence to Rand’s claim (which is certainly not without foundation), Peikoff simply declares: “The fact that esthetics is a consequence of an entire philosophy is most obvious in the systems of Aristotle and Kant. Aristotle may be regarded as the father of Romanticism. His epistemological antipode, Kant, is the father of modern art (see Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*)” (1991, 449). Thus, the poor reader who would like to know just *how* Kant’s ideas led to modern art is left by Peikoff to plow through the countless pages of Kant’s dense prose on his own. In addition, Peikoff’s accompanying assertion, regarding Aristotle and Romanticism, is preposterously ahistorical.

50. It is telling that nearly half of Peikoff’s sixty-four endnotes to his chapter on aesthetics cite Rand’s essays on literature, rather than those on her theory of art.

51. Peikoff also asserts, however, that “all art works involve some moral content” (1991, 421), and he claims that the “model-building” function of literature can be “supplemented by the other arts” (420), though he supports neither claim. (See also his statement, in a 1987 lecture: “According to the Objectivist esthetics, a crucial purpose of art is to depict man as he might be and ought to be” [(1987) 1988, 353]). In any case, if the “model-building” function is neither “universal” nor “primary,” as he argues, it is not fundamental to the philosophy of art. See our discussion under “Art and Ethics” in Torres and Kamhi 2000, 30–31.

52. “It is by the standards of . . . truth and mastery combined,” Peikoff declares, “that Ayn Rand evaluates Romanticism . . . as being, *objectively*, the greatest achievement in art history” (1991, 449)—a proposition that both misuses the term “art history” (which normally refers to the visual arts) and gives disconcertingly short shrift to the artistic accomplishments of other periods, such as classical antiquity and the Renaissance.

53. For instances (and echoes) of Rand’s misquotation of Aristotle, see Rand 1958, lecture 1; Rand 1964, 40; Rand 1975, 80 and 168; N. Branden 1962, 87; B. Branden 1986, 12; Merrill 1991, 124; and Thomas and Kelley 1999, 18. Stephen Cox pointed out Rand’s misquotation as early as 1986.

54. Ironically, in a subsequent passage (1991, 443), Peikoff himself emphasizes Rand’s proper view that an artist need not depict only the good or the ideal.

55. The principles for evaluating art summarized by Peikoff are by no means original to Rand. In contrast with other twentieth-century theorists, however, Rand integrates them into a coherent view of art, and is more consistent in rejecting any breach of them with respect to contemporary work.

56. Rand states, in part: "The subject is not the only attribute of art, but it is . . . the end to which all the others are the means" ("The Goal of My Writing," [1963] in Rand 1975, 166). Contrary to Peikoff's claim that she is not speaking "as a philosopher" here, she once asserted: "I never think or speak of anything except as a philosopher." Letter to John Hospers, 17 April 1960 (1995, 506). Though Rand's declaration is somewhat exaggerated, there is no doubt that in the instance at issue here she was indeed speaking as a philosopher.

57. While we agree with Peikoff that, in Rand's view, a work of art must be intelligible, he overstates the case when he categorically insists that every art work must be "fully intelligible" (Peikoff 1991, 444). Allowance must be made for the fact that works of art employ expressive or depictive conventions that vary widely from culture to culture. Moreover, as Rand herself recognized, individuals within a given culture vary widely in their capacity to grasp the meaning of works of art, especially those of some complexity and subtlety. (On this point, see, for example, Rand's letter to film producer Kenneth MacGowan, 18 May 1934 [1995, 6–9].) Finally, it is doubtful that even the most sensitive and intelligent responder "fully" comprehends every work. Since art deals with fundamental human concerns, however, and since human beings share a basic core of psychological characteristics and life experiences, *some* meaning should be universally intelligible in *any* work of art—especially in a work from one's own cultural milieu—without (and we cannot stress this enough) the need for "expert" interpretation.

58. Though the terms are often taken to be synonymous, I much prefer *non-art* (meaning "not art") to *anti-art*, which can imply "against art."—*L.T.*

59. Peikoff (1991, 446) is correct to highlight Rand's emphasis on integration as a basic principle of art, but he exaggerates when he claims that *anything* "insignificant," or *any* "irrelevancy," produces a "lethal" contradiction. Perfect integration or coherence is rarely achieved in large-scale works of some complexity. Rand's own *Atlas Shrugged* is a good example—in the view of many readers, it is marred by the inclusion of Galt's sixty-four-page speech yet on the whole manages to transcend that flaw. See, for example, Stephen Cox 1986, 23. As Meyer Schapiro observes (1966, 5): "Perfection, completeness, strict consistency are more likely in small works than in large. The greatest artists—Homer, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Tolstoy—present us with works that are full of problematic features." Rand herself criticized Victor Hugo's practice of inserting tangentially related historical essays into his novels, yet argued that "[i]t does not detract from [his] achievement" (1975, 86).

60. The only entry *s.v.* "Beauty" in the *Ayn Rand Lexicon* (Binswanger 1986) is Rand's brief discussion of the concept in answer to a question following Lecture 11 (on aesthetics) of Peikoff's 1976 series.

61. In "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age," for example, Rand cites beauty—and its antithesis, ugliness—as but one of several pairs of contrasted concepts that may be depicted in literature, including the following: prosperity/misery, greatness/mediocrity, success/failure, happiness/suffering, and virtue/vice (1975, 125).

62. Chapter 8, “Art, Philosophy, and Efficacy,” of *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* includes a section entitled “The Function of Art” (204–10), but less than half of Sciabarra’s discussion pertains to art and aesthetics, the remainder being devoted more narrowly to Rand’s views on the role of literature.

63. We emphasized the uniquely indirect mode of communication in art in Torres and Kamhi 1991–92; and in a letter to the editor, *Full Context*, December 1995, 10.

64. Compare Rand’s characterization of the essentials of her philosophy as “in metaphysics, *the Law of Identity*—in epistemology, *the supremacy of reason*—in ethics, *rational egoism*—in politics, *individual rights* (i.e., capitalism)—[and] in esthetics, *metaphysical values*.” “Philosophical Detection” (1974), in Rand [1982] 1984, 22.

65. To our knowledge, none of Rand’s other commentators whom we have cited in this chapter, whether admirers or detractors, has equated the content of her aesthetics with her “literary credo,” although (as we have noted) they have often followed her unfortunate practice of referring to “art” when “literature” would be more precise.

66. Regarding the error of some of Rand’s views on the psychology of art, see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 56–57.

67. On the questionable validity of Rand’s claims regarding subject and style in art, see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 51–57.

68. While all of the studies we cite in this section appeared before *What Art Is*, and therefore could not have considered it, many of them were published after our 1991–92 monograph. Yet few of these writers mention that work, and none of them (with the exception of Sciabarra) appears to have taken the arguments offered there into consideration.

69. Gotthelf’s relegation of Rand’s aesthetics (as well as her politics) to such a catch-all chapter is all the more astounding when one considers that he devotes two entire chapters to her metaphysics—a subject which Rand, in effect, reduced to a few axioms.

70. On the issue of beauty in defining art, see our comments above, under “Peikoff’s Summation”; and Torres and Kamhi 2000, 95, 204, 353 n. 2, and 372 n. 8.

71. Rand surely meant this term generically, as applying to all human beings, both male and female, contrary to Diana Mertz Brickell’s implication (in Gladstein and Sciabarra 1999, 319) that only males were intended by the phrase in Rand’s ethical writings. We, too, use the term “man” in this generic sense, as do such eminent scholars as Jacques Barzun.

72. Bissell concludes: “I would reformulate Rand’s assertion about musical value as follows: music offers us the opportunity to reenact, solely within the *perceptual* field of hearing, the higher-order, volitional process of integrating percepts and concepts into an intelligible, complex *conceptual* hierarchy” (1999, 77).

73. Beauty, for Vacker, is ubiquitous and, though he never defines it, he assigns to it a host of complex functions. In one of his more baffling passages, he writes: “The aesthetics of concept formation are deeply embedded in our thinking processes, guiding our valuations of the world around us and creating a deep cognitive need to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ such abstractions in varieties of physical forms and experiences. The aesthetics of concept formation give rise not only to the need for art, but also to the need for seeing beauty in nature, culture, and life. Scientific

discovery[, too,] is motivated by the pursuit of beauty” (1999, 144, emphasis ours).

74. What Vacker regards as a deficiency of Rand's aesthetic theory we view as one of its main virtues. As we have argued, Rand's emphasis on the cognitive function of art constitutes a significant advance over traditional theories of fine art, which were mistaken in regarding beauty as a defining attribute. See Torres and Kamhi 2000, 95, 204, 353 n. 2, and 372 n. 8.

75. While Vacker draws most of his examples of Rand's “nonlinear aesthetic” from the architecture she envisioned in *The Fountainhead*, we have argued that architecture is not an art form and is therefore governed by different principles and criteria from the arts (Torres and Kamhi 2000, chap. 10). In any case, many of the characteristics of Roark's buildings that Vacker associates with the “Third Wave”—among them, “organicity” of form, “harmony” with nature, structural “free growth,” and asymmetry (1999, 146–51)—existed in previous building styles such as the vernacular architecture of the Greek islands, the medieval hill towns, and the Pueblo Indians.

76. See our discussion in Torres and Kamhi 2000, 109–10.

77. On the postmodernists' flouting of the cognitive requirements of art, see Torres and Kamhi 2000, 220–29, 250–52, and chap. 14. Though we did not deal with the “experimental fiction” of writers such as William Gass, or with the computer-based “hyperfiction” championed by Robert Coover, they, too, suggest Vacker's “Third Wave aesthos”—as does the pretentious, disorienting “architecture” of Frank Gehry, which we briefly cited (198–99 and 423–24 n. 45).

## References

- Binswanger, Harry. 1982. Ayn Rand's philosophic achievement. 4 parts. *The Objectivist Forum* (June, August, October, December).
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. 1986. *The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z*. New York: New American Library.
- Bissell, Roger E. 1996. Dialectical Objectivism?: A review of *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*, by Chris M. Sciabarra. *Reason Papers*, no. 21 (Fall): 82–87.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Music and perceptual cognition. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 1, no. 1 (Fall): 61–86.
- Branden, Barbara. 1986. *The Passion of Ayn Rand*. New York: Doubleday.
- Branden, Nathaniel. 1962. The literary method of Ayn Rand. In *Who Is Ayn Rand?* New York: Random House.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1989. *Judgment Day: My Years with Ayn Rand*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Cattani, Richard J. 1970. Ayn Rand and all that: Review of *The Romantic Manifesto*, by Ayn Rand. *Christian Science Monitor* (5 February).
- Clarke, Gordon W. 1972. *The Romantic Manifesto* by Ayn Rand: A review. Bibliophage Reprint. First published in *Magill's Literary Annual, 1972/Masterplots 1992 Annual*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Salem Press, 276–78.
- Cox, Stephen. 1986. Ayn Rand: Theory versus creative life. *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 8: 12–29.
- Den Uyl, Douglas J., and Douglas B. Rasmussen, eds. [1984] 1986. *The Philosophic*

- Thought of Ayn Rand*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Dipert, Randall R. 1985. Taking Ayn Rand seriously: Review of *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*, ed. by Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen. *Reason* (January).
- Edwards, Paul, ed. [1967] 1972. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan.
- Gladstein, Mimi Reisel. 1984. *The Ayn Rand Companion*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. *The New Ayn Rand Companion*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Gladstein, Mimi Reisel, and Chris Matthew Sciabarra, eds. 1999. *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Gotthelf, Allan. 2000. *On Ayn Rand*. Wadsworth Philosophers Series. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Greenwood, Robert. 1974. Ayn Rand and the literary critics. *Reason* (November): 44–50.
- Hook, Sidney. 1961. Each man for himself: Review of *For the New Intellectual*, by Ayn Rand. *New York Times Book Review* (9 April).
- Hospers, John. 1946. *Meaning and Truth in the Arts*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1967. Aesthetics, problems of. In Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1982. *Understanding the Arts*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990a and 1990b. Conversations with Ayn Rand. *Liberty* (July and September).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. Letter to *Aristos*: Readers' forum (August).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998a. Interview. *Full Context* (May).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998b. Memories of Ayn Rand. *Full Context* (May).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998c. Art, philosophy of. In *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia*, 15th ed.
- Hughes, John W. 1970. None dare call it reason: Review of *The Romantic Manifesto*, by Ayn Rand. *The New Leader* (2 March).
- Kelley, David. 1986. *The Evidence of the Senses: A Realist Theory of Perception*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. *The Art of Reasoning*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. *Truth and Toleration*. Poughkeepsie, New York: Institute for Objectivist Studies. For online excerpts from the Introduction and Chapter 5 (including "What is Objectivism?"), see Web Library at <http://www.objectivistcenter.org>.
- Kirkus Reviews*. 1969. Review of *The Romantic Manifesto*, by Ayn Rand (15 September).
- Library Journal*. 1970. Review of *The Romantic Manifesto*, by Ayn Rand (15 February).
- Machan, Tibor R. 1999. *On Ayn Rand*. Masterworks in the Western Tradition, vol. 5. New York: Peter Lang.
- Merrill, Ronald E. 1991. *The Ideas of Ayn Rand*. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. Letter to *Aristos*: Readers' forum (August).
- Michelson, Peter. 1970. Fictive babble. *New Republic* (21 February).
- Minsaas, Kirsti. 2000. The role of tragedy in Ayn Rand's fiction. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 1, no. 2 (Spring): 173–209.
- O'Neill, William F. [1971] 1977. *With Charity Toward None: An Analysis of Ayn Rand's*

- Philosophy*. Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams.
- Peikoff, Leonard. 1976. *The Philosophy of Objectivism*. 12 lectures (audio). Oceanside, California: Second Renaissance Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. [1987] 1988. My thirty years with Ayn Rand: An intellectual memoir. Reprinted in *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought*. New York: New American Library, 334–53.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*. New York: Dutton.
- Plekhanov, Georgi. [1910] 1980. On Belinsky. In *Selected Philosophical Works* [trans. from the Russian], vol. IV. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Publisher's Weekly*. 1969. Review of *The Romantic Manifesto*, by Ayn Rand (6 October).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1970. Review of *The Romantic Manifesto*, by Ayn Rand, rev. ed. (7 December).
- Rand, Ayn. [1958] 1986. *Lectures on Fiction-Writing*. 12 lectures (audiotapes). Oceanside, California: Second Renaissance Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1962. Introducing Objectivism. *The Objectivist Newsletter*, no. 1 (August): 35.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1964. Playboy interview: Ayn Rand—a candid conversation with the fountainhead of “objectivism.” *Playboy* (March): 35–43.
- \_\_\_\_\_. [1969] 1971. *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*. Rev. ed. New York: New American Library (Signet).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1971. *The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*. New York: New American Library (Signet).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1975. *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*. Rev. ed. New York: New American Library (Signet).
- \_\_\_\_\_. [1982] 1984. *Philosophy: Who Needs It*. New York: New American Library (Signet).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995. *Letters of Ayn Rand*. Edited by Michael S. Berliner. New York: Dutton.
- Rasmussen, Douglas B. 1988. John Hospers and the activity of philosophy. In *The Free and Noble Spirit: A Festschrift for John Hospers. Reason Papers*, no. 13 (Spring): 3–7.
- Sacks, Oliver. [1973] 1990. *Awakenings*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Schapiro, Meyer. 1966. On perfection, coherence, and unity of form and content. In *Art and Philosophy: A Symposium*, ed. by Sidney Hook. New York: New York University Press: 3–15.
- Sciabarra, Chris Matthew. 1995. *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. [1996] 1999. *Ayn Rand: Her Life and Thought*. [Poughkeepsie, New York:] The Atlas Society, a division of The Objectivist Center. Revised and expanded from “Ayn Rand,” in *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*, ed. by A. Walton Litz and Molly Weigel, Supplement IV, Part 2. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Sparshott, Francis. 1983. Review of *Understanding the Arts*, by John Hospers. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41: 335–37.
- Thomas, William, and David Kelley. 1999. Why man needs art [excerpted from Chapter 4 of *The Logical Structure of Objectivism*]. *Navigator*, newsletter of The Objectivist Center (July–August). Online version under “Excerpts” in Web Library at <http://www.objectivistcenter.org>.
- Torres, Louis, and Michelle Marder Kamhi. 1991–92. Ayn Rand's philosophy of art: A critical introduction. *Aristos* (January and September 1991, January and

September 1992).

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. Reply to readers' forum on "Ayn Rand's Philosophy of Art." *Aristos*, (August).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Vacker, Barry. 1999. Skyscrapers, supermodels, and strange attractors: Ayn Rand, Naomi Wolf, and the Third Wave aesthos. In Gladstein and Sciabarra 1999, 115–56.