

## Discussion

Reply to The Aesthetics Symposium (Spring 2001)

# What “Rand’s Aesthetics” Is, and Why It Matters<sup>1</sup>

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This is the first of a two-part reply to our Spring 2001 symposium on Ayn Rand’s philosophy of art. In our Fall 2003 issue, we will publish part two, written by Louis Torres.

— The Editors

The Aesthetics Symposium is described in the journal’s table of contents as “[a] discussion of Ayn Rand’s philosophy of art inspired by Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi’s *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand*.” The ten contributors vary widely in the extent to which they deal with either Rand’s theory of art or our book, however. While Lester Hunt and Jeff Riggenbach offer on the whole thoughtful, though not necessarily approving, responses to our analysis and application of Rand’s theory, two of the longest essays—those by John Hospers<sup>2</sup> and Barry Vacker—scarcely touch on Rand’s philosophy of art, much less on our book. David Kelley focuses on two points we raised in “Critical Neglect of Ayn Rand’s Theory of Art” (Kamhi & Torres 2000)—a chapter omitted from the book and subsequently published in this journal.<sup>3</sup> Like Kelley, Roger Bissell deals only with points related to that article, not with the main thesis of our book.<sup>4</sup> Michael Newberry deals exclusively with the application of Rand’s concept of metaphysical value-judgments to the interpretation of paintings. Gene Bell-Villada appears to deal with the substance of our book—in particular, with our application of Rand’s theory in Part II—but he so often ignores or misconstrues our point that it is

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difficult to recognize ourselves in much of his account. Following a long aside on what he regards as Rand's shortcomings as a novelist, Randall Dipert offers some thought-provoking reflections on our account of her analysis of the nature of music. Finally, both Vacker and John Enright assume that Rand's aesthetics can be gleaned primarily from her fiction; they therefore make only minimal reference to her philosophic essays on the subject and to our interpretation of them. Vacker's discussion, moreover, centers on aesthetic concepts Rand did not even consider in her essays—"beauty" and "the sublime" as they occur in nature and architecture.

Since this disparity of perspectives reflects, in part, a common confusion about what "aesthetics" comprises, let me begin by briefly restating Rand's view, and placing it in a historical perspective that may serve to highlight its value. I shall then respond to topical issues raised by the contributors.

### **"Rand's Aesthetics": What Is It?**

As Torres and I (hereafter "we") noted in *What Art Is*, Rand ([1974] 1982, 4) defined *esthetics* (her preferred spelling) as "[the branch of philosophy devoted to] the study of art"—not as "the study of beauty and related concepts," the much broader sense in which it has been generally understood" (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 16). As we also pointed out, her usage had significant precedents, which help to illuminate its value. It extended back not only to Hegel, whom we cited, but to the putative "'father' of aesthetics," the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714–62), whom we did not cite.<sup>5</sup> Baumgarten coined the term for a new branch of philosophic inquiry, which he defined broadly as "the science of perception." It was with the nature of perceptual knowledge conveyed *through the arts*, however, that he was exclusively concerned (Cassirer 1969; Davey 1989; [1992] 1995). In fact, the work in which he first used the term *aesthetikē* (from the Greek *aisthētikos*, "perceptible to the senses") was his *Reflections on Poetry* ([1734] 1954, 78; §116). Containing no mention at all of *beauty*, the treatise aimed mainly to persuade his fellow rationalist philosophers that questions of art were as worthy of their attention as the

more abstract spheres of thought with which they had theretofore concerned themselves. In the *Reflections*, Baumgarten proposed a set of principles regarding the perfection of poetic expression. His subsequent work, *Aesthetica* ([1750] 1961), aimed to treat the other arts as well; but references to poetry predominate even there. Further, though Baumgarten recognized that emotion plays an essential role in art, his theory—like Rand’s—is “distinguished by a cognitive emphasis,” to quote the editors of the English edition of the *Reflections* (Baumgarten [1735] 1954, 8). Whereas other rationalist philosophers had disparaged the realm of sensory perception, Baumgarten argued that it was a valuable source of knowledge, complementary to rational conception. Ernst Cassirer (1969, 356) credits him with being “one of the first thinkers to overcome the antagonism between ‘sensationalism’ and ‘rationalism’ and to achieve a new productive synthesis of ‘reason’ and ‘sensibility.’”

Immanuel Kant’s influential *Critique of Judgment* tended to shift the focus of aesthetics to more general questions of beauty and taste, relating them not only to the fine arts but also to other artifacts and to Nature as well. In so doing, he pursued concerns that had occupied British philosophers such as Lord Shaftesbury, Frances Hutcheson, and David Hume. Kant’s most frequently quoted aesthetic dicta—regarding beauty’s “purposiveness without purpose,” its “freedom from a concept,” and the “disinterestedness” of aesthetic judgments—pertain to sections of the *Critique* dealing with beauty and taste in general, not with art per se. As Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer ([1982] 1989, 309–10) have observed, these sections “are directed at objects of nature [not art], and this has made it singularly difficult for contemporary theorists to assimilate Kant’s work, for they have read these passages as if Kant were talking about art. Only very recently has the philosophy of art begun to . . . integrate Kant’s actual insights about art.”

Often overlooked in philosophic discussions of aesthetics has been the fact that in the sections of the *Critique* (43–53) in which Kant deals specifically with the (fine) arts, he observes, in part, that the value of a work depends not simply on its “beauty” but on its presenting what he terms “aesthetical Ideas” ([1790] 1957, 392–94). He seems to

mean by this expression something like *perceptual embodiments of important concepts*—much as Rand ([1965b] 1975, 20) holds that, through the “selective re-creation of reality,” art “brings man’s concepts to the perceptual level of his consciousness and allows him to grasp them directly, as if they were percepts.” In Kant’s words:

by an aesthetical Idea I understand that representation of the Imagination which . . . cannot be completely compassed . . . by language . . . [and] is the counterpart (pendant) of a *rational Idea*. . . . The Imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) is very powerful in creating another nature, as it were, out of the material that actual nature gives it . . . , and by it we remould experience, always in accordance with analogical laws. . . . Such representations of the Imagination we may call *Ideas*, partly because they at least strive after something which lies beyond the bounds of experience, and so seek to approximate to a presentation of concepts of Reason (intellectual Ideas), thus giving to the latter the appearance of objective reality.<sup>6</sup> ([1790] 1957, 426)

Although Kant included both Nature and art in his aesthetic considerations in the *Critique of Judgment*, therefore, it is clear that he viewed the two spheres as governed by somewhat different principles. And contrary to the implications of his propositions regarding beauty in general, his view of art seems to have incorporated a cognitive function similar to that postulated by Baumgarten. Much like Rand, for example, Kant distinguished (§44) between merely “agreeable art” (she called it “decorative”)—which functioned on the level of immediate “sensations”—and “fine art,” which served to stimulate reflective thought. Such crucial distinctions have too often been ignored by both critics and aestheticians. Vacker’s account of Rand’s aesthetics falls into this error.

Though we were unaware of Kant’s cognitive view of art when we wrote *What Art Is*, we noted Hegel’s view emphasizing the philosophic significance of art (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 16; 331 n. 76). In his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel wrote:

These lectures deal with *Aesthetics*. . . . The word . . . in its literal sense is perhaps not quite appropriate here, for it means, strictly speaking, the science of sensation or feeling [i.e., perception]. Yet it is now commonly used in our more specialized sense, and may therefore be permitted to stand. We should bear in mind, however, that a more accurate expression for our science is the “Philosophy of Art,” and better still, the “Philosophy of Fine Art.”<sup>7</sup> ([1823–29] 1979, 1)

As we also noted, Hegel explains that he will not deal with the *beauty of nature*, because “*artistic* beauty stands higher than the beauty of nature”—by which he means, as he explains, that “the beauty of art belongs to mind and . . . mind only is capable of truth. Thus to be *truly* beautiful, a thing must have an element of mind in it and indeed be a product of mind” (1–2). Considered in this light, Hegel argues, art belongs in the same sphere with religion and philosophy (7–8). Rand shares that view, though with a very different emphasis.

Hegel’s concern with the “beauty” of art notwithstanding, what emerges from his aesthetics, as from Baumgarten’s and Kant’s, is the recognition that “fine art,” as a sphere of intentional human activity, carries a special significance, of greater philosophic import than aesthetic considerations of Nature. Rand’s aesthetic theory revives this valuable tradition. At the same time, her account of the cognitive function of art benefits from a sounder grasp of the psychology of perception, cognition, and emotion than was formerly possible.<sup>8</sup> In emphasizing the essential link between art and cognition, moreover, Rand was decades ahead of contemporary aestheticians. After a century of art’s being discussed mainly in terms of “beauty” or “expression,” they have only recently begun to recognize this crucial nexus, following the lead of continental philosophers of hermeneutics such as Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>9</sup> As a prominent member of the American Society for Aesthetics has observed, “human cognition and perception is at its most sophisticated in the cognition and perception of art works, so understanding the art-perceiving mind is a key to understanding human cognition” (Lopes 1999, quoted by Freeland

2001).

Rand's cognitive theory of art is presented in the essays she reprinted as the first four chapters of *The Romantic Manifesto* (second edition). Their main purpose, we argue in *What Art Is*, was not to advocate a particular kind of art, but to analyze the essential nature of art in general: its cognitive function, its relationship to emotion, and the basic forms of expression subsumed by the concept. We thus depart markedly from the tendency of previous writers to regard Rand's aesthetics as primarily advocating "Romantic" values in art. Not surprisingly, several Symposium contributors have taken issue with our view. Roger Bissell (2001, 304) objects that the "whole point" of *The Romantic Manifesto* was to argue for Rand's aesthetic values, namely Romanticism in literature. In so claiming, he confuses the main purpose (more accurately, the main *content*) of the first four essays with the purpose (or content) of the volume as a whole. He ignores that the volume was not written as an integral whole, but was simply a collection of previously published essays on various aspects of art and culture, cobbled together with an Introduction purporting to unite them under the theme of Romanticism (see Kamhi & Torres 2000, 5–7).

Further claiming that Rand "wanted to enable people to make aesthetic . . . judgments on the basis of objective standards," Bissell asserts that we were "simply mistaken" in criticizing (Kamhi & Torres 2000, 13) Ronald Merrill's (1991, 122) suggestion that Rand's aesthetics aimed mainly "to make it possible to make esthetic judgments on the basis of objective standards." In fact, however, Rand ([1966b] 1975, 42–43) explicitly stated that, while she recognized that "the science of esthetics" normally deals, in part, with the "esthetic principles which apply to all art . . . , and which must guide an objective evaluation," she regarded them as "outside the scope of [her] discussion." Though cited by us (Kamhi & Torres 2000, 38 n. 29), this key statement is ignored by Bissell—whose own assertion, unsupported by any textual evidence, runs directly counter to it.

Rand's focus on the essential nature of art, rather than on judgments of taste or quality, is not without significant precedents. As we noted (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 37–38 n. 26): "The Russian literary

critic and theorist V. G. Belinsky (1811–48) . . . 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).” Moreover, in contrast to those who regard “Rand’s aesthetics” as mainly advocating Romanticism, the noted French literary historian and critic Hippolyte Taine (1828–93) judged 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 in Plekhanov [1910] 1980, 513)—as we also noted (Kamhi & Torres 2000, 37–38 n. 26). Of the ten contributors to the Symposium, however, only Riggensbach (2001, 266–67) appears fully to recognize the importance of separating the fundamental content of Rand’s philosophy of art from her ideas on Romanticism—though several contributors concede our claim that those ideas are applicable solely to dramatic and narrative literature, or to those works in other media that are based on a literary text.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, only Riggensbach seems to share our view that the Objectivist emphasis on Rand’s theory of Romanticism has obscured the far wider significance of her philosophy of art.

Just as Rand’s philosophy of art cannot accurately be characterized as “Romantic,” it is certainly not a “libertarian aesthetics”—contrary to Bell-Villada’s implication (2001, 292). It is a universal theory of art, conceived in terms of basic human cognitive and emotional needs, independent of politics.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, we expressly stated in *What Art Is*: “Rand does not argue that in order for [a] work to qualify as art its ‘view of existence’ must conform to a particular value system” (50). Nevertheless, Bell-Villada appears to assume that the political philosophy expressed in Rand’s fiction somehow determines her aesthetics. He thus fails to grasp the crux of her aesthetic theory—her insistence that the fundamental nature of art is rooted in broad requirements of human consciousness. While the subject matter and themes and even the style of particular works of art may reflect political ideologies, the *major art forms* are, Rand correctly argued, biologically (not politically) determined.<sup>12</sup> To this point we devoted an entire chapter, “Scientific Support for Rand’s Theory.” We expected that this chapter would be of particular interest to Objectivists, since

Rand's is a preeminently realist philosophy, stressing the empirical foundation of all knowledge. To my great surprise and disappointment, it was scarcely touched on in the Symposium, apart from frequent allusions to the sections on psychopathology (less than a tenth of the chapter). In any case, as Dipert (2001, 389) observes, Torres and I certainly do not view Rand's aesthetics "merely as an extension of her fictional writing."<sup>13</sup>

### **Vacker's View and Chaos Theory**

In contrast to our focus on explicit statements from Rand's essays on the philosophy of art, Vacker claims to identify the principles of "Rand's aesthetics" by imaginative inference from a handful of descriptive passages in her fiction—passages that are about Nature and architecture, not art. Based on his interpretation of these passages, Vacker draws much the same conclusion in his contribution to the Symposium as he did in an essay for *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand*, which Torres and I have briefly commented upon (Kamhi & Torres 2000, 32–34). Rand, Vacker argues, anticipated the postmodernist "cultural aesthetics" of "chaotic forms and functions," "turbulent harmony," and "strange attractors" characteristic of the "New Wave" of the postindustrial world postulated by theorists such as Alvin Toffler and Naomi Wolf.

Vacker's account is deficient in numerous respects, however.<sup>14</sup> He begins by objecting to our presenting "a philosophical explication of Rand's aesthetic theory, *absent* any consideration of beauty, one of the central concerns of aesthetics across the centuries." Oblivious of the relevant historical and textual considerations cited in *What Art Is* (some of which are noted above), he asserts that, in justifying Rand's use of the term "esthetics" as synonymous with "the philosophy of art" (rather than as "the study of beauty and related concepts"), we defend "the weakest element in Rand's theory of aesthetics, at least as presented in *The Romantic Manifesto*" (Vacker 2001, 361–62). He further charges that it is not just beauty but also "the sublime" that we err in neglecting. In support of this point, he asserts that the "main reason" for the popularity of Rand's "revolutionary classics" *Atlas*



*Sbrugged* and *The Fountainhead* is her “passionate explication of the sublime” (363).<sup>15</sup> Vacker’s interpretation would certainly come as a surprise to the legions of conservatives, libertarians, and free-market advocates who have been inspired by Rand’s fiction for its passionate explication of the values of individualism and capitalism, and, especially, of the role of the individual mind in human creativity and productivity. Nonetheless, Vacker faults *What Art Is* for “claim[ing] to present Rand’s theory of aesthetics, not only absent the beautiful, but even without discussion of the sublime, the aesthetic style most emblematic of Rand’s own writing.” Consequently, he is “convinced that *something other than a theory of art* is being defended in its pages” (363; emphasis added).

The reader might reasonably expect Vacker to identify what that “something” is. Instead, he continues by declaring: “Without doubt, Rand presented a provocative theory of art in *The Romantic Manifesto*” (363). He further observes (in the very next paragraph): “In *What Art Is*, Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi defend and explicate Rand’s theory of art, as presented in *The Romantic Manifesto*.” Though one might think he was going to shed light on the “something other than a theory of art” we allegedly defend, he never does. But the real problem seems to be that we accept *The Romantic Manifesto*’s “flawed view of the complex relation between art and aesthetics.” Of course, that view is “flawed” only if Vacker imposes *his* sense of the term “aesthetics,” which is not the one meant by Rand.

Vacker censures both Rand and us for “embracing” three great “modernist chasms” (such mixed metaphors pepper his prose): (1) “art versus function, specifically *material* function”; (2) “*art versus beauty*”; and (3) “*order versus chaos*”—the “alleged duality [that] has created an aesthetic abyss that has plagued the entirety of human culture and utopian ideals” (363–64).

With respect to the first “great chasm” (“art versus . . . *material* function”), Vacker acknowledges that we affirm Rand’s view of the *cognitive* and *psychological* function of art,<sup>16</sup> but he fails to understand why that role is incompatible with a practical, physical function. First, he ignores that the very concept of (fine) “art” was based on the observation that certain categories of activity that human beings

naturally engage in—dance, music, painting, sculpture, drama, storytelling, and poetry—in fact serve no material function. In contrast with the “useful arts” (e.g., the making of clothing, shelter, tools), which “supply the deficiencies of nature” (*Politics* iv(vii)17. 1337a1–2; as translated by Butcher [1905] 1951, 119), Aristotle aptly observed that these activities exist only for the psychological pleasure or enrichment they afford. Vacker also ignores our discussion of the relevant distinction Rand maintains between objects of “decorative” art, which do serve a material function, and works of “fine” art, which do not.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to his apparent implication, the point of this distinction is neither that useful objects are of negligible importance in human life nor that beauty is “tainted” by utility but, rather, that an object’s practical function diverts attention from contemplation of the import of any visual representation the object may contain (see Torres & Kamhi 2000, 203). Nor is there anything “sterile” (to quote Vacker) about such contemplation in Rand’s or our view.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the second “great chasm” (“*art versus beauty*”), Vacker falsely implies that we exclude beauty from, or oppose it to, art—a charge he repeats more explicitly later in his essay.<sup>19</sup> What we wrote, in part, was:

[Rand] rejects the traditional view that the primary purpose of art is to afford pleasure and convey value through the creation of *beauty*, which she does not regard as a defining attribute. In her view, the primary purpose of art is much broader: it is the meaningful objectification of whatever is metaphysically important to man. (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 15)

Neither here nor in subsequent passages in which we mention or allude to beauty do we imply its exclusion from or opposition to art. To say that beauty is not “a defining attribute of art” does not mean that it is *excluded from all works of art* but simply that *some works of art lack it*.<sup>20</sup> Vacker fails to grasp this distinction. Worse, he seems to regard *all* distinctions as expressive of “duality” (dualism).<sup>21</sup> In this and other respects, he evinces a deeply confused epistemology.

The third “great chasm” Vacker criticizes us for “embracing” is

“*order versus chaos*.” In contrast with his paired terms in the first two “chasms,” the concepts “order” and “chaos” are polar opposites in standard usage.<sup>22</sup> If “embracing *order versus chaos*” means recognizing that the two concepts, as normally understood, are mutually exclusive, it is surely no offense to do so; on the contrary, it is required by the laws of logic. *Chaos theory*, however—which inspired Vacker’s fantastically revisionist interpretation of both *The Fountainhead* and “Rand’s aesthetics”—unfortunately means something very different by the term. In that context, “chaos” refers to a *highly complex order* underlying an *apparently* chaotic disorder. As more than one of the theory’s pioneers has suggested, “chaos” is a regrettable misnomer (Gleick 1987, 306–7).<sup>23</sup> Characteristically, Vacker does not bother to define the term in either of its very different senses, though it is crucial to his argument. And the reader can never be quite sure in which sense it is being used in a given context. Vacker appears to regard it as a value regardless of the context. And he seems to imply that any *appearance* of chaos always conceals an underlying complex order. (Need I cite, as an obvious counterexample, the collapse of the World Trade Center towers?)

In Vacker’s essays, terms and concepts such as “chaos,” “nonlinearity,” and “strange attractors” are tossed about like so many ping-pong balls in a wind machine—without reference to their origin or to their relevance in a particular context. Not until he is halfway through his 22-page essay, moreover, does he offer definitions of the key terms *aesthetics*, *beauty*, the *sublime*,<sup>24</sup> and *art*. Indeed, on the whole, Vacker seems to hold definitions in low regard, viewing them as barriers to the utopian libertarian society he envisions. While his goal of seeking to understand the interrelatedness of various realms of human activity and experience could be of great value, such a task requires that the “utopian theorist” (as Vacker characterizes himself [2000, 197]) command a sounder epistemology, a more comprehensive grasp of intellectual and cultural history, and a deeper understanding of each of the spheres in question than Vacker gives evidence of possessing.

Consider the following passage, for example:

Torres and Kamhi claim that Rand's theory of art provides a rational and objective foundation against the chaotic onslaught of modernism, yet they express a modernist philosophical trajectory in their approach. Their rigid and hierarchical classification of art reflects the modern mania for classifying everything within distinct categories, and then treating any deviation or resistance as an intellectual or artistic crime. A box for everything and everything in its box, otherwise "chaos" reigns. Nevertheless, this obsession for narrow categorization dominates the academic arts and sciences of modernity; it should be challenged by all thinkers seeking to increase the quality of art and aesthetics. (Vacker 2001, 365)

Here Vacker is in error on several important counts. First, he confuses the concepts of "modernist" and "modern." His phrase "onslaught of modernism" alludes to the avant-gardist trends in the arts of the past hundred years, while the "modernist philosophical trajectory" we allegedly "express" alludes to the *modern* philosophic tradition of the past several hundred years. These are two very different cultural expressions. The "hierarchical classification of art" and a penchant for "classifying everything within distinct categories" are part of the earlier philosophic tradition; they surely do not apply to twentieth-century modernism in the arts. As much of *What Art Is* is devoted to documenting, both the systematic classification of the arts and the concept of (fine) *art* as a distinct category were virtually abandoned in the course of the twentieth century. Thus, Vacker's suggestion for how to "increase the quality of art and aesthetics" is patently absurd.

It seems from Vacker's argument, moreover, that what he eschews, in fact, is *all* categorization, not merely our alleged "obsession for narrow categorization." He seems unaware that categorization is a basic cognitive process (Edelman 1986; Cohen and Younger 1983; Quinn and Eimas 1986). It is not the peculiar invention of modern philosophy (as he implies) but has evolved as an adaptive mechanism in higher vertebrates. At least as far back as Aristotle, moreover, some philosophers have recognized the importance of forming categories

according to fundamental rather than trivial or incidental attributes. As Rand emphasized ([1966–67] 1990, esp. 62–74), higher-level categorization (concepts based on other abstractions, rather than on direct perception) is subject to considerable error, since it depends on volitional processes.<sup>25</sup> Vacker’s own thinking and writing offer ample evidence of the truth of this principle.

Vacker’s argument that “chaos” is a value in Rand’s aesthetics rests on a series of superficial resemblances he observes across diverse fictional contexts, with little regard being paid to the deeper significance Rand intended in each case. In his view, her fictional descriptions of nature, of Howard Roark’s architecture, and of the lower Manhattan skyline are all equivalent in their essential “aesthetic” significance.<sup>26</sup> Contrary to Vacker’s assumption (1999, 131–33), however, Rand’s description of the natural setting in the opening scene of *The Fountainhead* does not reveal her view either of “the beautiful” in general or of the beauty of nature in particular. As Gregory Johnson (1999, 160) has correctly observed, its primary aim is to represent nature as nothing more than raw material for man’s shaping.<sup>27</sup> Nature, according to Rand’s view in this passage, is not “beautiful” but *chaotic*—in the original sense of the word, not in the revisionist sense of chaos theory. In contrast, her descriptions of nature in the context of Roark’s architectural projects *do* suggest the sort of complex, irregular order and beauty referred to in chaos theory—as do her descriptions of the architecture itself (the contradiction implicit in the views of nature in these descriptive passages apparently escaped Rand). In the case of nature, however, the “beautiful” effect results from spontaneous processes unmediated by man, whereas in architecture it is the result of deliberate human design, aimed at harmonizing with nature.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, while Rand’s description of the New York skyline in *The Fountainhead* partly suggests the sort of complex order postulated by chaos theory, her metaphorical comparison of it to “the graph of a stubborn struggle” ([1943] 1971, 310)—which Vacker misquotes as “the graph of a sudden struggle”—seems to suggest no underlying order. In any case, the Manhattan skyline is the product neither of purely spontaneous natural processes nor of a unitary human design.

It is an instance of unplanned order, arising spontaneously and cumulatively from a series of design decisions for individual buildings. If the whole is aesthetically pleasing, that effect is quite accidental—in contrast with the aesthetic effects of Roark’s architectural projects, which are entirely intentional. Nowhere does Rand suggest that the complex order she implies in her descriptions of Roark’s architecture can arise without deliberate effort (which, like all intentional activity, is fundamentally *linear*—a concept Vacker seems to abhor), much less without a deep understanding of human needs and productive processes. In contrast to Vacker, moreover, Rand nowhere suggests that the visual beauty of Roark’s buildings takes precedence over their functionality. On the contrary, she always implies that they are organically suited to their practical functions. This is not to say that “chaos theory” is entirely irrelevant to, or incompatible with, Objectivism. It is merely to dispute Vacker’s purported evidence for it in Rand’s fiction.

At times, Vacker is egregiously misleading in his citations. For example, he begins his Symposium essay with two epigraphs purporting to epitomize his thesis. The first, taken from *The Fountainhead*, is a derogatory characterization of one of Roark’s crowning achievements (the Stoddard Temple) by the architect Peter Keating, whom Rand portrays as the antithesis of Roark in every important respect. The other is a brief excerpt from our critique of the postmodernist architect Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum building in Bilbao, Spain. Vacker quotes our reference to the building’s “structural incoherence—as evidenced by the ‘disorienting spaces’ . . .”; but his ellipsis conceals the fact that the crucial phrase “‘disorienting spaces’” was not ours. It was a direct quote from Michael Kimmelman—a *New York Times* art critic who, as we noted, admires Gehry’s work.<sup>29</sup>

Vacker (2001, 378) also distorts our meaning when he declares: “If there is to be an aesthetic renaissance, it may be inspired partially by *The Fountainhead*, precisely because the novel expresses a postindustrial vision of beauty and sublimity united through the fractal architecture of Roark’s buildings. For [Torres and Kamhi, however], any radical integrations of chaos theory and aesthetics must be summarily

dismissed as ‘a lamentable degradation of culture.’” Contrary to Vacker’s implication, we do not regard either the “fractal architecture of Roark’s buildings” or an intelligent integration of chaos theory and aesthetics as a “degradation of culture.” What we wrote was:

[Vacker] characterizes the “Third Wave” in terms of “nonlinearity . . . , turbulence, . . . and, *above all, chaos*” ([1999], 122; emphasis added). 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. [He] 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” ([Rand [1971]] 1975, 73). 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. 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. (Kamhi & Torres 2000, 33)

Since Vacker is concerned only with beauty, sublimity, and fractal forms, wherever they occur, he readily ignores our distinction between art and architecture and does not hesitate to take a phrase we intended for one context and apply it to the other.

Vacker’s enthusiasm for Gehry is perhaps the most telling evidence of his complete misreading both of Rand’s “aesthetics” and of chaos theory itself. Even more inapt than his comparison of

Gehry's work to Rand's vision of architecture in *The Fountainhead* is his claim not only that Gehry's work exemplifies the fractal forms of chaos theory but also that Gehry is the true heir of Frank Lloyd Wright—on whom Rand modeled Roark's creative attributes. “If there exists one building that might have been designed by Howard Roark,” Vacker declares, “then it is Frank Gehry's design for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain . . . a sign of the emergence of a radical post-industrial aesthetic” (Vacker 2001, 379). He further speculates: “It would be natural to think that fans of *The Fountainhead* would embrace the building, seeing the obvious similarities constructed in real life.”

That assumption could not be more mistaken. As observed by Fred Stitt (2001)—a prominent Objectivist architect who founded the San Francisco Institute of Architecture in order to advance the Wrightian principles of “organic architecture”—had Wright not been cremated, he “would be spinning in his grave” at the frequent comparisons of Frank Gehry to him in the media. As Stitt emphasizes, and as we suggested, Gehry's designs—“based on total randomness”—are the antithesis of Wright's essentially organic approach in harmony with the natural setting.<sup>30</sup> Unlike Gehry, Wright would surely never have designed a building based on the accidental forms of crumpled paper, for example. Moreover, as the Gehry retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in New York last year demonstrated, randomness and arbitrariness are the earmarks of Gehry's work. Its apparent chaos is not redeemed by any underlying order.<sup>31</sup> If ever there were an apt illustration of Rand's dictum that “emotions are not tools of cognition,” therefore, it is Vacker's effusive yet muddled account of her “aesthetics” and his mistaken application of its principles to the work of Frank Gehry.

Vacker's thinking and writing about chaos theory and aesthetics are, I fear, representative of the worst tendencies in academia today. Even more disturbing, he purports to build a defense of liberty on this shaky foundation.

## **The Basic Forms of Art**



The aesthetic theory Rand outlines in the first four essays of *The Romantic Manifesto* is, in effect, a theory of “fine art”—though she never uses that term. In recent years, however, both the term “fine arts” and the concept it refers to have been largely rejected by Western philosophers and art historians. After more than two centuries of inconclusive speculation about the essential characteristics of the fine arts, most academic theorists now claim that the concept is a mere invention of eighteenth-century European thought, lacking universal validity. Such a claim is true only in a trivial sense, however. Though the term *beaux arts* (“fine arts” in English) was indeed coined in eighteenth-century France, the concept it refers to had a much longer and wider history. As we noted, the modern idea of (fine) “art” had evolved from the ancient Greek concept of the “mimetic (or imitative) arts”—a concept prominent in the thought of Plato and Aristotle and implicit in the numerous comparisons between poetry and painting, song and dance, painting and sculpture, that have occurred in the writing of poets and philosophers since antiquity.<sup>32</sup> Observations regarding the mimetic nature of these basic art forms are also found in the spoken and written traditions of other cultures, just as the forms themselves are universal (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 2–3; Gebauer and Wulf 1998).

Rand not only accepted this system of classification as the objective basis for her concept of *art*, she suggested that all the arts were “born in prehistoric times” as a consequence of the nature of human consciousness—its perceptual, conceptual, and emotional requirements. While new subcategories or recombinations of the basic forms might be created, in her view, “to develop [a truly new] form of art, man would have to acquire a new sense organ” ([1971] 1975, 73). Her analysis of the major art forms introduced some inadvertent confusion, however. First, though the genus of her definition of art (“a selective re-creation of reality”) implies that all art is mimetic, she failed to show in what respect music is mimetic; she also grouped architecture among the arts, although she acknowledged that it “does not re-create reality” ([1971] 1975, 46). Second, though Rand clearly stated that “[o]ne of the distinguishing characteristics of a work of art . . . is that it serves no practical, material end” ([1965b] 1975, 16), she

seemed to make an exception (however ambiguous) for architecture by listing it among the major arts, while claiming that it “combines art with a utilitarian purpose” ([1971] 1975, 46).

In *What Art Is*, we sought to resolve these problematic aspects of Rand’s theory—first, by offering an account of music’s mimetic attributes (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 87–90, 385 n. 45) and second, by arguing that the inclusion of architecture among the “fine arts” was epistemologically unsound (192–94). The fundamentally mimetic nature of music has been argued in so much detail by so many knowledgeable theorists, a number of whom we cite in our book, that I do not think our claim requires further support here.<sup>33</sup> As for the classification of architecture, Rand herself appears to have had second thoughts about it, according to an account offered by Harry Binswanger, editor of *The Ayn Rand Lexicon*. When asked at a talk he gave in New York in November 2000 why the *Lexicon* contains no entry on architecture though all the other art forms are included, Binswanger replied that Rand (who reviewed the entries under “A” before she died) chose to omit it, for she had decided that it was “more utilitarian” (Torres & Kamhi 2001a).

Several contributors to the Symposium think that Rand’s concept of art as we have presented it is too narrow, and they propose revising or expanding it to accommodate other forms. Hunt, Riggensbach, and Vacker would like to include photography. Hospers, Enright, and perhaps Dipert suggest that abstract painting and sculpture have value as “art.” At least half of the contributors are uncomfortable with our exclusion of architecture, and two of them (Vacker and Enright) also object to the exclusion of the decorative arts. Surprisingly, it is Bell-Villada, the writer least sympathetic to Objectivism, who remarks that our “considerations as to whether photography, architecture, and crafts belong to the category of ‘art’ can only be described as provocative and stimulating, despite the absolutism of [our] stance”—which, he acknowledges, “is shared by many individuals across the ideological and aesthetical spectrum” (2001, 292), a fact that should have suggested to him, by the way, that Rand’s theory is not a “libertarian” aesthetics.

The arguments offered by other contributors for expanding the

concept of art to include previously excluded forms, and for revising Rand’s definition accordingly, suffer, I think, from two types of error. One is the false assumption that placing something outside the category of art implies a depreciation of its value. That assumption seems to underlie this question by Enright (2001, 350) for example: “Why are Torres and Kamhi so bent on eradicating architecture from the canonical fine arts?”—as if denying architecture the status of fine art meant consigning it to a limbo of disrepute. Also indicative is Enright’s claim that “[w]ith the concept of art, we isolate, for study and honor, the highest forms of human self-expression, the forms that best allow an individual to communicate a felt sense of what really matters in life,” and he advises that, “[i]n honoring the highest, it is important that we not dishonor forms of expression that have their own valued place in human life” (355). Finally, there is his incoherent further claim that “[a]rchitecture *is* a design art, but it is selected from among the design arts for elevation into the concept of high art” (351). In a somewhat similar vein, Hunt argues: “[T]hose of us who accept Rand’s conception of art cannot content ourselves with magisterially declaring that this or that thing is not really art. This conception, and indeed any mimetic conception, . . . seems to imply that one or two things that we ourselves wish to keep inside the realm of art actually fall outside its borders” (259). The mere inclusion of something within (or its exclusion from) the category of art does not in itself determine the thing’s value, however. An honest, well-crafted object of decorative art, for example, merits greater esteem than an incompetent and pretentious work of “fine art.” Nor does our approach consist of simply “magisterially declaring” that something is or is not art. In all cases, we offer an extended argument, taking into account the premises, intentions, methods, and products of the purported artists themselves.

The other type of error exhibited in this context is the tendency to focus on certain attributes as essential or definitional for art, while disregarding the full context of the concept—the whole complex of traits shared by the canonical art forms. As Rand ([1966–67] 1990, 51) advised in her *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*: “When in doubt about the meaning or the definition of a concept, the best method of

clarification is to consider [the] referents . . . [that] gave rise to [the] concept.” Although her definition of art identifies only two distinctive characteristics, she was surely aware that works of art are complex entities, whose full nature is not exhausted by the definition—any more than Aristotle’s definition of man as “the rational animal” implies that human beings are not bipeds. Everything Rand wrote about the nature of art suggests that she regarded the concept as encompassing a number of fundamental similarities, not in just one simple physical aspect or psychological dimension, but in several complex respects: in the nature of the creative process; in the relationship of the artistic product to reality; and in the interplay of perception, cognition, and emotion in both the creation and the experience of the work. Since this issue boils down to discriminating between essential and nonessential features in each case, let me summarize and comment on some of the main arguments Symposium contributors have offered for expanding the concept of art we presented based on the principles of Rand’s theory.

### **Architecture**

“In Rand’s account of the arts,” Enright (2001, 343) correctly observes, “architecture plays the part of the ungainly beast that has trouble fitting in.” He then proceeds to analyze it as a “borderline case.” He further remarks: “Forms such as painting and music are sufficiently unlike each other that one might wonder whether it was a mistake to form this concept of art in the first place. Should they have been left as a grouping, as the fine arts, rather than being consolidated into a single concept of art?” What Enright fails to recognize here is that the grouping itself, like all rational taxonomies, was based on the recognition of fundamental similarities between real entities, and that the “single concept” is not a floating abstraction, with a life of its own, but is merely a shorthand way of referring to all the real entities that share these fundamental similarities. Enright ultimately concludes that the concept is useful, even valuable, because “the fine arts sprung forth as the creation of a single species, namely ours, with an essential unity of purpose. . . . It is this unity that makes it *possible* for us to form the

concept of art. It is our critical and peculiar need of art that makes it *important* for us to form the concept” (356). This conclusion is astonishing, for Enright entirely ignores the historical evidence we present regarding the “unity of purpose” (to borrow his phrase) of the art forms that gave rise to the concept of “art” at issue here. As we show, architecture was not initially classified among the “fine arts,” nor had it been included among the “imitative arts” that gave rise to that concept (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 2–3, 191–94). Further, as we emphasized, the “essential unity” (to use Enright’s term) of the concept was based on two criteria: first, the *sole function* of the “fine” arts was psychological, not physical; second, it was through their *mimetic* attributes that the arts accomplished their function (191–94, 333–34 n. 7). Since architecture typically satisfies neither of these criteria, it is hardly a “borderline case”—as Enright claims.

Remarkably, to support his claim that architecture was among the canonical fine arts (along with literature, painting, sculpture, and music), Enright (2001, 356 n. 2) cites Paul Oskar Kristeller’s comment: “These five constitute the irreducible nucleus of the modern system of the arts, on which all writers and thinkers seem to agree.” I say “remarkably” because Enright does not even mention, much less resolve, the considerable contradictions and inaccuracies that we point out in Kristeller’s argument, as well as in that of Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, the other major scholar who has traced the history of the concept of art (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 420 n. 18, 421 nn. 22, 24). As we emphasized (193–94), architecture became one of the “canonical” arts through its rather late inclusion among them, on very flimsy grounds, in the influential *Preliminary Discourse* written for Diderot’s *Encyclopedia* by Jean Le Rond D’Alembert. Since no one, to my knowledge, has previously questioned the dubious premises on which D’Alembert established architecture as a “fine art,” it is both surprising and disappointing to me that none of the Symposium contributors even mentioned this datum of original scholarship— which illuminates for the first time the crucial weak link in the intellectual history of the modern concept of architecture as “art.” As we observed, many scholars have remarked over the years on the obvious illogic of including architecture among the nonutilitarian (“fine”) arts, yet they

paradoxically continue to accept its canonical status. Enright entirely ignores this discussion.

Surprisingly, Hunt, too, seems to disregard that the utilitarian/nonutilitarian distinction lies at the root of the concept of art at issue here. Questioning the manner in which we resolve the contradictions between Rand's account of architecture and her concept of art, he remarks: "The solution they propose is to do to architecture what they do to clothing design and quilting: they deny that it is an art at all" (Hunt 2001, 260). We do not deny that each of these qualify as "an art" in the broad sense of the term, of course; we merely deny that they are "art" in the more limited sense of the *fine arts*—a category defined, in part, by the very lack of a *physical* function. Hunt's remark suggests that his notion of "art" has been divorced from its original referents and context. It is ironic, moreover, that he subsequently proposes to define art "in terms of its function"—in order to "promote the broadly cognitive function of art to a status that is more central to the account" (262). Since he is concerned in that context mainly with broadening Rand's definition to include photography, he fails to recognize that such a redefinition would exclude architecture no less decisively than Rand's does.

### Photography

Both Hunt and Riggensbach object to Rand's and our excluding photographs<sup>34</sup> from the category of art, and argue that their inclusion is warranted because they can serve the same purpose as art. In Hunt's words:

Given that [a photograph] does contain representational elements, and given that the representation is achieved by acts of selection on the part of its creator, [the question is] do the works in this genre have *enough* of these features to enable it . . . to do what art does? For a functional account, what art *is* follows from what art *does*. (262–63)

So, too, Riggensbach (2001, 286) argues:

What is relevant is what the picture is used for. . . . The people who contemplate Ansel Adams’s photographs of the Yosemite Valley are not doing so in search of information about Yosemite Valley. They are doing so for the same reason they would contemplate paintings of the Yosemite Valley—because contemplating them is an end in itself, made meaningful by what the pictures convey about the grandeur and beauty of nature and the reflective pleasures of solitude amid such beauty.<sup>35</sup>

A similar argument has of course been made for treating a piece of driftwood as art—it, too, can be contemplated for its own sake as a meaningful reminder of the beauty of nature. Such a comparison may at first seem frivolous on my part, since photographs, unlike driftwood, are not just bits of nature itself but *images* of nature produced by the mediation of a human agent. The fact that they are images does not make them *representations* in the sense that paintings are, however. As Hunt (2001, 259) himself notes: “[Art on Rand’s account must] be a particular *sort* of reproduction, one that the artist builds detail by detail, selecting them in accordance with his or her fundamental values. This is why photography, in which the representation is built all at once by a mechanical device, cannot be art.” But Hunt’s use of the term “reproduction” is inappropriate here, and unwittingly points to the very distinction both Rand and we were driving at. A painting (in the sense used here) is never a *reproduction*, properly speaking. Even when the painter works directly from nature or copies another painting, every detail of the image is filtered through and mediated by his or her personality, imagination, and skill (or lack thereof). In contrast, a photograph is, in effect, a *graphic reproduction* of the scene it presents—mediated mainly by the mechanical agency of the camera and the photochemical action of light, and only to a very limited degree by choices the photographer makes. Many photographs that one might “use” for the same purpose as art are, in fact, lucky accidents. The now-iconic World War II image of GIs raising the flag at Iwo Jima, for example, was selected from among a whole series of images shot under turbulent conditions by a photographer who was

scarcely able to look through the viewfinder to compose them.<sup>36</sup> And though I am a rank amateur, I have managed without much effort to take quite a few fine photographs (yet I could never paint or draw an image that would satisfy me, much less be of interest to anyone else). In contrast, as Rand properly emphasized, *art* is never accidental.

Riggenbach (2001, 285) nonetheless claims that our “attempt to disqualify photographs as works of art because a machine has been used to produce them will not withstand scrutiny.”

A machine, such as a camera, is simply a tool, one of many that human beings have devised over the centuries to aid them in the process of making pictures. One can imagine early painters decrying the invention of the brush, for, just as Rand maintains that “the camera operates the same way regardless of the nature of the material,” so “the bristles of the brush operate the same way regardless of the nature of the material.” (Rand quoted in Torres & Kamhi 2000, 181)

This argument is mistaken on two counts, however. First, Riggenbach’s quotation marks around the phrase “the bristles of the brush . . .,” followed by his parenthetical citation, misleadingly implies that Rand herself equated the operation of a paintbrush with that of a camera. Nothing could be farther from her view. Though I do not think she ever commented directly on this point, I am confident that if she had she would have drawn a fundamental distinction between a simple tool such as a paintbrush and a more complex piece of equipment such as a camera. In the hands of a skilled artist, the action of a paintbrush is fully under his control at every step and in every detail of the process. The bristles most assuredly do *not* “operate the same way regardless of the nature of the material” being depicted, for the painter is constantly manipulating that process to emphasize and adjust certain details, to eliminate or downplay others. In a sense, the paintbrush is merely an extension of the artist’s hand, always under the control of his mind, whereas the camera’s operation is essentially uniform over the entire surface being photographed.

Second, Riggenbach is equally mistaken in the analogy he attempts



to draw from the art historian Edgar Wind’s observation (quoted approvingly by us) that photography is not art because it involves “the crucial surrender of the pictorial act to an optical or chemical agency which, however carefully set up and controlled by the photographer, must remain automatic in its operation” (Wind [1963] 1985, 414 n. 3). Riggensbach (2001, 286) argues: “One could scarcely wish for a clearer description of the mixing of paints to produce a particular color.” What he misses here is that colors are merely constituents of the medium of a painted image; they are not the image itself. The crucial “pictorial act” referred to by Wind means the *creation of the image*. That image—not the mixing of the individual colors—is the work of art.

As we noted, Rand ([1971] 1975, 74) acknowledges that there is “an artistic element in some photographs, which is the result of such selectivity as the photographer can exercise.” In adding that “some of them can be very beautiful,” however, and in comparing them to “many [other] utilitarian products,” she seems to suggest that the only value that photographic images can convey is beauty. In our view, photographs can suggest a broad range of human values—though they do so not because the photographer selectively “re-creates reality” but, rather, because he is able to capture on film what Henri Cartier-Bresson termed the “decisive moment,” a moment in real time that is expressive of the character of a person or event. As we also noted, Cartier-Bresson—who is an amateur painter and therefore understands both processes from the inside, as it were—does not consider his photographs to be art, though he is widely acclaimed as a photographer (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 187, 414 n. 2).

Riggensbach (2001, 286) argues that “[e]very advance in the technology of picture making, from the original cave paintings done by hand to the computer arts of today, has been an advance in the design and use of tools.” The question remains, of course, whether every form of “picture making” produces images that qualify as *art*. I view works of art (as did Rand) as the product of a certain kind of painstaking, fully intentional process. This process determines the quality of the work produced. And at some level, I think, it also affects one’s perception of the work. Part of the power and wonder of visual art lies in the awareness that what one is seeing was created

by the hand and mind of a fellow human being. If the creative process employs mechanical equipment or a computer, that sense of wonder is lost to a large degree. And one can never be sure which aspects of the work are the products of human intention and which are the result of an impersonal, partly fortuitous, mechanical process.

Like Riggenbach, Vacker raises the question of computer imaging. In response to our insistence that “[t]he photographer— unlike the composer, painter, sculptor, or poet—does not select and shape every minute detail of the work” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 182), he charges ignorance on our part, arguing that “all elements of the [photographic] image are selectively controlled on a daily basis in fashion and advertising, where airbrushing and digitalization provide the power to manipulate *any* or *every* aspect of the image” (Vacker 2001, 376). Of course, we were aware of such a process, but that is no longer photography in our view. Nor do we think it qualifies as art, since the process begins with a photographic image, whereas an artist’s re-creation of reality is based on his direct experience of the world, filtered through and transformed by his imagination. Vacker himself implies as much, when he states that “traditional photography . . . is being replaced by digitalization . . . blurring forever the lines between the captured and constructed or the real and the virtual.” Unlike him, we do not celebrate such blurring. But this is not to say that, as Vacker claims, we regard “the fictional re-creation of reality [as] intrinsically superior to creating actual reality or a future reality” (377). We do regard it as intrinsically *different*, however. Indeed, the very concepts of *fiction* and *art* depend on recognizing that difference.

## Music

As Riggenbach (2001, 282) aptly observes: “Music has long been a major flaw in the otherwise admirable edifice of Rand[’s] aesthetics.” The discussion in *What Art Is*—which attempts to resolve persistent doubts about the “re-creation of reality” in music—drew considerable comment in the Symposium. Several of the contributors raise objections to our account, while others offer provocative further thoughts on the subject.

Hunt’s comments on the mimetic nature of music suggest that he has misunderstood what we said about it. Stating that, according to our account, musical tones are “stylized versions of natural human sounds, including tones of voice” (as he puts it), he objects that “music is not *about* tones of voice in the way that a novel is about an architect,” and adds that “we do not listen to a piece of music because we want to find out about the natural sounds that are referred to and stylized in them” (Hunt 2001, 261). Of course, one doesn’t listen to music for this purpose—we never suggested that one does. Throughout our analysis, we indicated that music is *about* the internal, “feeling” side of human experience—about “emotional states” (and, ultimately, about the values they may suggest or imply). As we explained, it is “through particular qualities of tone, tempo, rhythm, and timbre, [that] music ‘imitates’ or ‘re-creates’ the vocal *and behavioral* expressions associated with emotional states and with emotionally charged movement” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 80; emphasis added). We also agreed with Peter Kivy’s observation that music is intelligible, in terms of feeling and emotion, “in virtue of its resemblance to expressive human utterance and behavior.” Finally, we quoted Susanne Langer’s view:

The tonal structures we call “music” bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling—forms of growth and of attenuation . . . conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm . . . —not joy and sorrow perhaps, but the poignancy of either and both—the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt. Such is the pattern, or logical form, of sentience; and the pattern of music is that same form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. *Music is the tonal analogue of emotive life.* (Langer 1953, 27; emphasis added)

Because music employs sound primarily to suggest the internal realm of feeling, rather than the external world, we deliberately avoided using terms such as “depiction” or “representation,” which generally connote visual or verbal re-creations of reality. Hunt’s use of these terms tends,

I think, to obscure this important distinction. “Representation” is an appropriate term for music only if one remembers that what is being “represented” are emotional states, not material reality.

I have a similar objection to Bissell’s view that “the fundamental re-creation [of reality] in art is not of things from reality, but of reality itself, which is created anew in the form of a ‘*microcosm*’ or *imaginary world*” (2001, 299–300; emphasis added). First, while the term *microcosm* may be appropriate for some complex works of visual or literary art, it is not applicable to music at all, in my view, because (like “depiction” and “representation”) it implies a *tangible, physical* reality. In addition, the distinction Bissell attempts to draw here seems an ephemeral one, since in re-creating “reality itself” the artist inevitably draws on his knowledge and experience of “things from reality.” As Rand ([1973] 1982, 25) wrote:

The power to rearrange the combinations of natural elements is the only creative power man possesses. . . . [Re-] Creation’ does not (and metaphysically cannot) mean the power to bring something into existence out of nothing. . . . [M]an’s imagination is nothing more than the ability to rearrange [recombine, or reintegrate] the things he has observed in reality.

Hospers, too, deals with the issue of the re-creation of reality in music. At one of the few points where he comments on Rand’s ideas, he raises the long-standing objection that music isn’t a “re-creation of reality,” since it doesn’t “represent” things. “One can plausibly say that a painter can show us some aspects of what nature looks like, but can we plausibly say that music shows us what nature sounds like?” he asks (Hospers 2001, 313). Yes, we can, if we understand that it does so in a highly abstracted and stylized way, and that the “nature” it re-creates is the *emotive* side of human experience. And Hospers is quite mistaken in his further assertion that “[m]usical sounds, as opposed to noises, seldom occur at all in nature.” For humans, the most important sound in “nature” is the human voice— which, as pitched sound, is essentially musical. As we further argued: “[Human beings] naturally

perceive pitched sounds in terms of vocal expression, and . . . are innately attuned to its varieties of meaning in our human context. Moreover, we expect that music, as a product of human creation, will make sense in *human* terms” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 89). (That is no doubt why, as we noted in relation to serialism, much “avant-garde” work—which largely abandons music’s natural basis in human vocalization and movement—tends to be perceived as the expression either of a madman or of an alien from outer space. Hospers ignores this discussion.)

On the one occasion when Hospers comments on our discussion in *What Art Is*, his response is vitiated by the omission of a crucial passage (the quotation from Susanne Langer cited above in my response to Hunt) that leads up to our summary point. He writes: “When I read Torres and Kamhi’s description of Rand’s view—‘*What music presents, then, are certain auditory concretes . . . that have emotive and existential significance.*’ That is why music, in Rand’s analysis, possesses an objective, generalized, core of meaning—I do not have, from this description, a clear enough handle on her view to say more about it without further elucidation” (Hospers 2001, 316–17; emphasis added). In the sentence italicized here, we were summarizing Langer’s view, not Rand’s, however, and the “emotive and existential significance” we referred to was illuminated by the above-noted passage from Langer’s *Feeling and Form*. Oddly, Hospers failed to recognize that we were alluding to the same sort of significance he was describing when he wrote, only two pages earlier: “When people are sad, they move slowly; their movements are not loud or rapid, and they speak softly and low—just as the music we call sad tends to be slow rather than rapid, and soft rather than strident” (315).

In contrast with Hospers, Dipert finds Rand’s ideas on the nature of music to be “rich and subtle,” and “worthy—surprisingly worthy—contributions to the continuing debate in music aesthetics, including [that] on emotion and music.” Since he possesses both a technical knowledge of music and a close familiarity with the philosophic literature on the subject, as well as a deep appreciation of the art, his views are of particular interest. For Dipert (2001, 392), one of the “better points” of our book is our analysis of how Rand’s “discussion

of music is often inconsistent with some elements of her general theory of art, notably her thesis concerning the ‘re-creation of reality’—though he misattributes that analysis to the section entitled “Rand’s Mistaken Hypothesis.” What we view as Rand’s “mistaken hypothesis” regarding music is her proposition that, while music is like the other arts in affording “a concretization of [one’s] sense of life,” it differs in that “the abstraction being concretized is *primarily epistemological*, rather than metaphysical” (Rand [1971] 1975, 59; emphasis added)—in other words, that the meaning of a work of music lies primarily in “the kind of work it demands of a listener’s ear and brain” in the process of “hearing and integrating a succession of musical tones,” as Rand puts it (58). Rejecting her claim, we argue that it reflects a misguided emphasis on form at the expense of content, which is completely at odds with her view of the other arts.

With respect to the other arts, Dipert regards as “an attractive hypothesis” Rand’s insistence that form must always be “in the service of substance,” as he puts it.<sup>37</sup> As he points out, however, form in music has always appeared to assume greater importance because the “inner, psychological” nature of music’s “emotional substance” makes it difficult to identify and articulate specific content. It is here that we think Rand’s theory offers the greatest insight, through her idea that, when music suggests “an emotional state without external object, [the listener’s] subconscious suggests an internal one” (51). Such an account helps to explain, for example, why the experience of music often seems more intensely personal than that of the other arts—the reason may be that each listener particularizes the meaning of a piece of music according to his own life experience and personal associations.

Dipert offers some provocative observations and suggestions that warrant further exploration. Noting that we tend to agree with both Rand and aesthetician Peter Kivy that (as Dipert states it) “music’s emotional expressivity is likely an extension of ordinary expressivity in terms of gesture and speech,” he briefly considers the possibility that “one can experience mere perceived and organized sounds *as* emotions” (2001, 391). Such “emotional contours,” he suggests, would be “without the distinctively cognitive objects that emotions

typically have: yearning, mourning, even anger, *without being directed at a precise target or intentional object*” (emphasis added). This suggestion recalls Rand’s observation that “music induces an emotional state without external object,” and that the listener’s subconscious then supplies “an internal one” (Rand [1971] 1975, 51). In Dipert’s view, Rand’s most distinctive contribution does not lie here, however; it lies instead in her claim that what matters for the listener “is not the feelings that [music] initially evokes but, as she puts it, how one ‘feel[s] about these feelings’” (Dipert 2001, 392)—in other words, what ultimately matters is one’s sense-of-life response to the series of emotional states suggested by the musical work.

In Bissell’s view, we misrepresented both Rand’s position and his own when we observed that 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” (Kamhi & Torres 2000, 32). “Rand clearly indicates,” he insists, “that although the degree of complexity and ease of integration is the basic factor in determining musical preference, the re-creation of reality as a *microcosm* is all-important in determining what one will enjoy (and, necessarily, value)” (301–2). But if the re-creation of reality is not “the basic factor,” I would ask, how can it be “all-important”? To support his argument, Bissell quotes Rand’s proposition that “[w]ithin the general category of music of equal complexity, it is the emotional element that represents the *metaphysical* aspect controlling one’s enjoyment” ([1971] 1975, 61). But he omits the statement that immediately precedes it in “Art and Cognition”: “The epistemological aspect of music is the *fundamental*, but not the exclusive, factor in determining one’s musical preference” (emphasis added). The key word here is “fundamental”—just as the key word in the above-quoted comment of ours that Bissell purports to rebut is “primarily.” In defense of his view of music as re-creating a “microcosm,” Bissell also cites Rand’s proposition that “[t]he nature of the music represents the concretized abstraction of existence—i.e., *a world* in which one feels joyous or sad or triumphant or resigned” (Rand [1971] 1975, 61; emphasis added by Bissell 2001, 302). His selective quotation again unfairly stacks the deck in his favor, however,

for he omits the crucial first half of Rand's sentence: "The process of integration represents the concretized abstraction of one's consciousness."

Bissell also objects to our criticism that "[i]n pressing the analogy between music and literature, . . . [he] 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)" (Kamhi & Torres 2000, 32). He claims that "in stressing the analogy between musical events and progressions and those in dramatic and literary art, [he does] not 'equate' anything." What is the reader to make of the following propositions (all of them from the section of Bissell's text cited above), however—if not such an "equation"?

[M]usic must follow pretty much the same general procedures as literature and drama at *their* most effective. . . . [T]he physical accompaniments of emotions are conveyed by *characterization* in literature and music, while the progressions of emotions are conveyed by *plot* in literature and music. . . . [P]urposefulness or goal-directedness in music, conveyed by progressions of musical events analogous to plot in literature, has long been acknowledged by music theorists and laymen alike.<sup>38</sup> . . . [Rand's] essays are rife with statements about both plot and characterization that can be directly extended to music. (Bissell 1999, 60–61)

Similar examples can be found throughout Bissell's essay, along with numerous references to music as one of the "dramatic arts." To defend himself against our criticism, Bissell quotes the following passage from the end of his essay:

The flip side of the seldom realized deep commonalities between music and the other arts is the more familiar fact that, in the final analysis, music is also, to a large degree, *sui generis*. Despite its significant commonalities with the other



dramatic arts, it is also a realm of human expression with a considerable amount of autonomy. (76)

Coming as late as it does in his essay, however, this purported disclaimer or caveat is insufficient to reverse the impression created in the preceding pages. And even here Bissell implies that music is among the “dramatic arts.”

Last but not least, Riggenbach (2001, 282) suggests that our “ingenious and highly persuasive” revision of Rand’s account of music might be improved by being combined with Susanne Langer’s “similar, but slightly, and very importantly, different understanding of the subject.” While he finds our idea that music “*selects and stylizes meaningful aspects of our aural experience*” to be “an excellent hypothesis, rigorously and persuasively defended,” he judges that “there is much more to music”—which can be found in Chapters 7–9 of Langer’s *Feeling and Form*. In Riggenbach’s view, Langer’s theory of music complements ours, “in just the way Langer’s overall approach to aesthetics complements Rand’s” (283). While Langer, too, regards music “as a mimetic, representational art,” he argues, “she sees music as ‘deriving its vital meaning’ from an ‘aspect of reality’ much more fundamental and universal than mere ‘vocal expression and the sonic effects of emotionally charged movement.’” According to Riggenbach:

That aspect of reality is *time*—our experience of “passage,” as Langer puts it, or “duration,” as Henri Bergson, the philosopher on whose theories she explicitly bases these chapters, called it. As Langer writes: “*Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity sensible*” (1953, 110).

Riggenbach then cites a long and very interesting passage (which I excerpt here) in which Bergson characterizes self-awareness—“beneath the surface perceptions, thoughts, memories, and habits”—as a continuous

succession of states, each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it. [These states are]

so solidly organized, so profoundly animated with a common life, that [it] could not [be] said where any of them finished or where another commenced. . . .

This inner life may be compared to the unrolling of a coil. . . . But it may just as well be compared to a continual rolling up, like that of a thread on a ball, for our past follows us, it swells incessantly with the present that it picks up on its way; and consciousness means memory.

[T]here are no two identical moments in the life of the same conscious being . . . because the second moment always contains, over and above the first, the memory that the first has bequeathed to it. A consciousness which could experience two identical moments would be a consciousness without memory. (Bergson [1900] 1912, 11–13; quoted by Riggerbach 2001, 283–84)

“Could there be a better description than this of music?” asks Riggerbach, who further argues:

As we live, our experience of duration, of the passage of time, is not only irredeemably rhythmic, the rhythm of our heartbeat and our respiration being always a part of the background against which duration unwinds itself (or winds itself up), but also charged with patterns of tension and resolution. *This* is what music stylizes and selectively re-creates. *This* is what it presentationally symbolizes. (284)

Recalling Oliver Sacks’s observation that each of us has “a life-story, an inner narrative—whose continuity, whose sense, *is* our lives” (quoted in Torres & Kamhi 2000, 390 n. 75), Riggerbach (2001, 285) aptly suggests: “The fact is that not only does each of us have an inner narrative, each of us has a soundtrack to that narrative.” I certainly do not disagree with such a fertile idea; but the soundtrack consists of more than just “duration,” in my view. Both Riggerbach’s claim that “Melody is stylized duration” (285) and Langer’s proposition that “*Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity sensible*” (283) seem

much too abstract to me. Time (duration) is merely the dimension in which vital experience occurs. To focus on the dimension per se, rather than on the nature of the experience that fills it, may be a suitable undertaking for a philosopher or a physicist. But it is not the essence of music, any more than experience of the spatial dimension as such constitutes the essence of painting (as some theorists of abstract art have claimed).<sup>39</sup> What matters in art, as in life, is how time and space are filled.

### The Art of Film

In Rigenbach’s view, Torres and I “come up short” in arguing, as Rand did, that the art of film is a subcategory of literature. “A more plausible case might be made for the view that it is a subcategory of storytelling,” he suggests, “as long as it is understood that storytelling can be undertaken either with or without the aid of words” (286–87). Indeed, as we stated, “film is pre-eminently a form of *story-telling*” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 253). But I do not agree that storytelling of sufficient depth or interest to sustain a feature film “can be undertaken . . . without the aid of words.” Even a film without dialogue requires a scenario to make sense of the action to the actors, director, and crew. In response to our claim that “one could readily grasp the gist of the story [of a film] by listening to the sound track alone” (253), Rigenbach (2001, 287) recounts an experience that occurred when he was viewing Mel Gibson in *The Patriot*, and “the image on the screen . . . went dark, while the soundtrack continued for fifteen long, excruciating, and increasingly incomprehensible minutes.” Having viewed that film myself since then, I readily concede that whole long scenes, mostly of violent action and battles, would be unintelligible from the sound track alone. The fact remains, however, that what gives *meaning* to that action, and to the film as a whole, are the scenes with dialogue that define the characters and their motivation: the opening debate of the colonists, the patriot’s conversations with his rebellious son, his meeting with General Cornwallis, his exchanges with the vicious British officer whom he defeats at the end, and so on. By the same token, if the film is (as I think) less than wholly satisfying, it

is owing neither to impoverished production values nor to lack of directorial panache but rather to deficiencies in the screenplay. To echo a now-famous political quip, the filmmaker's watchword ought to be "It's the screenplay, stupid!"

Riggenbach claims that "[a]s long as a film is not a collection of words on paper but a *moving picture*, the guiding artistic intelligence behind that film must lie in the director, not the screenwriter" (287). If that were so, one might just as well say that if a play is not to be just a collection of words on paper but a compelling theatrical experience, the guiding artistic intelligence must be that of the director, not the playwright. The cogent argument that theater director Terry McCabe (2001) offers against "director's theater" also applies to film, in my view—though not in his. The difference is only in degree, not in kind. Of course, good films require good directors, just as effective theatrical productions do—to ensure unity of vision, effective integration of all the components. But the question remains, What is it that *guides* the director? Without a scenario or screenplay, the film director has nothing to direct, unless he assumes the screenwriter's role himself. In either case, some form of written text precedes the lights, camera, and action. Moreover, good screenwriters understand the medium and do not simply write the sort of "dialogue-heavy, talking-heads-type videotaped radio plays" Riggenbach (2001, 287) disdains. As our account of Walter Newman's screenplay for *Harrow Alley* demonstrated, a skilled screenwriter envisions the setting and action in considerable detail, in addition to writing effective dialogue. The screenplay thus guides the director's "guiding artistic intelligence." Nor do films that incorporate improvised dialogue constitute an exception to this principle, as Riggenbach claims.<sup>40</sup> To make any sense, improvised dialogue must be based on a scenario or story line in which the characters and plot have been adequately delineated—in *words*, not just images. In any case, to my knowledge, it is primarily actors, not directors, who improvise dialogue.

Since Riggenbach astutely notes (288) our failure to deliver on a promise to discuss the distinction between *entertainment* and *art* "in Chapter 16," let me deal with it here. First, the omission was not due, as he speculates, to our having "found the distinction . . . untenable

once [we] began examining it more closely.” Along with the numerous other “copy-editing lapses” he so mercilessly calls attention to, it was the result of an impossibly accelerated schedule for completing the book, during which three chapters were excised at the eleventh hour. The former Chapter 16 became Chapter 13, on the literary arts and film—the last chapter to be written, though not the final chapter of the book. Under pressure to complete that chapter, we had neither time nor space to cover the distinction between art and entertainment, but we neglected to eliminate the earlier cross-reference. A reader as careful as Riggensbach, however, should have noticed several entries under “entertainment” in the index. One of these entries points to our citation (69) of a brief statement of Rand’s regarding one type of entertainment, which I quote more fully here:

Without [a musical or literary] base, a performance may be entertaining, in such fields as vaudeville or the circus, but it has nothing to do with art. The performance of an aerialist, for instance, demands an enormous physical skill . . . but what it offers is merely an exhibition of that skill, with no further meaning, i.e., a concrete, not a concretization of anything. (Rand [1971] 1975, 71)

As Rand suggests, entertainment often shares certain properties with art, but it is less serious in its function: its pleasure is superficial, it inspires neither intense emotion nor deep reflection. To that I would suggest a further distinction not implied by Rand’s brief statement: the creation of entertainment is primarily audience-focused, it aims, first and foremost, to please the consumer. In contrast, an artist’s primary aim is to realize his own vision, not to amuse or divert others.<sup>41</sup> During the creative process, he focuses on the work, not on its reception; his main concern is to perfect the work to his own satisfaction. As observed in *What Art Is* (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 346–47 n. 17), moreover:

Such a view of the artist is not confined to modern Western culture. A colophon by the Chinese painter Wu Li (1632–

1718), for example, quotes an artist of the Sung dynasty as saying: “I write in order to express my heart, I paint in order to comfort my mind. I may wear rough clothes and eat coarse food, but I would not ask support from others.” Wu Li comments: “Neither kings nor dukes or nobles could command these painters; they were unattainable by worldly honors.” (quoted in Schapiro [1964] 1994, 203)

This, by the way, is but one of numerous instances we cited which indicate that ideas about art and artists that are often thought of as peculiar to modern Western culture are, in fact, universal.

### **Rand’s Concept of “Sense of Life”**

As Riggenbach (2001, 270) suggests, Rand’s concept of “sense of life,” including her account of its role in both the creation of and the response to art, is “an idea of enormous insight and explanatory power.” Yet, as he also seems to recognize, it is one that has been widely misinterpreted and misapplied in the Objectivist literature. Riggenbach is the only Symposium contributor to comment on our attempt to clarify this key concept of Rand’s theory of art, and I thank him for crediting us with “the subtlety to see and clearly express ways in which it can be made even more precise and widely applicable.” What we argued against was the seeming implication (of Rand’s proposition that an artist “presents *his* view of existence” in his work) that an artist’s *comprehensive* view of existence is implied in— and can be inferred from—his work, regardless of the medium or the scale. As we pointed out, Rand herself notes that the capacity of an artwork to project such a view varies greatly in degree, according to the medium and the particular genre. While we agreed with her claim that the artist’s sense of life *governs* the creative process, we insisted that so complex a psychological totality cannot be *conveyed* by his work (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 48, 348 n. 28). Nevertheless, Enright (2001, 344) claims that a “well-designed building provides a compelling experience of the architect’s sense of life,” and he proposes revising Rand’s definition of art accordingly (see below, p. 459). Even if one were to

accept that architecture is art, an individual’s sense of life is too complex a psychological phenomenon to be conveyed by *any* work—as Rand made clear. Enright’s suggestion reflects an error that is nonetheless common among Objectivists.

### “Sense of Life” and Philosophy<sup>42</sup>

Another common error is to regard Rand’s concept of “sense of life” as synonymous with “philosophy.” This tendency seems to be reflected in David Kelley’s response to our comments on an article he co-authored with William Thomas entitled “Why Man Needs Art” (Thomas & Kelley 1999). Kelley (2001, 331) argues, in part:

Kamhi and Torres [2000] write: “Thomas and Kelley’s most egregious omission is their failure to discuss, or even mention, Rand’s distinctive concept of *sense of life* . . . or her view of the crucial role of sense of life in the all-important *emotional* response to art” (19). There is no question that sense of life is an essential concept in Rand’s explanation of how artists create their works and of how we respond to them. But that was not the topic of our essay. We were addressing the questions: Why is art a value? Why does man need art? How does it relate to his survival as a rational animal?

We argued, as Rand herself did, that man’s need for art derives from a cognitive need for philosophy. (Kelley 2001, 336)

By “philosophy,” Kelley explains, he and Thomas meant the following:

In order to guide our actions and integrate our knowledge, we need some view of the nature of the world and our place in it, some view of how knowledge is acquired, some view of what values to live for and what principles to live by. . . . The content of that worldview may be held in the form of a consciously articulated system of ideas, or in the form of the emotional sum that Rand described as a sense of life. (336)

Kelley's use of the term "worldview" here has the effect of an equivocation, however, since our criticism pertained precisely to the question of what *form* one's worldview is held in. What we wrote on this point was: "Thomas and Kelley . . . ignore Rand's valuable distinction between an explicit 'philosophy' and an implicit 'sense of life'" (Kamhi & Torres 2000, 20). As Kelley (2001, 336) himself acknowledges: "The latter is the form particularly relevant to art." In any case, the distinction is one Rand took great pains to elaborate—despite her own occasionally equivocal statements on the subject, as in the following passage (which Kelley may have had in mind):

In order to live, man must act; in order to act, he must make choices; in order to make choices, he must define a code of values; in order to define a code of values, he must know *what* he is and *where* he is—i.e., he must know his own nature (including his means of knowledge) and the nature of the universe in which he acts—i.e., he needs metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, which means: *philosophy*. He cannot escape from this need; his only alternative is whether the philosophy guiding him is to be chosen by his mind or by chance. (Rand [1966a] 1975, 30)

In this passage—from the essay "Philosophy and Sense of Life"—Rand is using "philosophy" loosely, in the sense of a "worldview," much as Kelley did. But the subsequent paragraph begins: "If his mind does not provide him with a comprehensive view of existence [i.e., a 'philosophy'], his sense of life will." Moreover, the passage is preceded by several paragraphs in which Rand sharply contrasts her concept of *sense of life* (as "an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and existence") with a fully "conscious *philosophy* of life." Since she devoted an entire essay to delineating this distinction, it is clear that, notwithstanding her own occasional equivocations, she regarded it as very important.

Along similar lines, we also criticized Thomas and Kelley for declaring that "the artwork is a concrete embodiment of the artist's *philosophy*" (Thomas & Kelley 1999, 18; emphasis added). In his



response, Kelley (2001, 337) acknowledges that “artworks . . . rarely convey anything like an entire philosophy,” and that “it is hard to see how any art form other than a philosophical novel could do so.” We agree with his claim that, nonetheless, “the judgments [artworks] convey are philosophical in character,” loosely speaking. But we think him mistaken in his further claim that a painting of a mother and child, for example, is “essentially normative in character” (338) because it re-creates what the artist regards as “important, worthy, or vital” in reality. Here, again, Kelley seems to blur a key distinction identified by Rand when she wrote that “the primary focus of art is metaphysical, not ethical [or normative]” ([1965b] 1975, 22). True, she had referred, in a slightly earlier essay, to normative abstractions as forming the foundation “of morality and of art” ([1965a] 1975, 145). She subsequently refined that view, however, when she distinguished between “[n]ormative abstractions . . . formed by the criterion of: what is *good*?” and “[e]sthetic abstractions . . . formed by the criterion of: what is *important*?” ([1966b] 1975, 36).

### Comparable Views by Other Philosophers?

While Riegenbach (2001, 272–73) thinks we generally do an “exemplary job” of comparing Rand’s ideas with those of “other thinkers whose views on the arts would interest those who are drawn to Rand’s aesthetic theories,” he argues that two writers of interest have been either unfairly “ignored” or “grossly misrepresented” by us. They are the philosophers Susanne Langer (1895–1985) and Stephen Pepper (1891–1972). The provocative comparisons Riegenbach offers between their views on the arts and Rand’s merit consideration, and in my view constitute one of the most interesting parts of the entire Symposium.

Regarding Pepper, whom we “totally neglected,” Riegenbach suggests that his thought resembles Rand’s in two important respects: first, that his concept of “world hypotheses” is comparable to Rand’s idea of “sense of life”; and second, that his “Formistic” approach to aesthetic criticism is strikingly similar to Rand’s views on aesthetic

judgment. I find the second of these claims more compelling than the first. Riggenbach characterizes Pepper's idea of "world hypotheses" as follows:

Each of us understands life and the human condition in terms of a world hypothesis—a notion about the way the world is and the way it is to be human—an idea, but not one that has been worked out, not one that can be expressed clearly and specifically in discursive language; rather, an idea that can only be expressed in the mode literary artists choose to express themselves: metaphor. (273)

As summarized here, this does sound very much like Rand's concept of "sense of life." When Riggenbach proceeds to illuminate the theory in Pepper's own words, however, quite a different focus seems to emerge. According to Pepper:

A man desiring to understand the world looks around for a clue to its comprehension. He pitches upon some area of common-sense fact and tries if he cannot understand other areas in terms of this one. This original area becomes then his basic analogy or root metaphor. . . . A list of [this area's] structural characteristics becomes his basic concepts of explanation and description. We call them a set of categories. In terms of these categories he proceeds to study all other areas of fact. . . . Some root metaphors prove more fertile than others, have greater powers of expansion and adjustment. These survive in comparison with the others and generate the relatively adequate world theories. (Pepper 1942, 91–92; quoted by Riggenbach 2001, 274)

It seems to me that what Pepper is getting at here is a methodological or epistemological approach to understanding the world, something more akin to Rand's concept of *psycho-epistemology* than to her idea of "sense of life." In her view, an individual's psycho-epistemology—his habitual "method of awareness"—is an important component of his

sense of life, but not the whole of it. It is the *style* of one’s thinking and feeling about the world, not the *content*.<sup>43</sup> That Pepper’s concept pertains more to the style than to the content of a worldview becomes even clearer in Riggenbach’s account of his four “relatively adequate world theories”: Formism, Mechanism, Contextualism, and Organicism. The “Formist” theorist, Riggenbach explains, “chooses the phenomenon of *similarity* among entities and actions as his root metaphor; he adopts a philosophical view that stresses the abstract, the formal, the conceptual.” Pepper applies this approach in a chapter on “Formistic<sup>44</sup> Criticism” in his book *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts*; and the brief excerpts quoted by Riggenbach do suggest a striking kinship with Rand’s views on aesthetic judgment (see the discussion in Torres & Kamhi 2000, 57–59)—in particular, with her harsh criticisms of works whose content does not measure up to their style or technique in her view. Further, as Riggenbach points out, this similarity of approach to the question of artistic value suggests yet another tantalizing link between Rand’s thought and that of the nineteenth-century historian and critic Hippolyte Taine (see Torres & Kamhi 2000, 38, 337 n. 33, and 342–43 n. 14; also Kamhi & Torres 2000, 37 n. 26).

Nonetheless, I do not think that our neglect of Pepper deserves the strong censure implied by Riggenbach, who seems to regard it as an act of deliberate evasion on our part. We had only a passing familiarity with Pepper’s work—from Riggenbach’s own early article “Philosophy and Sense of Life, Revisited” (1974). That article cited only Pepper’s *World Hypotheses*, however, not his books on the arts and criticism. And as I’ve suggested above, it is not the world hypotheses themselves but their application to criticism that seem most germane to Rand. In our comparative considerations of Rand’s ideas, moreover, we tended to focus on thinkers who are frequently cited in the critical or philosophic literature. Pepper, unfortunately, is not.<sup>45</sup> In any case, Riggenbach’s comments have pointed to a potentially fruitful avenue of further study.

With respect to Langer, Riggenbach (2001, 278) claims that our treatment “seriously shortchanges her,” both quantitatively and qualitatively, failing to credit her with having “anticipated almost every

major theme of Rand's aesthetic theory." On the quantitative side, he is at least partly in error, however. Contrary to his charge that "[a]ll [our] references to Langer are in endnotes; she never merits discussion in the main text," we cite her in the text in three different contexts: on pages 44–45, regarding emotion and "expression" in art; on page 48, for her observation that a work of art, though an "imitation" of natural forms, "is never a *copy* in the ordinary sense. . . . It records what [the artist] finds significant"; and, finally, on page 80, regarding music, where we feature her ideas in the block quote and discussion I cited above. The last of these instances, in particular, renders quite indefensible (even baffling) Riggenbach's charge that "if Torres and Kamhi had devoted a fair and detailed hearing to Susanne Langer's ideas, instead of confining an egregiously misleading representation of them to a few footnotes, they would have been forced to come face to face with her theory of music" (2001, 282). Our "few" endnotes on Langer, by the way, number at least nine— which places her among the thinkers we most frequently cite. On the qualitative side, Riggenbach charges that some of our endnotes "come close to misrepresenting Langer's actual position" (281). He takes particular issue with our claim that, while "Rand's emphasis on art's relation to the cognitive need for unit-economy bears comparison with Susanne Langer's view of art as *symbolic* in nature," and while "Langer, too, stresses the importance of selectively condensing vital experience in art, her term 'symbol' (which implies an arbitrary, conventional sign) does not suggest the all-important mimetic character of art, which Rand's theory properly emphasizes" (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 334 n. 9). Although Rand did not fully develop the significance of mimesis, I am convinced that the reason why it is fundamental to the arts is that human representation of the world through mimetic devices is linked to our emotional systems at a very deep level of consciousness. In this connection, we cited the Canadian neuropsychologist's Merlin Donald's views on the cognitive significance of mimesis.<sup>46</sup> Though we argued that the connection is a crucial one, none of the Symposium contributors commented on it.

Riggenbach (2001, 281) argues that Langer meant in the context cited by us what she had termed in an earlier work a "presentational

symbol” (i.e., a *representation*)—as contrasted with a “discursive symbol” (the sense in which we used *symbol*). He rather harshly alleges, therefore, that our criticism was “either disingenuous or shockingly ill-informed.” While it is true that, as he points out, Langer had distinguished between “presentational” and “discursive” symbols in *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942), she dropped those terms in *Feeling and Form* (1953), the work we had primary recourse to. In that work, she employed the simple term “symbol,” without a qualifier, defining it as “any device whereby we are enabled to make an abstraction”<sup>47</sup> (xi). I suspect that she had dropped her prior distinction between kinds of symbols at least in part because some of the things she considered to be “art” were not mimetic in her view. For instance, in *Philosophy in a New Key*, she had argued (albeit mistakenly, I think):

Music . . . is preëminently non-representative. . . . It exhibits pure form not as an embellishment, but as its very essence; . . . from Bach to Beethoven . . . [we] have practically nothing but tonal structures before us: no scene, no object, no fact. . . . If the meaning of art belongs to the sensuous percept itself apart from what it ostensibly represents, then such purely artistic meaning should be most accessible through musical works. (Langer 1942, 169)

This passage is a good example of the tendency to think of “representation” as pertaining to the visible world—a tendency which often leads to the mistaken conclusion that, since music doesn’t represent visual reality, it doesn’t “represent” anything. Moreover, though Langer wisely cautioned, in *Philosophy in a New Key* (169–70), against “the fallacy of hasty generalization—of assuming that through music we are studying all the arts, so that every insight into the nature of music is immediately applicable to painting, architecture, poetry, dance, and drama,” a decade later, in *Feeling and Form*, she argued: “The proper way to construct a general theory is by generalization of a special one; and I believe the analysis of musical significance in *Philosophy in a New Key* is capable of such generalization, and of furnishing a valid theory of significance for the whole Parnassus”

(Langer 1953, 24). As I've indicated, I think that she did not sufficiently recognize the respects in which music is mimetic. But even if the question of music were set aside, her inclusion in the category of "art" of such things as architecture,<sup>48</sup> abstract sculpture, and "pure design" (abstract "decoration") militates against a truly mimetic view of art, and suggests that, contrary to Rigggenbach's claim (2001, 280), the "significant differences" between her ideas and Rand's are more than merely "matters of emphasis." I therefore cannot agree with his claim that their analyses "amount, in sum, to the same theory" (280–81).

At one point, Rigggenbach proposes that "it was Langer, not Rand, who originally suggested the 'Randian' concept of sense of life, and Rand who looked into the idea, saw what might be made of it, and greatly enriched the world of aesthetic philosophy with her insights" (280). This intriguing idea raises the specter of the frustration that scholars are bound to experience in attempting to trace the lineage of Rand's ideas. All access to archival materials at the Ayn Rand Institute, for example, was denied to us, and though the original manuscripts of Rand's principal essays on aesthetics were in private hands, we were equally unable to gain access to them.<sup>49</sup> Sadly, until recent years, there has not been much of a tradition of scholarship or documentation among Objectivists. Notwithstanding his initial suggestion that "Rand looked into [Langer's] idea," however, Rigggenbach quickly acknowledges that there is "no evidence to suggest that Rand ever read Langer" (280). One can't be sure that she didn't, of course, or that she hadn't learned of Langer's ideas indirectly. Be that as it may, while I agree with Rigggenbach's suggestion that "a detailed comparison of these two theories of art" (282) would be of value, such a project would have been beyond the scope of *What Art Is*.

### **Rand's Definition of Art**

Though I have commented at some length on issues related to Rand's ostensive definition of art, questions remain about her formal analytic definition ("Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to

an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments”). In the chapter of *What Art Is* devoted to the definition of art, we accepted Rand’s ostensive definition (apart from her nominal inclusion of architecture, which she later abandoned), but suggested that the differentia of her analytic definition might be refined. Enright does not comment on this chapter, yet he proposes a complete revision of Rand’s definition, prompted mainly by his dubious premise that a “well-designed building provides a compelling experience of the architect’s sense of life” (2001, 344)—on which I commented above. While Rand’s definition “continues to hold” for him, “particularly as a definition for the layman, who focuses on art as a recipient, and who attends primarily to the effects achieved by art,” Enright argues that perhaps “from a technical point of view, from the perspective of the producer, who attends more to the means by which the arts achieve their effects, we would be better served by something along the lines of: [*Art is*] a manmade work created to provide an experience of the creator’s sense of life” (353–54). This definition is unsatisfactory in at least three key respects: (1) the genus “a manmade work” is far too broad, offering no information on the particular class of “manmade” objects to which this subcategory belongs (our summary of the basic rules of definition prominently cited this pitfall); (2) as noted above, an individual’s “sense of life” is too complex a totality to be conveyed by any work of art; and (3) artists do not create in order to “provide an experience” of their sense of life; they create in order to objectify their values and their view of what is important in life.

### **On Metaphysical Value-Judgments in Art<sup>50</sup>**

In *What Art Is*, we were critical of the brief elaboration offered by Rand in “The Psycho-Epistemology of Art” of her concept of “metaphysical value-judgments”—the key term in the differentia of her definition of art. In particular, we took issue with the following series of questions, the answers to which are implicated in metaphysical value-judgments, according to Rand’s analysis:

Is the universe intelligible to man, or unintelligible and

unknowable? Can man find happiness on earth, or is he doomed to frustration and despair? Does [he] have the power . . . to choose his goals and to achieve them . . . or is he the helpless plaything of forces beyond his control? Is man, by nature, to be valued as good, or to be despised as evil? ([1965b] 1975, 19)

We argued, in part, that “it is difficult to understand how the specific questions Rand poses would pertain to any art form but literature—unless the given work had a literary or narrative base (biblical, historical, mythological, or fictional) known to the viewer or listener”<sup>51</sup> (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 25). As an example, we cited Jacques-Louis David’s painting *The Death of Socrates*. Without knowledge of the historical event it refers to, we maintained, “one can only sense that some event of great moment is occurring, one cannot guess what [particular] values are at stake in the action depicted” (25–26). Tangentially, we rejected Rand’s claim ([1965b] 1975, 19) that metaphysical value-judgments in themselves “determine the kind of *ethics* men will accept and practice.”<sup>52</sup> We further suggested that the concept of metaphysical value-judgments, “and its relevance to all the arts, becomes clearer in Rand’s subsequent essays, . . . in which she articulates her concept of *sense of life*, the psychological form in which such judgments are integrated and retained” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 26). At a later point (39), we explained that, in Rand’s view, the main criterion for an individual’s forming the emotional abstractions that constitute his sense of life is personal *importance*—“in the essentially *metaphysical* sense of [being] ‘entitle[d] to attention or consideration.’” Further, while we accepted Rand’s proposition in “Art and Sense of Life” ([1966] 1975) that the metaphysical (and epistemological) assumptions implicit in one’s sense of life guide the artist’s creative process, we rejected her claim that one can reliably *infer* these premises from a work of art (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 55). Finally, in our discussion of her definition of art, we suggested replacing “metaphysical value-judgments” with a term (or terms) that would more clearly capture the idea of personal importance conveyed by her discussion of sense of life.<sup>53</sup>



Painter Michael Newberry takes issue with our position, claiming that our attempt to “redefine Rand’s definition of art, specifically the meaning of metaphysical value-judgments,” negates “an important aspect” of that definition and “minimizes and dilutes Rand’s monumental picture of art” (2001a, 383, 385). As the brief précis offered in the preceding paragraph indicates, however, our attempt to reformulate (not “redefine”) Rand’s definition was intended not as a “negation” but as a clarification of a key term of that definition—along lines Rand herself suggests in essays that were published a year after “The Psycho-Epistemology of Art” and that may therefore reflect deeper thought on her part. Be that as it may, Newberry proposes to demonstrate our alleged error by applying Rand’s metaphysical questions to an interpretation of selected works of visual art. In another context, he has gone so far as to declare that “answering the[se] questions is not only possible [but] . . . is [for him] the most rewarding and exciting aspect of appreciating painting” (2001b). Such an approach is lamentably all too common among Objectivists attempting to apply Rand’s theory to the interpretation (and even to the creation) of visual art.

Regarding the painting we cited, David’s *Death of Socrates*,<sup>54</sup> Newberry notes only that “[q]uite independent of the story, the visual information . . . conveys variations on the themes of great loss and tragedy” (2001a, 384). We would counter that if one cannot answer “loss of what?” and “what sort of tragedy?” one has not said very much. Unlike Newberry, however, we would not conclude that a painting is “not a good work” if it depends on culturally shared knowledge or associations for a full grasp of its moral (or other) import. Many paintings inspired by history, literature, or mythology have done so, to great effect. Yet, we would agree that a painting must make *some* sense without such extra-pictorial information (and, for that reason, we agree with Rand’s rejection of “abstract art”).

The two paintings chosen by Newberry to make his case are Eugène Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* and *The Scream* by Edvard Munch.<sup>55</sup> Of *Liberty Leading the People*, Newberry (2001a) observes:

[T]he central figure is a very physical woman in the act of

striding over a rampart littered with dead fighters. She is encouraging the masses behind her onwards, the French flag raised in her outstretched arm. The setting of the scene is quite clear and the focus of details and the composition are selected and arranged to make her prominent. The clarity of the scene, combined with an emphasis on some elements, conveys that reality is knowable to the artist, and he exhibits a selective focus that makes the event intelligible. (384)

In contrast, Newberry argues, the central figure of *The Scream*

has a sexless face that is out of proportion and rubber-like. The background is swirling and the figure is on a bridge that is plunging downward in an impossible manner. The painting projects that humans are sexless and non-solid, without muscles or bone structure, and hardly intelligible as real humans. The painting also indicates that the universe swims and shifts, that its nature is unpredictable and unknowable. (384–85)

While we do not object to Newberry's claim that Delacroix's painting implies (not "conveys") that "reality is knowable to the artist," we would argue that *any* representational painting does this—including Munch's *Scream*. Contrary to Newberry's facile interpretation, the reality Munch was concerned with conveying was not the physical appearance of external reality but, rather, the inner, emotional reality of an overwhelming sense of terror. The artist's meaning is not that "humans are sexless and non-solid, without muscles or bone structure" or that the universe, in general, "swims and shifts, that its nature is unpredictable and unknowable." What Munch was getting at was something more like: "This is what it feels like to be gripped by terror (regardless of one's gender)—one feels limp and helpless, at the mercy of an unknown power in an unstable realm." While the image is not one we are personally drawn to, it is a powerful expression of a moment in the artist's own experience of life—a life beset, as he reported, by illness, insanity, and the death of close family members.

Notwithstanding such a somber view, bred in large measure of early personal tragedy, other works by Munch depict anatomically differentiated men, women, and children, in an intelligible natural world that is neither swimming nor shifting, and they thus belie the simplistic generalization Newberry draws from *The Scream*. Though this painting is one of Munch’s most expressionistically stylized images and has therefore been widely exploited as an icon of modernism, it is by no means wholly representative of his work.<sup>56</sup> When viewed in the context of his life’s output, it is a sobering reminder of the futility of Newberry’s approach to artistic “detection.”

Instead of “detecting” metaphysical value-judgments, viewers wishing to appreciate a painting would do better to reflect upon the artist’s context and intent. Here are a few questions that are more likely than Rand’s broadly abstract metaphysical ones to illuminate one’s experience of art: What is my direct response to this work? What do I like or dislike about it? What aspect of human experience did the artist focus on as worth attending to? What values—or disvalues—does the work imply? How does the artist’s view compare to my own sense of what is important in life? What insights, if any, does the work offer? What, if anything, am I made more acutely aware of?

### **Rand’s Theory of Art Applied to Modernism and Postmodernism**

Several of the Symposium contributors raise objections to our critique of avant-garde trends in the arts since the early twentieth century. In that critique, we apply the principles of Rand’s cognitive theory of art to an assessment of modernism and postmodernism, analyzing the underlying theories and intentions as well as the work produced. Our aim was to show that in both intent and result the various twentieth-century avant-garde movements have produced what amounts to “anti-art”—a term employed by some of the avant-gardists themselves. Such work is the antithesis of art, we argued (along lines suggested by Rand), because it flouts or subverts the very attributes that enable works of art to perform their cognitive, and emotional,

function. In contrast, most philosophers in recent decades have tended to accept all avant-garde work as legitimate (if not very “good”) art, and have adjusted their aesthetic theories accordingly. One result is the “institutional theory,” which claims in effect that anything can be art. In such a state of affairs, nothing coherent or valid can be said about the nature of “art,” of course, because it has become an epistemologically empty concept—it can refer to virtually anything in reality. In concrete terms, this has meant that “artists” such as Damien Hirst (who only a few years ago shocked the world by displaying dead animals in vats of formaldehyde and calling it art) have now gained full acceptance within mainstream institutions of culture.<sup>57</sup> Those who object to our critique have not, I think, adequately reflected upon either this intellectual and cultural debacle or our response to it.

Riggenbach, for example, complains: “Much of the latter half of *What Art Is* consists, unfortunately, of lamentations over the state of the arts in the twentieth century. And, alas, much of it is of such a caliber as not to inspire confidence in the knowledge or understanding of its authors” (2001, 287–88). In truth, however, of some hundred and fifty pages we devote to this discussion, Riggenbach comments on only ten pages (hardly “much” of the total)—our critique of the work of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett—on which I will say more below.

Bell-Villada is similarly critical of what he refers to as our “obsessive dismissal of virtually all now-canonical twentieth-century artworks”—deprecating our discussion as a “philosophical Johnny-One-Note” (2001, 292). Though he covers more ground than Riggenbach, he, too, misses the main point of our negative emphasis. Our analysis was not intended as a mere “broadside” against modernist and postmodernist work we *dislike*. What we aimed to demonstrate was that, judged by an objective standard, based on a growing understanding of normal perceptual and cognitive processes, most such work does not qualify as art at all. The main thesis, or “one note,” of our book is Rand’s answer to the central question of aesthetics—*What is art?*—which includes the related questions, *What is the function of art?* and *How does it perform this function?* Since contemporary considerations of “art”—not to mention public exhibitions, arts education, and art law—are increasingly vitiated by the

inclusion of “cutting-edge” work that is not art, establishing reasonable boundaries for so important a concept becomes an ever more urgent cultural issue.

Bell-Villada finds “particularly troubling” our alleged failure to offer “any larger theory of historical causality” (292)—one that would take into account the sociopolitical and economic factors that may have contributed to the ascendancy of such work (293–94). He apparently discounts philosophic and intellectual factors—which is not surprising, given his Marxist premises. As argued throughout *What Art Is*, however, the avant-garde’s departures from “traditional” art forms have been driven largely by mistaken (often deliberately contrarian) notions regarding the nature of art itself, and by gross ignorance of human psychology, both cognitive and affective. Marxists like Bell-Villada would like to pin the blame for these trends on late capitalism, while some libertarians are inclined to argue (as Rand herself seemed to do at times) that the irrationalism and oppression of statism are to blame. We have offered a different perspective, by analyzing the *false ideas* underlying the purported artistic innovations of both modernists and postmodernists. As for why certain individuals have held and acted upon such false ideas, while others have rejected them, that is a question of such complexity that I doubt it could be satisfactorily answered in another entire book. It was certainly beyond the scope of ours.

### **Abstract Art**

Though Bell-Villada concedes that our “close analyses of statements by abstract artists, and [our] account of the critical reception of abstraction itself,” is “useful and informative” (291), he subsequently claims that the deficiency of our analytic approach “becomes especially evident in [our] onslaught against abstract art and artists” (293). A contradiction, or at least ambivalence, is surely evident in these two views. Unfairly charging that our “only argument . . . is that these artists are somehow sick,” and suggesting that our primary reason for frequently citing clinical psychologist Louis Sass is to show that they were all “schizoid,” Bell-Villada argues (again

revealing his Marxist premises) that “the question of *why* some styles of art become dominant is an issue having more to do with politics, economics, and history than with subjective preferences and personal disorders.” Contrary to his charge (and to a similar one by Riggerbach<sup>58</sup>), we stated, in our discussion of abstract art:

We are by no means suggesting that all [these] artists suffer from schizophrenia, or from other forms of mental illness—although evidence certainly exists that at least some of its more prominent practitioners did. But we do mean to challenge the view of critics such as [Hilton] Kramer—who sees in the work of Mondrian, for example, “a dazzling demonstration of a first-class intelligence working out its special destiny” and evidence of “a powerful mind . . . expressing itself through the pictorial inventions of a powerful sensibility.” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 145)

We also argued that “[f]rom its inception, abstract art was theory-driven, dependent on an ever-growing body of philosophic and critical discourse for its very existence, not to mention its legitimization” and that “[o]ccult beliefs about the nature of the universe and of man’s place in it [had] led the first abstract artists to their . . . radical break with reality” (133). Further: “When one analyzes the arguments put forward by these seminal figures, however, one can see that the whole abstract edifice rests on the flimsiest of intellectual foundations, weakly cemented by dubious premises incompatible with modern science. Those unsubstantiated claims, often originating in occultist beliefs, pertain not only to the ultimate nature of reality but also to the sources of human knowledge and emotion, as well as to the function of art” (135).

We then proceeded to analyze some of these false claims and beliefs—from the assumption that mind and spirit could be severed from matter to the idea that profound spiritual values could be represented without reference to persons, places, and things in reality. (In this context, I find particularly ironic Enright’s approving citation [2001, 355] of Richard Speer—an Objectivist who has written at

length about Mondrian on his personal website—for his “praising [Mondrian’s designs] in Randian terms as signifying the psycho-epistemology of a logical mind.” Here, once again, Enright completely ignores the relevant discussion in *What Art Is*.) Finally, we emphasized that, from the beginning, abstract artists themselves have doubted the viability of their work as “art,” for they have persistently feared that it would be perceived as merely “decorative” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 138–39 et passim). Among other evidence, we cited a leading Mondrian scholar’s view that for Mondrian, as for the other early abstract painters, “there was the constant danger of falling into the abyss of meaningless ornament”; and that all of Mondrian’s theorizing was dominated by his “need to prove to himself and to others that . . . his art was not just decoration” (Blotkamp 1995, 80, 113, and 204). Here, as throughout our critique, we relied primarily on the words not of adversaries of modernism and postmodernism but of the “artists” themselves and their admirers.

Bell-Villada’s less than satisfying response to all this is that he “happen[s] to like a great deal of abstract art.” While he is willing to concede that there are “plenty of mediocrities and frauds in the field,” he ultimately concludes that “it comes down to a matter of taste: either you like the stuff or you don’t” (2001, 293)—a position not unlike that taken by the conservative critic Roger Kimball (2001, 119) in his review of *What Art Is*. On the contrary, it is not at all a question of whether one likes it, but of what one likes it for, and whether it belongs in the category of *art*.<sup>59</sup> The questions that interest Bell-Villada (2001, 293), however, have to do with such things as “the crucial role played by the New York corporate elite in weaning American artists away from 1930s Socialist Realism and leading them toward pure abstraction.” The fundamental question of how “pure abstraction” came about in the first place—why, after millennia of representing men and gods, the wonders of the natural world, the whole range of human experience in all its glory and misery, a handful of artists suddenly began painting grids of straight lines, black and white squares, and patches of bright color—that question is of no interest to him. Instead, he adduces Serge Guilbaut’s *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (1983)—a “seminal study” of the way in which Abstract

Expressionism was exploited for anti-Marxist political purposes in America during the Cold War. Falsely implying that we are silent on the subject, Bell-Villada (293–94) ignores our interpretation of this phenomenon. Thus he, too, misses the remarkable irony that escaped Guilbaut and the champions of Abstract Expressionism alike. As we wrote in our discussion of the abstract pioneers:

It is one of the ironies of abstract art—which was eventually thought of as a bastion of individual freedom—that the originators of the “new art,” who considered themselves harbingers of the “new consciousness,” were profoundly collectivist in their outlook and explicitly aspired to the eventual submersion of the “individual” in the “universal,” in art as in society and politics. Firmly believing that art “marches in the vanguard of psychic evolution,” as Malevich declared, they insisted that man’s inevitable progress toward the new state of consciousness would be manifested in abstract form in the arts. For them, the “universal” was not merely an epistemological concept; it was endowed with metaphysical reality, comparable to that ascribed to Plato’s ideal “Forms.” . . . Proponents of the “new art” deprecated the “individual” as the dominating force in the old world order, which mankind must move beyond. (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 136)

To any thinking person not blinded by ideology, it should appear absurd that, within a few decades of the pioneers of nonobjective painting, the abstract artist would be honored in America for being “true to his personal vision”; and that abstract art—which, as we noted, “had originated in the explicitly collectivist rejection of all that was personal and individual”—would be “transformed, in theory, into the last bastion of individual liberty” (154). To understand such intellectual somersaults requires more than detecting “the invisible hand of the CIA” or uncovering the machinations of “the mighty captains of industry and finance in Manhattan” cited by Bell-Villada (2001, 294). And abstract art has surely had cultural repercussions far



beyond the politics of the Cold War. Not least, it provoked the “postmodernist” reaction that has wrought havoc in the artworld since the 1960s.

In attempting to defend abstract art, Bell-Villada resorts to the time-worn fallacy of illicit conversion. Since the Impressionists, now beloved by the public, once “endured scorn and vilification in the press,” he argues, now-reviled abstract artists such as Barnett Newman may one day be popular. I doubt it. In any case, time is running out for them. The Impressionists—who were never as totally rejected as Bell-Villada’s account suggests—had gained a fair degree of popular acceptance within a quarter-century. Even Monet, the most impoverished of the group, had become a sought-after and prosperous artist by the age of fifty (Canaday 1959, 185; Bazin 1958, 35–38). Nearly a century after the pioneers of abstraction, however, and a half-century after the Abstract Expressionists, cartoonists still poke fun at their inscrutable canvases, thus reflecting the attitude of much of the public.

### **Avant-Garde Literature**

Both Bell-Villada and Riggerbach strongly object to our treatment of the literary avant-garde—or at least to two-thirds of it, as neither of them comments on our section on John Ashbery and poetry (perhaps implying tacit approval). According to Riggerbach (2001, 287–88): “For all [our] admirable ability to distinguish between Rand the aesthetician and Rand the frequently ignorant polemicist against all Modernist art, [we] lapse into a good deal of ignorant, anti-twentieth century polemicism of [our] own.” Given such harsh censure from so intelligent a critic, we would have appreciated a substantive critique of our argument. Instead, Riggerbach merely points out two regrettable errors of fact on our part—which have no direct bearing on the thrust of our analysis—and suggests that one modifier we used may have been too strong. Since Torres will comment on these points in the Fall 2003 issue, I will say no more here.

Bell-Villada finds “depressingly familiar” our criticism of Joyce and Beckett for (as he puts it) “not offering more physical action in

their novels, and in particular for portraying the world as bleak and hopeless” (2001, 296). In so claiming, he misconstrues the main point of our discussion of these two literary icons, and ignores its connection to the larger thesis of our book. Our primary objection to their critically acclaimed work is not that it is uninspiring or that it portrays the world as hopelessly bleak (real art can do that) but that it is so deficient in the basic attributes of fiction and drama—one of which is action, or plot, and the most fundamental of which is *intelligibility*. That is the main reason why the work in question fails as art, in our view. As we note, even Joyce’s admirers concede that *Ulysses* cannot be understood by literate English-speaking readers without the benefit of an interpretive guide. While one might willingly consult an interpretive guide to plumb the depths of, say, Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (since it was written in a foreign tongue, in a culture centuries removed from our own), it seems reasonable to expect to dispense with such a crutch in reading a fictional work in one’s own language and of a relatively recent time.<sup>60</sup> As we noted of *Finnegans Wake* (1939), moreover, not only does plot give way entirely to “internal thought processes—and to wholly involuntary, subconscious thought at that,” but further, language itself is reduced to largely incomprehensible, contrived abstruseness (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 244–46), thereby defeating the main purpose of art: to bring focus and clarity to the complexity and confusion of life.

With regard to Beckett, we did not analyze his “novels” (as Bell-Villada implies) but his “plays,” for which he is best known—and which, we argue, exhibited even more extreme obscurantist tendencies than Joyce’s fiction did. Whereas Joyce’s abstruseness was carefully contrived (a perverse product of wit and erudition, as it were), Beckett himself admitted that he was “not the master of [his] own material” but was working, instead, with “impotence [and] ignorance,” in the “zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable—as something by definition incompatible with art” (quoted in Torres & Kamhi 2000, 249). Bell-Villada’s defense of him merely echoes what is to me the depressingly familiar critical claim that the very absurdity or unintelligibility of his work is the source of its greatness, because it reflects the “truth of . . . human life” (2001,

297)—rather than mainly reflecting his own psychological infirmity, as we argued.

Given Bell-Villada’s commitment to the Marxist view of culture and society, it is not surprising that, in defense of these writers, he notes that Joyce “heralded from colonial Ireland” (296) and that Beckett’s critically acclaimed work followed hard on the heels of the Second World War—as if these circumstances were the exclusive, or at least primary, factors determining the nature of their work. In reply, I would remind him that colonial Ireland also engendered George Bernard Shaw—whose *Major Barbara* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1912), and *Saint Joan* (1923), for example, present sharply different views of human possibilities from those of Joyce or Beckett. So, too, Albert Camus’s postwar novel *The Plague* (1947) rises well above Beckett’s helpless nihilism and (like Shaw’s work) is genuine literature. These and countless other examples give the lie to Bell-Villada’s premise that an artist’s view of life is determined solely by his external circumstances.

Comparing us to “typical bourgeois moralists, Stalinist commissars, fascist theoreticians, religious imams, proper schoolmarm[s], and Hollywood executives,” Bell-Villada presumes that, like them, we want only artworks that “will give us uplift, not dark truths, [and] that will depict handsome and courageous heroes who triumph over all odds, not stories of the less-than-fortunate folks who simply get by day by day” (2001, 296). Never mind that we devote an entire section of our book to lauding a screenplay (*Harrow Alley*) dealing with folks who get by day by day during the horrors of the great London plague or that we defend Vermeer’s domestic subject matter against Rand’s charges of banality or that we write admiringly of Velazquez’s portraits of the Spanish court dwarves (hardly “handsome”). Bell-Villada simply ignores such evidence, which does not fit his preconceptions regarding our “libertarian aesthetics” (292). Also ill-founded is his claim that “throughout [our] book there is an implied notion that art should be easily accessible to everyone” (295). *Everyone?* Hardly. But I do find troubling, for instance, that an earnest and intelligent young woman I know once found herself in tears at the impenetrability of an assigned reading from Samuel Beckett in a

university course on modern English literature. Feeling herself inadequate to the task, she dropped the course. How many times, I wonder, have others been similarly intimidated?

Not for us “the very real angst and/or deprivation that are the lot of most human beings,” Bell-Villada charges, since “truth, alas, is not a major concern for professional ideologues, whichever be the little stripe they occupy on the political spectrum” (296–97). He thus implies that his doleful sense of life constitutes *the truth* about the human condition, while “courageous heroes” and “good guys trouncing evil” are mere fantasy, with no basis in reality. The irony of Bell-Villada’s view, of course, is that, were heroes and good guys not also part of the fundamental truth of human life, the bleak realities of history that cloud his vision would have been far bleaker yet. Given still-vivid memories of the September 11 terrorist attacks—the enormity of which was transcended by myriad acts of courage and generosity—I have no doubt of where the truth lies regarding heroes versus bad guys. (For some reminders from the historical past, Bell-Villada might read Jack Schaefer’s *Heroes Without Glory* or Jim Powell’s *The Triumph of Liberty*.) I am also inclined to think that focusing on misery and evil is an indulgence of well-fed, well-housed intellectuals, who may thereby expiate feelings of guilt at not being among the less fortunate. The “ordinary folk” who are struggling to survive cannot afford such a luxury. To go on, they need the image and hope of something better.

Finally, Bell-Villada attempts to discredit our critique of modernism and postmodernism by a superficial analogy with Tolstoy’s *What Is Art?* and Max Nordau’s *Degeneration*. Such a comparison in itself proves nothing, however. That those writers proposed theories now considered too extreme or downright mistaken in some respects does not mean that all their concerns about art and culture were foolish or that a sounder analysis is impossible. Nor should one shrink from such an investigation because the Nazis exploited Nordau’s claims for their nefarious purposes. In Austria, I am told, virtually no one dares to criticize even the most outrageous postmodernist work, for fear of being dubbed a neo-Nazi. I find such a state of affairs nearly as alarming as Nazi oppression itself once was.

In any case, if the theory we present is to be refuted, it must be by a detailed critique of our argument and of the evidence we present—not by a sweeping analogy with earlier mistaken theories or with the twisted uses to which Nordau’s, in particular, was put.

On the errors of Tolstoy’s argument, we ourselves offered a number of comments, pointing out fundamental differences between his view and Rand’s (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 44–45 and 345, nn. 4, 5). To lump the two theories together as Bell-Villada does is therefore indefensible. As for Nordau’s ill-fated tome (which we did not cite in *What Art Is*), he sometimes overstated his case, and he unfortunately tied his argument to a mistaken theory of physiological degeneration, yet he had many sensible things to say, both about the consequences of a breakdown of moral values and about irrational trends in the arts. As historian George L. Mosse wrote in an Introduction to a reissue of *Degeneration* by the University of Nebraska Press in the late 1960s (in Nordau [1895] 1968, xxxii):

Nordau’s criticism no longer seems as farfetched as it once did. . . . [His] science and his psychology are gone for good, but the values they supported probably have become more widely diffused, more basic to our society, than the custodians of cultural standards would have us believe. We are inclined to scoff at these values. But at one point in history, hard work, discipline, and attention to duty, combined with an unquenchable optimism, did help to build industrial Europe. This needs stressing, for the dark side of this liberal attitude toward life . . . has been the theme of modern art and literature from the *fin de siècle* until our own time.

### **Public Implications: Arts Education**

Given Rand’s frequent emphasis on the importance of intellectual activism, it is both surprising and disappointing to me that the final chapter of *What Art Is*, on key public implications of Rand’s theory, was so little commented upon in the Symposium. Of all the contributors, in fact, only Bell-Villada refers to it at all. And his

misreading of our section on “Teaching the Arts to Children”—which he considers the “weakest” though “potentially the most promising” part of the book—is worse than disappointing. Bell-Villada (2001, 295) charges that our approach of first allowing children to experience a work directly (before the teacher provides any interpretive, technical, or background information), and then eliciting their personal reactions, “smacks of the tiredest sort of fin-de-siècle aestheticism once proposed by Walter Pater.” In so claiming, he completely ignores our prior criticism of “the ‘Aestheticism’ embraced by writers and critics such as Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater in the final decades of the nineteenth century” and of its “mistaken emphasis on beauty as the primary attribute of art” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 204). He also belies our emphasis on helping children to identify and articulate the reasons *why* they respond to works of art as they do—reasons rooted in each child’s distinctive sense of life and emergent values. Contrary to the “aestheticist” approach (which regards beauty as an intrinsic attribute that anyone with “taste” must perceive), we seek to illuminate how a work’s aesthetic properties contribute to an embodiment of meaning, which each individual responds to in his own way. At the same time, we avoid reducing the work of art to a mere datum of history, sociology, or politics—which seems to be the approach Bell-Villada would prefer. In view of his own often illuminating critical and historical account of aestheticism in his *Art for Art’s Sake and Literary Life* (1996), I had hoped that he might—despite his evident animus against Rand, at whom he takes several gratuitous swipes in that volume—find much to appreciate in her theory of art. More important, I had assumed (in contrast with the pessimism of his parting swipe at Torres and me in the Symposium) that truth might yet be a major concern even for a “professional ideologue,” especially for one who also professes to be a scholar.

On a lesser point regarding arts education, Bell-Villada falsely alleges that we contribute to “historical and biographical amnesia” when we criticize the programmatically literal approach recommended to teachers in a Core Knowledge guide for introducing students to Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*. We were well aware of the background information Bell-Villada alludes to—that the composer himself had

assigned descriptive titles to the movements. Our concern lay with the more fundamental issue of the nature of music and the listening experience, however, and with the inappropriateness of ascribing a literal program to *any* instrumental music. Moreover, despite his descriptive titles, even Beethoven would have objected to the literal interpretation that the teaching guide recommends. This is what critic Harold Schonberg has to say regarding the composer’s thoughts on the subject:

Beethoven derided program music. While composing the *Pastoral Symphony* he . . . set down these observations: “All painting in instrumental music is lost if pushed too far. . . . Anyone who has an idea of country life can make out for himself the intentions of the composer without many titles. . . . Also, without titles, the whole will be recognized as *a matter more of feeling than of painting in sounds.*” (Schonberg 1981, 121; emphasis added)

What Bell-Villada seems to advocate is an authoritarian approach to arts education, in which a teacher tells children *how to respond* and *what to think* about the music. Such an approach ignores Rand’s apt observations that art is “of passionately intense importance and profoundly *personal* concern,” and that when “music induces an emotional state without external object, [the *listener’s*] subconscious suggests an internal one” (quoted in Torres & Kamhi 2000, 81). True, the teacher can play an important role in imparting technical, historical, and biographical information; in our view, however, such material should be introduced only after students have had a chance to experience the work on their own. But this issue pales in comparison with the fact that much of what passes for arts education in today’s schools does not deal with art at all—a point which, astonishingly, was of interest to none of the contributors.

## Notes

1. This account incorporates some of the remarks co-authored by Louis Torres and me and posted online <<http://www.aristos.org/editors/jarssymp.htm>> as a preliminary response to the Symposium (focusing on the papers by Dipert, Hospers, Hunt, and Kelley); but readers of this response may find additional material of interest there.

2. Of all the contributors to the Symposium, Hospers might have provided the broadest perspective on Rand's theory of art and the most informed response to our book, since he is the only academic aesthetician in the group and has had a long and distinguished career in the field. Instead, as he states, he makes "no attempt to provide a general review of [the] book" (this despite the fact that he requested a review copy from the publisher); and his remarks about the ideas in *What Art Is* are few indeed. Though his citations of "Torres & Kamhi" are quite numerous, nearly all of them refer to our quotations of statements by Rand, not to our interpretation or application of her aesthetic theory. What Hospers offers is mainly a recapitulation of his own published work on aesthetics, with scarcely any consideration of how Rand's theory of art compares or contrasts with other ideas on the subject.

3. Kelley also alleges a number of scholarly and moral lapses on our part— all of which we regard as unfounded and to which we have responded in full online at <<http://www.aristos.org/editors/jarssymp.htm>>.

4. Though Bissell does not deal at all with the content of our book, he faults us for not discussing ideas he presented in an unpublished monograph and a 1997 article in *Objectivity*, an Objectivist journal of very limited circulation. Our critique of the literature on Rand's aesthetics focused on publicly available materials, and at the time of writing we were simply unaware of his 1997 article.

5. Bissell (2001, 305) censures us for our purportedly "a-historical" omission of Baumgarten. His criticism misconstrues the sense of that term, however. While citation of Baumgarten would have enhanced the brief history we offered of the term "esthetics," our omission was not *ahistorical*, since it involved no anachronistic distortion of the ideas we did discuss. Moreover, as I shall indicate here, including Baumgarten would have only strengthened our argument.

6. Torres and I were not aware of the similarity between Kant's cognitive view of art and Rand's when we wrote *What Art Is*, but we noted it in our response to Roger Kimball's review of the book for *The Public Interest* (Torres & Kamhi 2001b). In discussing the principles of art criticism, Kimball had cited one of Kant's frequently quoted dicta regarding taste. Like most critics, he ignored that it was from a section of the *Critique of Judgment* not devoted to the consideration of art.

7. This translation is from the abridged edition by Paolucci. For a more complete, less idiomatic English version, see Hegel [1823–29] 1993, 3.

8. For an illuminating account of the respects in which Rand's philosophic thought drew on or anticipated "the developments in the study of perception, attention, memory, concept-formation, thinking, and problem-solving that have come to be known as the Cognitive Revolution," see Campbell 1999 and 2000.



9. It is worth noting here that a leading Gadamer scholar, Richard Palmer, has written a sympathetic review of *What Art Is* for *Choice* magazine (April 2001); see <<http://www.aristos.org/editors/choice.htm>>.

10. Hunt (2001, 256), for example, concedes that Rand’s definition of Romanticism “seems to be applicable only to arts that tell a story.” But he argues that we “are going too far when [we] suggest that . . . Rand’s comments on Romanticism . . . constitute mere personal statements that need not be taken seriously as theory” (257). That is not quite what we meant, however, when we stated that her concepts of Romanticism and Naturalism “figure prominently in her personal esthetic of literature but are misleading in the context of her theory of art” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 31). By “personal esthetic of literature,” we meant both the sort of literature she wrote and the kind she regarded as of highest value. This was not meant to imply that it “need not be taken seriously as theory” in any context, only that it does not constitute a theory regarding the nature of either art or literature in general.

11. In one respect, we may have inadvertently misled some readers by including the following in an endnote summary of Rand’s philosophy (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 332 n. 77): “The ideal political-economic system is *laissez-faire* capitalism.” While a true statement of her view, it is irrelevant to her theory of art.

12. It is interesting to note that, in opposition to the politically inspired avant-garde onslaught of the 1960s and after, the New Left philosopher Herbert Marcuse advocated (1969; 1978) a view of art not unlike Rand’s—suggesting that the essential nature of art is biologically delimited.

13. Where Dipert wrote “merely,” I would say “not at all.”

14. Not least of Vacker’s deficiencies is his prose style; Torres will comment on this in the Fall 2003 issue.

15. Nathaniel Branden (1989, 434–35) rightly suggests that part of the appeal of Rand’s novels is the deep human desire for transcendence. The issue here is the extent and precise nature of that appeal. Vacker claims it’s the “main reason” for the popularity of her novels. His notion of what engenders feelings of “the sublime” is, moreover, very different from the ways in which Rand suggests transcendence.

16. Of our account of Rand’s cognitive theory of art, Vacker (2001, 363–64) offers only a perfunctory summary, which misrepresents our developed view. Asserting that we “affirm Rand’s view that the *cognitive* function of art is to concretize a comprehensive view of human nature and humanity’s place in the universe ([Torres & Kamhi 2000], 25–27),” he ignores our subsequent emendation of Rand’s idea that art embodies such a “comprehensive” view (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 48). In contrast, Riggenbach (2001, 270–71) calls attention to the latter passage (cited here under my discussion of “Rand’s Concept of ‘Sense of Life’”) as a valuable correction of Rand.

17. It does not follow, however, that we “might dispute the claim that paintings often serve important *decorative* functions,” as Vacker suggests (2001, 371). Like Bell-Villada, he appears to have ignored our discussion of a survey reporting that individuals who *like* abstract art well enough to hang it in their homes do so more for its *decorative* values than for any “meaning.” Vacker’s

reference to a rug “designed by Mondrian” (does he mean “based on a design by Mondrian”?) is further evidence of abstract art’s decorative qualities. Vacker correctly surmises that “[n]one of this meets the criteria of art for Torres and Kamhi.” But his subsequent claim—that his “choice of urban living has less aesthetic value [in our eyes] than a suburban house adorned with Norman Rockwell and landscape paintings”—is nonsense. “Aesthetic value” is not limited to art. Nor would the mere fact of a suburban house’s being adorned with Rockwell paintings and landscapes indicate much one way or the other about its overall “aesthetic value.”

18. Vacker (2001, 366) argues: “For Rand, art is for pure contemplation, without any material function, existing as an end in itself. This claim is . . . clearly within the post-Kantian modernist trajectory.” In his preceding paragraph, Vacker claimed that “under the Kantian imperative, the beauty of an empirical object was marred from the outset. Any material function consigned an artwork to the tainted world of ‘design’ (or craft), placing its value well beneath pure expression for mental contemplation.” (Though such a view of Kant’s aesthetics is quite common, I think it distorts his meaning, but that is meat for another article.) Finally, Vacker charges that, in “defending the cognitive foundations of art,” we “reduce aesthetic experience to the sterile contemplation of our ‘deepest values’ and divorce such values from the functional objects that surround us in our everyday lives” (368).

19. Vacker (2001, 368) writes: “In embracing the duality between art and beauty or function, Torres and Kamhi (2000) aim to overcome ‘conceptual confusion.’ To accomplish this task, they conflate ‘philosophy of art’ with aesthetics, and define beauty out of aesthetics (16). Such philosophical contortions may work in defending an old order, but they do little to clarify the divorce of beauty and function from aesthetics.”

20. Several passages in *What Art Is* clearly imply that we not only recognize but value the presence of beauty in some works of art. See, for example, Torres & Kamhi 2000, 33, 49, 203–4, and 427 n. 14.

21. Vacker (2001, 364) claims, for example: “Rand presented a *psychology of art* that rests upon dualistic foundations that undermine its viability as a *philosophy of aesthetics*. Torres and Kamhi ardently defend this duality. . . . [T]hey too . . . embrace the duality of art versus material function.” Further: “[Torres and Kamhi] embrace a Kantian duality between empirical reality and abstract reason” (367). In these contexts, at least, Vacker appears to assume that our distinctions constitute an antagonistic dualism.

22. The *Dictionary of Philosophy* (edited by Peter Angeles), for example, offers the following definitions of “chaos”—which are consistent with common usage prior to the introduction of “chaos theory” in the early 1980s: “1. The *disorganized, confused, formless, and undifferentiated state of primal matter before the presence of order in the universe*. 2. That condition of the universe in which chance is the principal ruler. 3. An uncontrolled state of affairs. 4. In Greek philosophy, the universe as it was before rational principles (laws) manifested themselves throughout the universe and brought about the world order as it is now. *Sometimes regarded as a principle itself which prevents order or demolishes order*” (emphasis added).

23. According to Gleick (1987, 306), “no one could quite agree on the word itself.” Among others, he notes John Hubbard, who explored “the infinite fractal wildness of the Mandelbrot set, [but] considered chaos a poor name for his work, because it implied randomness. To him, the overriding message was that simple processes in nature could produce magnificent edifices of complexity *without* randomness.”

24. Nor are Vacker’s definitions entirely adequate. For example, he defines *the sublime* as “(1) so beautiful as to seem heavenly; 2) of highest moral or spiritual value; 3) excellent or particularly impressive.” But these three senses (which he takes from the *Encarta Dictionary*—a scarcely authoritative source) miss the connotations of awe-inspiring grandeur that are central to philosophic discussions of the concept. See Mothersill 1992.

25. See also Kelley 1988, 14–25, for a discussion of concepts based on other concepts.

26. A terrible irony of the World Trade Center disaster, which should give pause to beauty theorists such as Vacker, is that images of the planes crashing into the towers have been referred to as oddly “beautiful.” See, for example, *New York* magazine (24 September 2001, [12]).

27. It is the idea of “man’s cognitive mastery” over the chaos of nature (in the traditional sense of *chaos*, not that of chaos theory) that Johnson also emphasizes in his comment on elements of “the sublime” in “Rand’s aesthetic signature” (2000, 232), which Vacker misleadingly cites (2001, 362) as if it supported his own position. (Vacker conveniently omits Johnson’s preceding statement: “[A]lthough I think Vacker is right to point out chaotic elements in Rand’s descriptions of nature and art, it is a mistake to characterize the whole of Rand’s aesthetic in terms of this part.”) Johnson’s reference (232) to “mind-boggling magnitudes and fearsome powers” seems to me to be more related to the traditional sense of “chaos” than to that of chaos theory.

28. See, for example, the opening scene of Part IV of *The Fountainhead*, in which Rand describes Roark’s Monadnock Valley project: “There were small houses on the ledges of the hill . . . , flowing down to the bottom. . . . [T]he ledges had not been touched, . . . no artifice had altered *the unplanned beauty of the graded steps*. Yet some power had known how to build on these ledges in such a way that the houses became inevitable, and one could no longer imagine the hills as beautiful without them” (Rand [1943] 1971, 505; emphasis added).

29. Since we have never visited Bilbao, our critique of Gehry’s Guggenheim building relied on accounts by critics who have. As indicated by our brief reference to Michael Kimmelman—so misleadingly omitted by Vacker—even the praise of Gehry’s admirers implies the failure of his design. Toward the end of his essay, Vacker (2001, 380) quotes our descriptive passage in full. But that excerpt, coming so late in the essay, is unlikely to dispel the negative impression created for many readers by the opening epigraphs.

In a similarly misleading citation (381), Vacker states that we “criticize the spiral form of Wright’s Guggenheim for being ‘incongruous amidst the urbane uniformity of Fifth Avenue rectilinear apartment buildings,’ which has resulted in ‘absurd and disastrous consequences’ for the architectural site ([Torres & Kamhi

2000,] 422, 195).” The phrase “absurd and disastrous consequences” was not ours, but was quoted from Roger Scruton, and it did not refer merely to an “architectural site” or even to the Guggenheim in particular, but to the principle that all good architecture is site-specific and a building should not be constructed on a site other than the one it was designed for. We cited Wright’s Guggenheim as a “stark illustration” of this principle.

30. Although Vacker praises Wright’s “organic” architecture (1999, 139–40), his comparison of Wright and Gehry suggests he does not really understand the concept.

31. The fundamental disparity between Gehry and Wright has also been commented on by two other Objectivist architects who admire Wright’s work—John Gillis (2001) and Sherri Tracinski (1998).

32. Regarding comparisons between the various arts in literature and philosophy, see, for example, Butcher [1907] 1951, Halliwell 1986, Kagan 1986, Lee [1940] 1967, and Li Zehou [1981] 1994.

33. Since a section of *What Art Is* is devoted to “Music as a ‘Re-Creation of Reality,’” I find it particularly odd that Enright (2001, 357 n. 9) states: “As Merrill (1990 [*ibid.*, 125] puts it: ‘[I]f one accepts Ayn Rand’s definition of art, it is not clear how music can qualify.’ The issue was also raised by Torres and Kamhi (1992a, 4).” We not only “raise” the issue in that early monograph on Rand’s philosophy of art, we also offer some tentative answers, and develop them more fully in our book—which Enright does not cite.

34. Riggenbach (2001, 285) objects, in part, to our framing the discussion in terms of “photography,” rather than “photographs.” In his view, the proper question is not, “Is photography an art?” but “Can any photograph be a work of art?”—just as the proper question is not, “Is painting an art?” but “Can something painted be a work of art?” In the case of painting, I would agree that the distinction is a valid one, since not every painted image is a work of art. The point of our argument regarding photography, however, is that the nature of the process puts *all* images produced by it outside the category of *art*, despite the fact that some photographs are “artistic” in their effect.

35. For a different perspective on Adams’s work, see Kamhi 2002.

36. The Iwo Jima image is briefly discussed in Kamhi 2002.

37. Dipert (2001, 393) further observes: “It is then clear why [Rand] would like music that projected some grandeur and confidence, such as Beethoven or her fellow St. Petersburg émigré, Rachmaninoff.” While plausible in principle, this statement is partly in error, since Rand’s dislike of Beethoven’s work was notorious (Branden 1986, 243, 311, 386).

38. Bissell cites only one source for this “long . . . acknowledged” fact: Leonard B. Meyer (1967, especially 71–72). As Stephen Davies (1994, 289) observes, however, Meyer’s views are by no means fully accepted, for they are “vulnerable to many criticisms.”

39. I am reminded here of the dysfunctional tendency toward over-abstractness that Louis Sass describes as common in schizophrenic or schizoid thought processes. See, for example, Sass 1992, 191.

40. Riggenschach’s statement (2001, 287) that we “assert that the film *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961) is a film without a director” is somewhat misleading. What we wrote, after citing critic Andrew Sarris as the chief American advocate of the *auteur* theory (which regards the director as the primary creative artist in film) was: “Even Sar[r]is notes, however, that successful films can be made without a director, citing Marlon Brando’s *One-Eyed Jacks* as an example” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 453 n. 53).

41. A third concept is called for here: that of “popular art” (which Riggenschach may be conflating with my concept of “entertainment”). Whereas the creative focus of entertainment is on what will most divert or amuse an audience, popular art, like so-called high art, is primarily concerned with the objectification of the creators’ values and life view. It shares essentially the same creative focus, but tends to be more accessible, as well as less complex in its scope, less profound, and less subtle in its means. Unlike mere entertainment, however, popular art is not created with the *primary intent* of garnering popularity: in contrast with entertainers, genuine popular artists do not pander to their audience, they simply work in the way that is most natural to them. The lines between “popular” and “high” art, therefore, are far less sharp than those between “entertainment” and “popular art.” Since the issue of accessibility is often partly culturally determined, however, “high”-“low” status may shift from one period or place to another.

42. This section incorporates material from the joint response Torres and I published online at <<http://www.aristos.org/editors/jarsymp.htm>>.

43. On Rand’s concept of psycho-epistemology, see various essays in *The Romantic Manifesto*, esp. pp. 18, 40, and 63. See also Bissell’s suggestion (2002, 354–55) that Pepper’s “world hypotheses” correspond to methods of awareness.

44. The term “formistic” is less than felicitous, since at first glance it suggests “formalist,” though the two concepts are virtually antithetical.

45. To illustrate the oblivion (albeit unmerited) into which Pepper has fallen among aestheticians, he is not cited even once, much less is he the subject of an entry, in Blackwell’s comprehensive *Companion to Aesthetics*, edited by David E. Cooper (1992).

46. As we noted, Donald (1991) persuasively argues that mimesis played a crucial role in human cognitive evolution, serving as the primary means of representing reality among the immediate ancestors of *Homo sapiens*, just prior to the emergence of language and symbolic thought. For Donald, the term “mimesis” refers to *intentional means of representing reality that utilize vocal tone, facial expression, bodily movement, manual gestures, and other nonlinguistic means*. In his view, it is “fundamentally different” from both *mimicry* and *imitation*. Whereas mimicry attempts to render an exact duplicate of an event or phenomenon, and imitation also seeks to copy an original (albeit less literally so than mimicry), mimesis adds a new dimension: it “re-enact[s] and re-present[s] an event or relationship” in a nonliteral yet clearly intelligible way. Donald’s concept of *mimesis* is therefore closely comparable to Rand’s concept of “selective re-creation of reality.”

Donald emphasizes that mimetic representation, though a vestige of an earlier cognitive stage, remains “a central factor in human society” and is “at the very

center of the arts” (169). While it is logically prior to language, it shares certain essential characteristics with language, and its emergence in prehistory would have paved the way for the subsequent evolution of speech (171). Yet mimetic behavior, he insists, can be clearly separated from the symbolic and semiotic devices of modern culture. Not only does it function in different contexts, it is still “far more efficient than language in diffusing certain kinds of knowledge . . . [and in] communicating emotions” (198–99). Moreover, he argues that

mimetic representation remains [fundamental] . . . in the operation of the human brain. . . . When [it] is destroyed [through disease or injury], the patient [individual] is classified as demented, out of touch with reality. . . . But when language alone is lost, even completely lost, there is often considerable residual representational capacity. (199)

Repeatedly stressing the importance of mimetic representation in the arts, Donald notes that even literature, which employs the symbolic medium of language, is “ultimately mimetic” (170)—since (as Rand emphasized) it recreates concrete characters, events, and situations. He suggests, further, that story-telling and the construction of myths, which arose out of a need to describe and explain events and objects, were themselves the “basic driving force” behind the acquisition of language by early man (257). Noting that narrative thought (as contrasted with abstract-theoretic thought, which evolved later) continues to be the dominant mode in primitive societies, he emphasizes that its “supreme product” in such societies is the myth, which plays an essential role in the formation of a sense of tribal, as well as personal, identity. His emphasis on the importance of myths in primitive culture is compatible with Rand’s view that mythology in such cultures and art in civilized societies serve essentially the same function, that of concretizing and objectifying core values, whether societal or personal. Of even more fundamental significance, with respect to Rand’s theory of art, is Donald’s insistence on the “ultimately mimetic” basis of all the arts, and his view that its roots lie in a deeply embedded, prelinguistic mode of human thought.

47. Rand’s understanding of the relationship of symbols to concepts is, I think, more precise than that suggested by Langer’s definition of a *symbol* as “any device whereby we are enabled to make an abstraction.” See, for example, Rand’s definition of *language* as “a code of visual-auditory symbols that serves the psycho-epistemological function of converting concepts into the mental equivalent of concretes” ([1966–67] 1990, 10).

48. In contrast with Rand—who merely mentioned architecture in “Art and Cognition” and did not offer a developed explanation of how it functioned *qua* art (and, as we noted, eventually reversed her position)—Langer (1953) discussed architecture at some length as a “mode of creating virtual space” (92), and as a “universe created by man and for man, . . . not . . . by simulating natural objects, but by exemplifying ‘the laws of gravity, of statics and dynamics’” (97). In my view, the inclusion of architecture among the “fine arts” was a major factor in the dissolution of the concept.

49. The original manuscripts for Rand’s essays on aesthetics were owned by Robert Hessen, who placed them on the auction market in the fall of 1998. For reasons we have never fully understood, he denied our request for access to photocopies of the originals.

50. This section was co-authored by Louis Torres and me.

51. We ought to have qualified our statement here as follows: “it is difficult to understand how *all of the* specific questions Rand poses would pertain to any art form but literature—unless the given work had a literary or narrative base (biblical, historical, mythological, or fictional) known to the viewer or listener.” Kelley concedes that we raised a “good question” in our “Critical Neglect” article (Kamhi & Torres 2000, 19) in criticizing William Thomas and him for citing Rand’s analysis of “metaphysical value-judgments” without explaining how those judgments could be expressed in artworks other than literature. Regarding their apparent emphasis on literature, he explains: “The article was a brief excerpt from a much longer book project [their forthcoming work *The Logical Structure of Objectivism*], and a paragraph discussing the various forms of art was not included in this adaptation. Any appearance of bias towards literature, due to the prevalence of literary examples, was unintentional and will not be true of the book itself” (Kelley 2001, 335). I would urge, however, that in a truly balanced consideration of aesthetics, the other art forms warrant far more than a single paragraph.

52. In relegating to an endnote of *What Art Is* our rejection of Rand’s claim that metaphysical value-judgments “determine the kind of *ethics* men will accept and practice,” we may have inadvertently confused the reader as to the relevance of our subsequent remark in the text: “Nor do ethics and moral values appear to be essential to any other art forms [than fiction and drama]” (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 26). We ought to have emphasized “essential” here—by which we meant a defining attribute of *all* works of art in the given form.

53. Torres suggested replacing “metaphysical value-judgments” with “fundamental values.” I proposed replacing Rand’s phrase “according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments” with “according to an artist’s fundamental view of life, which includes his deepest values.” (A lamentable series of typographical errors scrambled the text of this discussion; see the corrections posted at <<http://www.aristos.org/whatart/ch6.htm>>.)

54. For a full-screen image of David’s *Death of Socrates*, see <<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/david/socrates.jpg>>.

55. Images of *Liberty Leading the People* by Delacroix and *The Scream* by Munch can be viewed on the Internet at <[http://www.artchive.com/artchive/D/delacroix/delacroix\\_liberty.jpg.html](http://www.artchive.com/artchive/D/delacroix/delacroix_liberty.jpg.html)> and <<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/munch/munch.scream.jpg>>, respectively.

56. A representative sampling of Munch’s work can be viewed on the Internet at <<http://www.oir.ucf.edu/wm/paint/auth/munch>>. For a more illuminating account of Munch’s sense of life than that provided in Newberry’s analysis of *The Scream*, see Weisgall (2001).

57. One sure sign of Hirst's having become accepted as an icon of mainstream culture is his recent interview on the Charlie Rose show on PBS (20 February 2002).

58. Riggenbach (2001, 271) objects, among other things, to our "rather dubious attempt [at the end of part I] to demonstrate that modernist artists like Duchamp are clinically insane." Like Bell-Villada, he distorts the point of our discussion, however. First, we never argued that Duchamp was clinically insane. Furthermore, what we suggested, in general, was not a literal equation but an analogy between the dysfunctional mental processes of schizophrenia and "a kind of cultural pathology" evident in modernism and postmodernism. We wrote, in part, that "various tendencies of modernist and postmodernist 'art' correspond to the characteristic manifestations of schizophrenia . . . in which the patient becomes dissociated from objective reality. . . . The requirements of reality—from the law of cause and effect to the rules and conventions of one's social milieu—are variously denied, flouted, or derided. Like the modernist or postmodernist artist, the schizophrenic defies authority and engages in the ironic destruction of social norms and values. Further, in schizophrenia as in both modernist and postmodernist art, a coherent sense of chronological and narrative sequence is replaced by a chaos of contingent associations" (Torres & Kamhi 2000, 129–30). Finally, it was the work we referred to as *insane*—not the "artists." We argued that "the work of the so-called avant-garde, whether modernist or postmodernist, rejects reality—deliberately *dis*integrating and fragmenting perceptions of, and thought about, the world, to indulge in a detached mode of abstraction, cut off from existential experience. It is, in a very profound sense, *insane* (lit. 'unsound')" (130).

59. Dipert seems to be struggling with this issue when he remarks, almost wistfully: "I must confess to a lingering attraction to the abstract works of Mark Rothko and Henry Moore, and am not totally convinced that Torres and Kamhi have dealt with them conclusively, although I share a dissatisfaction with what other critics—including Kramer—have said is the[ir] merit, especially Rothko. Just in case I am wrong, I have positioned a Bruegel opposite a Rothko in my otherwise bare Buffalo apartment." We certainly had no wish to deprive anyone of the pleasure they may derive from any work. Our aim was only to explore the nature of that pleasure—which, we suggest, is fundamentally different from the experience of representational art.

60. Bell-Villada's question "[D]o the authors really believe that most Americans will automatically take to Shakespeare . . . without previous training?" is therefore irrelevant (2001, 295). More to the point, the groundlings of Shakespeare's time understood the bard very well, or they wouldn't have flocked to his plays in such numbers. See Chute [1949] 1957, *passim*. Furthermore, Bell-Villada underestimates both Shakespeare and ordinary Americans. I recently viewed a literate yet spirited performance of *Much Ado about Nothing*, which was attended by a class of ninth-grade girls from a local Catholic school. As I learned from their teacher, most of them were from poor families of Latin American origin, for whom English was not the language spoken at home. Judging from their animated response, however, the girls were thoroughly absorbed in, and



delighted by, the play. Though they had not yet read it for class, they apparently had little difficulty in grasping or “taking to” it.

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