

Mimesis and Expression in Ayn Rand's Theory of Art

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Introduction

In her aesthetic writings, Ayn Rand set forth a theory of art that is basically mimetic in its formulation. In clear opposition to nonrepresentational views of art, she saw art primarily as a medium for the representation of reality. This, however, does not mean that Rand adhered to a literalist notion of artistic mimesis. Essential to her aesthetic theory is the view that art involves a form of *stylized* representation. Far from just holding up a neutral or “objective” mirror to the world, an artist, Rand holds, presents reality in a highly selective manner, re-creating it according to his particular view of what constitutes its essential nature. As a result, Rand’s theory assumes a strong expressive dimension that infiltrates and to some degree even threatens to destabilize her mimetic base.

In the steadily growing literature on Rand’s aesthetics, this expressionism has so far received rather scant attention. In their groundbreaking book on Rand’s aesthetics, *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand* (2000), Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi are mainly concerned with the mimetic aspects of Rand’s theory. Although in their Introduction they duly acknowledge the non-literal nature of Rand’s mimeticism, writing that for Rand “art is essentially mimetic, albeit in a highly selective and stylized manner” (14), their following discussion does not sufficiently indicate the wider implications of this statement. Committed to what seems to me a rather restrictive mimetic view of art, they tend to downplay the expressive significance of both selectivity and stylization in Rand’s aesthetics. A similar tendency to downplay Rand’s expressionism is also evident in Roger Bissell’s many articles (1997; 2001; 2004) on Rand’s concept of

art. Although Bissell adopts a much broader conception of artistic mimesis than do Torres and Kamhi, emphasizing an artwork's role as a "microcosm" that re-creates reality, not in its particularity, but in its essential nature, he has little to say about the expressive aspects of this microcosm. Instead he focuses on its formal aspects and its function as a cognitive tool.

In contradistinction to these theorists, I aim in the following to show the many ways in which notions of art as expression infuse Rand's mimetic orientation. An important point will be that this expressionism brings Rand's theory of art into close alignment with Romantic aesthetics. Even though Rand herself saw her theory of what art is as universal—and thus valid for all art at all times, independent of any particular period or movement—the fact remains that her theory reveals a number of features that can also be observed in Romantic theories of art. This is especially notable in the expressive slant of her mimeticism. In his important study of the historical development of the concept of mimesis, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis* (2002), Stephen Halliwell argues persuasively that, contrary to the traditional tendency to view Romanticism as the product of a radical shift from a mimetic to an expressive theory of art, Romantic aesthetics is better seen as an accentuation of a concern with expression which, he claims, was present in mimetic theory from its very inception but became more prominent during the Romantic period. As he writes, "Romanticism . . . involves the 'renegotiation' and redefinition, not the outright rejection, of certain strands in the intricate makeup of mimeticism" (358). Far from advocating any form of pure or nonrepresentational expressionism, therefore, Romantic theorists emphasized the expressive nature of art within what remained a basically mimetic aesthetics. A similar concern with an expressive mimeticism, I wish to claim, informs Rand's theory of art, making it a modern restatement of Romantic aesthetics.

To see how this may be so, we may begin by considering her view that art serves as a medium for the concretization of metaphysics.

Art as a Concretization of Metaphysics

As defined by Rand (1975, 19), art is “a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments.” The mimetic orientation of this definition is clearly indicated by its *genus*: “re-creation of reality.”¹ Rand’s choice of the term “re-creation,” however, rather than “representation” or “imitation,” the two standard terms used in mimetic theory, requires some explication. In her taped fiction-writing course (1958, lecture 1), Rand gives us a clue when she states: “By ‘re-creation’ I don’t mean copying. But neither do I mean creation in a mystical sense. I do not mean going against reality. . . . I mean creating that which could be real . . . that which is consistent with reality.”² What she is saying here is that artistic representation is not a matter of mere imitation, of simply recording or transcribing actual phenomena, as in journalistic or photographic representation, but involves some degree of creative modification. At the same time, she makes it clear that such modification must be held within the bounds of reality. It must be a *re*-creation of the real world and not a creation of a fantasy world. The phrase “re-creation of reality” is thus carefully chosen to stake out for art an intermediate realm of representation that lies between fantastic creation (creating out of a void) and imitation (reproducing things as they are).³ The nature of this re-creative activity is specified by Rand’s two *differentiae*: “selective” and “according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments.”

By adding that the artist’s “re-creation of reality” is “selective,” Rand accentuates the crucial role of selectivity in artistic creation, marking her opposition to a more narrowly conceived mimeticism that sees art as an attempt to render reality as realistically as possible, unmodified by the artist’s selective activity. For Rand, such realistic representation is not art, properly seen, since it is governed by the desire to create a semblance or likeness to actual existents (as in photo-like portrait painting), not by the principle of selective re-creation. Of course, Rand is not the first to emphasize the importance of selectivity in art. As an aesthetic principle, it dates back at least as far as Aristotle and was particularly prominent among

Neoclassical theorists of the eighteenth century, who, according to M. H. Abrams (1953, 35), believed that “poetry imitates not the actual, but *selected* matters, qualities, tendencies, or forms, which are within or behind the actual” (emphasis added). Rand’s notion of selectivity, however, differs from what we find in Neoclassical theory in that it seems to allow for a much stronger element of imaginative transformation of reality. While the Neoclassicists made the artist’s selectivity subordinate to the canons of realistic representation, seeing it as a matter of imitating either the most typical or the most beautiful aspects of reality, Rand goes one step further and adopts the Romantic view that the artist not only *selects* what he wants to represent but *reshapes* it in accordance with his personal perception of the world. As Furst (1979, 119) observes, for the Romanticist “the focal point is his imagination, his power to perceive and recreate the world according to his own inner vision.” In view of this, the phrase “selective re-creation” in Rand’s definition assumes a meaning close to creative projection, thus bringing into her mimetic aesthetics certain features traditionally associated with expressive theories of art, particularly in their Romantic variants.

The special slant of this expressionism is suggested by Rand’s second differentia: “according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments.” The notion of metaphysical value-judgments is distinctive to Rand and requires some exposition. What it refers to is that special branch of metaphysics Rand believes constitutes the foundation of ethics: a fundamental view of man and his place in the universe. Such a view, she argues, is formed by one’s answers to such questions as whether “the universe is intelligible” or not, whether man can “find happiness on earth” or is “doomed to frustration and despair,” and whether he has “the power of choice” or is “the helpless plaything of forces beyond his control.” Although, as she explains, these questions are metaphysical, their answers “determine the kind of *ethics* men will accept” (1975, 19), thus constituting an evaluative realm intermediate between metaphysics and ethics. It is this realm Rand identifies as the special province of artistic creation. In so doing, she comes to see art as a vehicle for objectifying an artist’s most fundamental value-beliefs and, in consequence, also as a mode

of expression.

To fully understand the nature of this expressionism, however, we have to move beyond her definition and consider her overall theory of art. Considered by itself, in isolation, Rand's definition seems to conform to the traditional mimetic view that the artist's task is to imitate outer reality, though in a way slanted by his personal perception of this reality. But if this is so, there would be little to distinguish Rand from an arch-Naturalist like Emile Zola, who, although considered the chief spokesman for an accurate and truthful rendering of reality in art, yet allowed for some degree of artistic modification by declaring that art is nature seen through a temperament. However, as Rand's own explication of her definition reveals, what she has in mind is something entirely different. Going beyond the idea of art merely as a modified representation of reality, she seems to embrace a version of the embodiment theory of art, which holds that art objectifies or concretizes an idea, feeling, or state of mind, by giving it sensuous form. This is clearly suggested by her description of the mental process she believes takes place in an artist's selective re-creation of reality:

By a selective re-creation, art isolates and integrates those aspects of reality which represent man's fundamental view of himself and existence. Out of the countless number of concretes—of single, disorganized and (seemingly) contradictory attributes, actions and entities—an artist isolates the things which he regards as metaphysically essential and integrates them into a single new concrete that represents an *embodied abstraction*. (19–20; emphasis added)

The important implication of this statement is that, instead of seeing selective re-creation of reality as the *goal* of artistic activity, Rand sees it as a *means*, serving the end of giving concrete shape to metaphysical value-judgments. What the artist does (or should do?) when he creates an artwork is that he converts, by a judicious process of isolation and integration, his basic view of the world into a concrete unit that *embodies* and hence also *expresses* that view. That this is his

goal is a point Rand makes quite explicit when she writes that an artist's "primary purpose is to bring his view of man and of existence into reality . . . by means of the appropriate particulars" (35). The product, the resultant artwork, is a highly stylized representation of reality, one that serves as a "metaphysical mirror" (39) reflecting the artist's vision of what constitutes the essential nature of reality.

For the consumer of art, the value of contemplating such a mirror is, according to Rand, psycho-epistemological, relating to the peculiar nature of the human mind. Since, she argues, man's consciousness is conceptual, i.e., since a person acquires knowledge by means of abstractions, he needs a system of philosophy, a set of general principles, to guide and direct his actions. Since, moreover, philosophical ideas—particularly in the realm of metaphysics—involve a person's widest and most fundamental abstractions, spanning an enormous and complex chain of integrations, they cannot be fully grasped and retained unless they are made available to him as an integrated sum. Such a sum, Rand holds, is provided by art:

Art is a concretization of metaphysics. *Art brings man's concepts to the perceptual level of his consciousness and allows him to grasp them directly, as if they were percepts. This is the psycho-epistemological function of art and the reason of its importance in man's life.* (20)

According to Rand, then, the fundamental function of art is that it fulfills a basic human need to observe philosophical abstractions in an embodied form, as a concrete unit that gives the abstractions the immediacy and clarity of perceptual reality.

This, it must be noted, does not mean that Rand holds that every painting or novel or musical composition necessarily holds up for contemplation a metaphysically slanted image of reality. In fact, she does the very opposite. Evidently, Rand uses the term art in an honorific sense, offering a definition that makes it an act of commendation to designate a given work as art. To say that something is art is, in Rand's view, to say that it represents a serious attempt to re-create reality in metaphysical terms and, for this reason, is worthy of

attention (if not necessarily appreciation or admiration). In this respect, her definition is a rather restrictive one. It is beyond the scope of this essay to evaluate the validity of Rand's definition, a task that would require an extensive testing of the definition against the body of works that have, or purport to have, a reasonable claim to be called art.⁴ What needs to be mentioned, however, is that on the basis of Rand's own discussion, it seems evident that her definition is designed to include only works that—whether explicitly or implicitly—convey some sort of metaphysical value-meaning. Thus, Rand excludes from the realm of serious artworks that are clearly formulaic, such as the many Hollywood films or television series which are produced by “random imitation rather than sense-of-life creation” (111). Similarly, she excludes works that are overtly didactic, aiming to teach rather than show, such as “a propaganda poster or a morality play” (22). In neither of these instances, she holds, do we have any serious attempt to convey a metaphysical view of reality. The same is true of horror stories, which according to Rand involve “not a metaphysical but a purely psychological projection” and therefore belong to “psychopathology rather than esthetics” (113). In addition, but more problematically, Rand also seems to exclude Naturalistic works from the realm of art. But here she is inconsistent. While on the one hand, she defines Naturalism as a category of art based on the determinist or anti-volition premise and hence as a form of metaphysical projection, she also disparages such art for being little else than a statistical recording of reality which, instead of “presenting a *metaphysical* view of man and of existence,” presents “a *journalistic* view” (124) and hence cannot be considered art in any honorific sense. For Rand, art, properly so designated, is restricted to works that can legitimately be said to present a concretized image of metaphysical essentials.

Rand's strong emphasis on art as a mode of metaphysical concretization has led Bissell (1997, 46-54; 2001, 305-6; 2004, 307-63) to the view that Rand's theory of art implies that an artwork is a form of *microcosm*, a world-in-miniature that reflects the essential nature of the universe. Drawing on a hint in Peikoff (1991, 417), Bissell argues that Rand's view of art as a selective re-creation of reality does not mean that art reproduces “things from reality” but

rather “reality itself,” perceived in its true essence. What it aims to present is consequently not a re-created image of particular objects or existents but of the whole universe, which is created anew by being given a new form equivalent to an aesthetic microcosm.

In basic outline, I find the idea of art as a microcosm one that may usefully be applied to Rand’s theory of art, as long as we see the microcosm as a metaphor. By its power to embody metaphysical abstractions and thus to concretize an artist’s view of reality as it essentially is, stripped of the accidental and nonessential, an artwork can indeed be likened to a microcosm. Yet, I am reluctant to accept Bissell’s contention that the phrase “selective re-creation of reality” in Rand’s definition refers to reality itself. If so, this would imply that the artist’s primary aesthetic aim is to re-create the universe in the form of a microcosm. But there is no indication that this is Rand’s position. Rather, she stresses that the artist’s aim is to objectify, to give concrete existence, to his particular *view* of reality, his vision of what constitutes its essence. And this he does by means of a selective re-creation of reality—not in the literalist sense of presenting real-life objects, persons, or events, but in the more general sense of singling out certain existential phenomena that reflect his metaphysical value-orientation. As she writes: “An artist *re-creates* those *aspects of reality* which represent his fundamental view of man and of existence” (1975, 99; emphasis added). What she means by “aspects” here becomes evident in her discussion of an artist’s “selectivity in regard to subject,” where she states that an artist should select for representation positive subjects, such as human greatness, beauty, virtue, achievement, etc., and not such negative subjects as evil, disease, ugliness, or mediocrity. The argument she offers to justify this requirement is: “That which is not worth contemplating in life, is not worth *re-creating* in art” (166; emphasis added). In an attempt to resolve the difficulty this poses to his theory, Bissell introduces a distinction between “two basic kinds of re-creations,” what he calls “figural” or “primary” re-creation of reality (= reality itself) and “microcosmic” or “secondary” re-creation of reality (= things from reality) (2004, 318–19). The first, he asserts, functions as a means to the second. But I find this more confusing than clarifying, making it

sometimes extremely difficult to follow his argument as one constantly has to figure out what kind of re-creation he is talking about. Surely, it is much simpler, and also much closer to Rand's actual view, to interpret the re-creation of reality she refers to in her definition as a re-creation of certain value-laden aspects of reality that serve as a means to that which is the artist's primary task: to concretize his metaphysical vision of the world.

A second objection I wish to raise against Bissell's microcosm argument is that it is seriously weakened by his attempt to give it an historical grounding, enlisting the support of a long line of thinkers who purportedly adhere to the microcosm view of art. All too often, Bissell here commits the fallacy of assimilating to the microcosmic model views that bear some resemblance to it while ignoring the many ways in which these views also differ from it. In regard to Aristotle, for example, he offers the following quotation from Halliwell (2002, 166):

[There is a] strong presumption that [Aristotle] is staking out a case . . . for treating artistic mimesis as equivalent to . . . the modeling of a world whose status is that of an imaginary, constructed parallel to the real, spatiotemporal realm of the artist's and audience's experience. (Bissell 2004, 311)

This in no way amounts to any claim that Aristotle viewed an artwork as a microcosm, embodying a *metaphysical* view. Halliwell's point, as his further discussion makes clear, is merely that Aristotle saw art as a medium for presenting a *possible* world, a world that may deviate from the actual world but still parallels it in that "its interpretation depends on standards of explanatory and causal coherence that are essentially derived from and grounded in real experience" (Halliwell 2002, 166). At no point does Halliwell suggest that Aristotle saw art as a vehicle for the projection of an entire philosophy of life. In regard to tragedy, for example, he emphasizes that the "universal" or "philosophical" dimension Aristotle attributes to this genre refers more narrowly to the causal intelligibility of the tragic plot—to the "causes, reasons, motives, and intelligible patterns of human life in the

structure of a dramatic poem as a whole” (195) that structures its action. This is a far cry from the idea that a tragedy concretizes, as Rand would have argued, a tragic metaphysics, or a view of the world as essentially tragic. That is an idea of tragic art that entered with German Romanticism, involving a line of thinking that includes Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and the Existentialists.⁵

Even more dubious is Bissell’s (1997, 48; 2001, 300, 305–6; 2004, 312) use of the eighteenth-century German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, whose notion of a fictional *heterocosm*, he argues, provides an important historical antecedent of the microcosm model he believes informs Rand’s view of art as a selective re-creation of reality. But this comparison is, I believe, quite misleading, since Baumgarten’s theory implies that art is a creation of an entirely *new* world, literally *another* world, not a metaphysically slanted re-creation of this one. According to Abrams (1989), Baumgarten developed his heterocosmic model of poetry (not art in general) in order to find a justification for poetic works of a purely imaginative kind that represent “fabulous and mythical elements that violate both the constitutions and the causal order of the real world.” Drawing on Leibniz’s notion of “compossible” worlds, Baumgarten maintained that such poetry presents a self-consistent world whose “poetic truth” is to be judged not by its “*correspondence* to the actual world” but by “the internal *coherence* of its elements” (177–78; emphasis added). It is, therefore, a theory fundamentally at odds with Rand’s insistence upon a correspondence—if not literally then essentially—between the world projected in the artwork and the material world. Historically, it represents a view that was to lead to the severance of art from reality that arose with the “art for art’s sake” movement of the mid-nineteenth century, which saw art as an autonomous construction projecting a world entirely determined by its inner coherence as an organic whole.⁶

More pertinent, and more illuminating, historical antecedents of Rand’s notion of art as metaphysical concretization, and also of art as a microcosm (though strangely ignored by Bissell), can be found in the long line of metaphysically oriented aesthetic theories developed by Neoplatonic as well as German idealist thinkers. Central in this

tradition is the view that art is a vehicle for the representation of a higher and more perfect reality than the one perceived by the senses. According to the third-century Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus, an artwork imitates, not, as Plato had argued, the shadowy and inferior world of surface appearances, but the eternal and perfect forms behind the appearances, serving the function of unveiling these forms by giving them a material embodiment that makes them clear to the understanding. As he formulates the point:

Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for . . . we must recognize that they give no bare reproduction of the things seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives, and, furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and add where nature is lacking. Thus Pheidias wrought the Zeus upon no model among things of sense but by apprehending what form Zeus must take if he chose to become manifest to sight.⁷ (*Enneads*, 5.8.1)

This is a view that had a strong impact on Renaissance and Neoclassical art theory as well as its practice, influencing, for example, the work of Michelangelo. But Neoplatonic aesthetics also worked its way into Romantic aesthetic ideals, especially as formulated by many German idealists. Hegel, for example, saw art as the sensuous embodiment of the Idea, having the power to reveal the beauty of the Idea by making it “immediately accessible to consciousness in outward form” (Hofstadter and Kuhns 1964, 380). Similarly, Schopenhauer “thought of art as a form of knowledge, an intuitive, direct vision of metaphysical essences, which are real in a more ultimate way than the actual objects of the phenomenal world” (Osborne 1970, 91).

Although we have no evidence that Rand was influenced by this idealist tradition, there is, I believe, a striking similarity between views commonly held in this tradition and Rand’s notion of art as metaphysical concretization.⁸ Yet, notwithstanding this similarity, there are also

some obvious points of difference. Most notable here is the fact that for the German idealists, the representation of ultimate reality meant the projection of some mystical realm—whether named the Absolute or the Cosmic Spirit or the Idea or the Will—which is normally inaccessible to the senses but which, by the specifically endowed artist, can be sensed or intuited and then given intelligible form in an artwork. By contrast, Rand holds that art objectifies metaphysical concepts that are derived, by a process of abstraction, from observable facts and hence are anchored in reality. Her approach, we could say, is Aristotelian rather than Neoplatonic in that it locates metaphysical essences in concrete phenomena and not in a transcendental realm above or beyond the phenomenal world. For Rand, consequently, the metaphysical vision the artist projects is not mystically intuited but is grounded in empirical thought and experience.

An important consequence of this empiricism is that Rand gives the artist a much more active role than what is common in idealist theories of art. Rather than serving as a passive though inspired reflector of transcendental truth, the artist, in Rand's view, presents his *personal* perception of what constitutes the essential nature of reality. Although, according to Rand, this perception is objectively verifiable in that it can be measured according to its degree of conformity with the actual facts of reality, it will bear the stamp of the artist's individual vision. Consequently, Rand does not hold that an artist presents a condensed version of reality as it really and essentially is; rather, her view is that it presents the artist's particular *view* of reality, one that declares by means of a slanted representation: "*This is life as I see it*" (1975, 35). In this way, she gives her metaphysical mimeticism a subjective-expressive dimension traditionally absent in Neoplatonic and German idealist aesthetics.⁹ This expressionism takes on special force in Rand's notion of art as the projection of an artist's sense of life.

Art as Sense-of-Life Projection

By focusing on Rand's view that art is a concretization of metaphysical abstractions, one may be tempted to conclude that she

holds a strictly cognitive view of art, seeing it exclusively as a medium for the presentation of philosophical ideas, divorced from feelings or emotions. However, as Rand's overall discussion makes clear, metaphysical value-judgments are for her involved in art mainly in the form of an artist's sense of life. In her special usage, a sense of life denotes a "pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence" (25, 34, 145). In terms of fundamentals, this appraisal can be "benevolent," involving the feeling that one's life is open to achievement and happiness; or it can be "malevolent," involving the feeling that one's life is doomed to failure and frustration. But whatever its special quality, the crucial point is that it is formed subconsciously "by a process of emotional generalization." As Rand explains, "it consists of classifying things *according to the emotions they invoke*—i.e., of tying together, by association or connotation, all those things which have the power to make an individual experience the same (or a similar) emotion" (27). Although, according to Rand, a sense of life can (and should) be translated into a consciously formulated philosophy that feeds one's subconscious integrations, it is still an artist's sense of life, not his explicit philosophy, that "controls and integrates his work, directing the innumerable choices he has to make" (34–35).

By thus emphasizing the emotive nature of an artist's metaphysical vision, Rand brings her theory of art into close alignment with the Romantic emphasis on art as emotional expression. While the Neoclassicists of the Enlightenment period, entertaining a more "objective" or realistic conception of mimesis, had believed that the artist's task was to represent the outer world as truthfully as possible, to hold up a mirror that (even if a selective one) reflects reality as it is, many Romanticists, most notably in France and England, came to believe that the artist's task was to express his inner state of mind, especially his feelings—a view summed up by William Wordsworth's famous declaration that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth [1802] 1984, 598, 611). Even though, as Rand herself pointed out, "the emotion involved in art is not emotion in the ordinary meaning of the term" but is "experienced more as a 'sense' or a 'feel'," it has, she claims, the quality of an

emotion in being “automatically immediate” and in having “an intense, profoundly personal value-meaning . . . to the individual experiencing it” (1975, 35). What is more, it has the quality of a “basic, constant emotion—an emotion which is part of all his other emotions and underlies all his experiences” (26). Its objectification in an artwork may consequently be seen as a special type of emotional expression, involving the artist’s most fundamental feeling state.

A good indication of Rand’s affinity with expressive aesthetics, especially in its Romantic variant, is her fondness for the words “projection” and “expression” in her discussion of artistic creation. As Abrams (1953, 47–69) has shown, these are words that gained currency in connection with the development of expressive views of art in the early nineteenth century. While for the Neoclassicists, the ruling metaphor of art had been the mirror, which suggests the idea that art is an objective reflector, revealing nature as it is, during the Romantic period the dominant metaphor became the lamp, which suggests the idea that art is a projector, revealing the artist’s inner thoughts and feelings. This is an image of art that frequently occurs in Rand, contributing to the expressive slant of her mimeticism—as, for example, in her statement that “[t]he task of the dance is not the projection of single, momentary emotions,” but “the projection of metaphysical value-judgments, the stylization of man’s movements by the continuous power of a fundamental emotional state—and thus the use of man’s body to express his sense of life” (1975, 67). Similarly, her use of phrases like “creative projection” (111) and “creative expression” (40) clearly indicates her adherence to the common Romantic notion that the world presented in an artwork is not an objective replica of the world as it is, but conveys the artist’s inner vision of the world.

In spite of Rand’s own strong emphasis on the emotional dimension of an artist’s metaphysical projection, this is an aspect of her aesthetics that has often been ignored. Generally, commentators have been more interested in Rand’s concern with art as a vehicle for the concretization of philosophical ideas than as a projector of feelings or emotions. Symptomatic in this regard is Kelley and Thomas’s (1999) brief article on why man needs art, which, in its

exclusive focus on Rand's views regarding the psycho-epistemological function performed by art as a concretizer of abstract philosophy, completely disregards its value as sense-of-life expression. More to the point is Torres and Kamhi's observation that the notion of sense of life brings into Rand's theory an important emotional component, both in regard to the creation of and the response to an artwork. Yet they too reveal an anti-expressive bias by downplaying the expressive import of this notion in Rand's theory, especially on the creative side. Thus, they take issue with Rand's contention that art has the power to convey an artist's sense of life on the grounds that "no work of art, however comprehensive" can present "so complex a psychological totality." In their view, the major significance of an artist's sense of life in the creative process is that it "governs his selectivity" (2000, 48). But although one may agree with Torres and Kamhi that it is difficult to draw definite inferences about the sense of life projected in an artwork, the fact remains that Rand did hold that an artwork, properly so designated, reveals an artist's sense of life. It seems to me, moreover, that if the creation of an artwork is *governed* by the artist's sense of life, it follows that it will also, at least implicitly, *express* his sense of life.

Reinforcing Torres and Kamhi's anti-expressive bias is their insistence that Rand's views regarding the role of emotion in artistic representation must be seen in contrast to the various forms of expression theory. As they write, unlike the proponents of expression theory, Rand "eschews the idea that all the arts are primarily a vehicle for the 'expression' or objectification of feelings or emotions as such. Instead," they claim, "she emphasizes the implicit reference to external reality that evokes the emotions in art" (2000, 45). The problem with this statement is that it is restricted to a consideration of post-Romantic proponents of expression theory, like Croce, Collingwood, and Langer, who all sever any necessary link between expression and representation by emphasizing the expressive power of symbolic forms, thus opening the way for abstract expressionism. Ignoring the much more reality-oriented version of expression theory that can be found in Romantic aesthetics, Torres and Kamhi fail to observe Rand's special affiliation with Romantic expression theory

which, unlike post-Romantic expression theory, is closely integrated with mimetic theory—a union which, according to Halliwell (2002), is not as unusual in the history of artistic mimesis as generally assumed. As he writes, “representation and expression are not mutually exclusive concepts in the interpretation of art, as they have so often been taken to be.” Historically, he argues, “ancient ideas of mimesis often encompass a dimension of what would now be counted, by many aestheticians, as expression” (14 n. 13).¹⁰ What happens in Romantic theory is that this expressive aspect assumes special prominence, giving rise to what today are considered basically expressive theories of art in that they see art as a vehicle for the projection or externalization of an artist’s state of mind. For the Romanticists, however, as for Rand, the medium of emotional expression is a slanted or stylized representation of objective reality.¹¹ Although some Romanticists in their desire to express emotion came to embrace an explicit subjectivism, there were also many who kept a firm eye on external reality. Thus, a Romantic critic like William Hazlitt ([1818] 1949, 129) observed that

neither a mere description of natural objects, nor a mere delineation of natural feelings, however distinct or forcible, constitutes the ultimate end and aim of poetry, without the heightening of the imagination. The light of poetry is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that, while it shews us the object, throws a sparkling radiance on all around it.

Hazlitt here formulates a view, shared by many of the Romanticists, especially in England, that the artist’s expressive task involves the representation of an emotionally and imaginatively heightened reality rather than any subjective outpouring of feeling. The artist, that is, expresses his feelings by presenting the objects of reality through a mirror in which they are illuminated by the light of his inner feeling.

Rand, I believe, holds a similar view. Although Rand steers clear of the idea, held by many Romanticists, that art is the expression of a particular emotion, such as love or grief, which the artist has personally experienced—a view suggested, for example, by Words-

worth's claim that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" (Wordsworth [1802] 1984, 611)—her view of art as sense-of-life projection nonetheless follows the Romanticists in that it sees art as a form of emotional expression, albeit on a generalized rather than particularized level of feeling.

What needs to be noted is that Rand's expressionism is restricted to the view that art embodies or objectifies an artist's sense-of-life emotions. Although she also believed that art may *evoke* emotions, she does not see this as its primary purpose. Her view must consequently be differentiated from the communication version of expression theory, as exemplified above all by Tolstoy's so-called "transmission" theory, according to which an artist "by means of external signs" conveys his feelings to other people so that they are "infected by these feelings and also experience them" (Tolstoy [1896] 1996, 51). This, however, does not mean that she ignored the role of emotion in our response to art. Quite the reverse, she considers it crucially important, seeing the emotional experience afforded by art as an essential part of its value for the consumer. Even if Rand emphasized the cognitive value of art as an instrument that satisfies our need to observe our most fundamental values in a concrete and hence perceivable form, she did not see this as an exclusively intellectual affair. Since the metaphysical view embodied in an artwork takes the form of a sense of life, it reaches us not on the intellectual level of philosophical thought but on the emotional and essentially subconscious level of a sense-of-life experience. As Rand (1975, 36) puts it: "Man's sense of life provides him with the integrated sum of his metaphysical abstractions; art concretizes them and allows him to perceive—to *experience*—their immediate reality." The most exalted example of this would be the chance she believes certain kinds of Romantic art, embodying a "benevolent" view of life, give us to experience "a moment of *metaphysical* joy—a moment of love for existence" (39–40, 170).

Basically, the peculiar quality of this experience will depend on the sense of life expressed in the artwork. But it will also depend on the respondent's own sense of life. As Rand well knew, the emotional transaction that occurs in art is by no means automatic, involving

some kind of “infection” as proposed by Tolstoy, but is contingent upon the respondent’s affinity with the sense of life expressed in the artwork. Thus, someone who holds a basically “malevolent” sense of life will not be affected by a work that expresses a buoyant or optimistic sense of life, but may instead respond with a feeling of irritation, dismissing the work as superficial or false. Conversely, someone who holds a basically “benevolent” sense of life may resist being affected by a tragic work, dismissing it as too dark or pessimistic or, in Randian parlance, as “malevolent.” It is only when we are emotionally disposed to respond to the sense of life expressed in an artwork that we will be smitten by it, assenting to the special emotional experience it invites. Rand thus seems to have a rather limited faith in the power of art to induce emotions to which the respondent is not already inclined through his sense of life, or, on a more didactic level, in its power to “convert” him to a “correct” sense of life.¹² Rather, she emphasizes the role art plays in providing the pleasure of having one’s sense of life confirmed by means of its embodiment in a concrete image. The truth or falsehood of this sense of life, whether it is rational or irrational, she sees as aesthetically irrelevant.¹³ The important point is that art allows us to contemplate our sense of life in an embodied form and so to experience it with the emotional immediacy and intensity that only art can offer. For different people, this will involve different things. As Rand formulates the point: “[W]hat an artwork expresses, fundamentally, . . . is ‘*This is life as I see it.*’ The essential meaning of a viewer’s or reader’s response . . . is ‘*This is (or is not) life as I see it*’” (35).

Art as the Revelation of Character

An important corollary of Rand’s concern with art as sense-of-life projection is that it lends her theory not just an expressive but also a self-expressive dimension. Since, in Rand’s view, a sense of life is an emotionally integrated sum of a person’s deepest values, it constitutes “the essence of his character” (25). It is, Rand argues, “experienced by him as a sense of his own identity” and is “what makes him a personality” (31). As a consequence, when an artist projects his sense

of life in an artwork, he gives his representation of reality not only an *emotional* slant but also a *personal* slant. In so doing, he discloses his own personality. As Rand states, “nothing is as potent as art in revealing the essence of a man’s character” (44).

In some respects, Rand’s emphasis on this personality-revealing aspect of art links her to self-expression theories so central in much Romantic aesthetics. While in pre-Romantic theory the primary focus had been on the moral and emotional effect of art on the beholder, the Romanticists turned their interest to the artist, seeing an artwork as an expression not only of the artist’s vision of life but also of his peculiar character. In its extreme manifestation, this led to the idea that the primary subject of art is the artist’s mind, what John Keats referred to as the “egotistical sublime.” A similar yet different emphasis on self-expression was developed in later expression theories, first of all through Croce’s idea that the artist’s main purpose is to express his own emotional state, not, as in Tolstoy’s theory, to communicate it to others, but to clarify it to himself. That is, the artist, according to Croce, comes to apprehend his own feelings by objectifying them and thus giving them full reality in an artwork.¹⁴

Although Rand did not embrace the self-expression theory in any of these variants, her concern with the artist’s presentation of objective reality nevertheless introduces a self-expressive element into her theory. The nature of this self-expression is evident in the following passage from *The Fountainhead*, where Dominique walks through the unfinished Enright house, intensely aware of Roark’s presence in the building:

... here was the shape he had made and the thing within him which had caused him to make it, the end and the cause together, the motive power eloquent in every line of steel, a man’s self, hers for this moment, hers by grace of her seeing it and understanding. ([1943] 1971, 287)

Here, of course, the artwork’s power to reveal its creator’s mind takes on a private quality that goes beyond the purely aesthetic appreciation of art. Still it serves to illustrate Rand’s deep concern with the artist’s

presence in his artwork, as its creative source and hence, indirectly, as an integral part of the artwork. Yet, we should not exaggerate the power Rand attributed to art in revealing personality. For her, self-expression is not the primary purpose of artistic creation, as it sometimes was in Romantic and post-Romantic expression theory. Rather, it must be seen as a consequence, an inevitable result of the fact that an artist presents reality from his personal perspective. His primary task remains that of metaphysical concretization: to re-create reality in accordance with his metaphysical value-judgments and thereby to give concrete embodiment to his sense of life. The revelation of character simply follows as an automatic though interesting by-product.

For Rand, such self-revelation was not restricted to the artist's choice of subject matter but also involves his distinctive style. This can be related to her idea that an artist projects not just a metaphysical sense of life but also a psycho-epistemological sense of life. As she writes:

Two distinct, but interrelated, elements of a work of art are the crucial means of projecting its sense of life: the *subject* and the *style*—*what* an artist chooses to present and *how* he presents it. The subject of an art work expresses a view of man's existence, while the style expresses a view of man's consciousness. The subject reveals an artist's *metaphysics*, the style reveals his *psycho-epistemology*. (1975, 40)

The further implication of this is that we respond to two aspects of an artist's sense-of-life personality—to his peculiar outlook on life as well as to his characteristic way of using his mind. Interestingly, a similar emphasis on the role of style in revealing an artist's mind can be observed in Romantic critical theory, where, as Abrams (1953, 228) notes, style came to be seen as an index to “the particularity of the author's cast of mind,” especially “the basic dispositions, interests, desires, preferences, and aversions which give continuity and coherence to a personality.”

Another important aspect of the self-revealing power Rand

attributes to art is that she considers it a central criterion in the evaluation of an artwork. Again, we may observe a clear link to Romantic theory. As often noted, the Romantic preoccupation with art as a form of self-expression led to a type of evaluative criticism that focused on the artist's mind and personality. Instead of judging an artwork in terms of the artist's craft or the world he presented or the effect of his work on its audience, critics chose to evaluate the work in terms of the peculiar qualities of character he displayed in his artwork. One manifestation of this was a shift from a concern with truth to a concern with *sincerity* in assessing the value of an artwork. More interested in art as the projection of the artist's quality of mind than as a truthful imitation of the world, critics turned their attention from the artwork's correspondence with reality to the artist's inner integrity and honesty in creating his work. Similarly, they came to put a high value on the *originality* of an artwork, rejecting the reigning Neoclassical doctrine that artistic skill was a matter of imitating classical masterpieces. In this way, they came to hold up criteria of aesthetic evaluation that are closely akin to those employed in moral judgment. The way we judge a work of art, they believed, runs parallel to the way we judge a person's moral character.¹⁵

A similar confluence of moral and aesthetic evaluation can be observed in Rand. In some instances, this takes the form of a tendency towards a rather crude moralism. One example of this occurs in her discussion of a painting that shows a beautiful woman with a sore on her lips, which, according to Rand, would evoke a feeling of "immense disgust and indignation at the artist" for committing a "corrupt, obscenely vicious attack on man, on beauty, on all values" (1975, 34). The artist, that is, and his work with him, is denounced morally for his revolting metaphysics. Of greater interest, I think, is Rand's deep concern with the sincerity an artist displays (or fails to display) in his artwork. Although Rand—especially in her discussion of literature and the pictorial arts—gives priority to an artwork's correspondence to reality (i.e., to its metaphysical and moral truth value), her recognition that the representation of this reality involves a personal slant seems at times to make her just as interested in the artist's honesty and sincerity of vision as in his correctness of

vision. This is especially evident in *The Fountainhead*, where the quality of sincerity and integrity of Roark's buildings is contrasted both with the false ostentation of Classicist architecture, designed to impress, and with the flaunting effrontery of modernist architecture, designed to provoke. When, for example, Wynand refers to some buildings as being "cheap show-offs" and to others as "the eternal unfit, botched, malicious and false" ([1943] 1971, 519), he is passing not just aesthetic but also moral judgment on the mind-state of their creators.

Perhaps the most notable evaluative criterion in Rand's aesthetics, also linking her to Romantic criticism, especially its cult of original genius, is creative originality. Since, in her view, the artist does not merely copy reality, reporting on things as they are, but actively re-creates it in order to present his inner vision of life, she places a high valuation—evident both in her fictional and in her nonfictional writing—on the originality of the artist's work. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Dagny Taggart watches a play that makes her experience "the forgotten delight of being held in rapt attention by the reins of the ingenious, the unexpected, the logical, the purposeful, the new" (1957, 729); and in *The Fountainhead*, Roark's drawings, we are told, are "sketches of buildings such as had never stood on the face of the earth" ([1943] 1971, 18–19). Such comments clearly reveal her preoccupation with originality not just as a moral criterion but also as an aesthetic criterion. "Bad art," she declared, "is, predominantly, the product of imitation, of second-hand copying, not of expressive creation" (1975, 39–40).

Finally, it may be observed that Rand pushes the self-disclosing aspect of art to its limit by holding that not only does the *artist* reveal himself through his artwork, but so does the person responding to it. As she, in a rather moralistic tone, tells her readers: "An artist reveals his naked soul in his work—and so, gentle reader, do you, when you respond to it" (44). What she has in mind, however, is less the moral goodness or badness one reveals in responding to an artwork than one's ability to recognize and appreciate great art. We may here detect a tendency towards elitism, but it is not the elitism of intellectual snobbery, of claiming superiority by virtue of being able to comprehend the incomprehensible on which so much modern art thrives;

rather, it is the elitism of genuine understanding and admiration, of being able to grasp the difficult and the demanding. A great work of art, Rand believes, is something one must live up to by grace of possessing the ability to appreciate its greatness. It is the kind of appreciation Wynand expresses to Roark: “Your buildings have one sense above all—a sense of joy. Not a placid joy. A difficult, demanding kind of joy. The kind that makes one feel as if it were an achievement to experience it. One looks and thinks: I’m a better person if I can feel that” ([1943] 1971, 519).

The Special Cases of Architecture and Music

So far, I have been discussing Rand’s view of art in general terms, making no reference to its special application to the individual art forms. The central question here is whether Rand’s definition can be said to be equally valid for all the arts. I believe it is difficult to escape the fact that Rand’s definition, with its emphasis on art as a selective re-creation of reality, is clearly biased in the direction of the overtly mimetic arts, like literature, painting and sculpture, thus facing, like all mimetic theories, difficulties in accommodating such nonmimetic arts as architecture and music. It will therefore be necessary to consider these two separately and see how they fit into Rand’s general theory.

In the case of architecture, Rand admits that it is not a mimetic but a utilitarian art. Constituting “a class by itself,” she writes, it “combines art with a utilitarian purpose and does not re-create reality, but creates a structure for man’s habitation or use, expressing man’s values” (1975, 46). Rand here makes two points. The first is that architecture is a utilitarian and not a mimetic structure; the second is that this structure has the power to express human values. It is by virtue of the latter quality that Rand includes architecture among the arts. This is a point supported by Rand’s many descriptions of buildings in *The Fountainhead*, which clearly reveal that she considered architecture as an art form by virtue of its expressive function, its capacity to project a sense of life and hence to concretize metaphysical abstractions on an emotional if not conceptually explicit level. The problem is that the means it uses are structural and not representa-

tional. Finding this inconsistent with Rand's definition of art, Torres and Kamhi (2000, 189–200) have proposed that architecture, if we are to retain Rand's definition intact, must be excluded from the canonical arts.¹⁶ But I find this problematic. At least two other solutions need to be considered. The first, vigorously promoted by Bissell (2004, 325–35), is that architecture is indeed a form of re-creation. The second is that the definition, as formulated by Rand, is inadequate and consequently needs to be revised to make room for architecture. But before pursuing this point any further, I wish to take a look at Rand's discussion of music, which faces us with a similar problem.

Although music, contrary to architecture, serves no utilitarian function, it is an art form that, because of its abstract nature, always has caused problems for mimetic theories of art. In spite of the numerous attempts from Aristotle and Plato on to ascribe to music a representational dimension, the fact remains that music—at least absolute or purely instrumental music—is not mimetic in a way comparable to what is the case with the literary and the pictorial arts.¹⁷ This is a fact fully recognized by Rand (1975, 52) when she writes that

Music cannot tell a story, it cannot deal with concretes, it cannot convey a specific existential phenomenon, such as a peaceful countryside or a stormy sea. The theme of a composition entitled “Spring Song” is not spring, but the *emotions* which spring evoked in the composer. Even concepts which, intellectually, belong to a complex level of abstraction, such as “peace,” “revolution,” “religion,” are too specific, too *concrete* to be expressed in music. All that music can do with such themes is convey the emotions of serenity, or defiance, or exaltation.

Rand here clearly indicates that music does not *represent* reality. To what extent this also entails that it does not *re-create* reality is a question she leaves unanswered. In view of the fact that Rand's conception of re-creation lies close to that of representation—a point she makes explicit when she states that “[a]s a selective re-creation, a work of art has to be representational” (75)—this seems, in my view, to be the

only logical conclusion. When nonetheless she includes music among the arts, this is because it, unlike abstract paintings consisting of random combinations of shapes and colors, can be perceived as an entity. As she writes: “There is a crucial difference between the perception of musical sounds and the perception of colors: the perception of sounds produces a new cognitive experience which is sensory-conceptual, i.e., the awareness of a melody” (75). But although this helps account for the difference between music (at least melodious music) and abstract visual art, it can hardly be construed as an argument in favor of the view that music is a re-creation of reality. All she is saying is that a musical composition can be perceived as a meaningful structural unit. Her emphasis is on *integration* not *re-creation*. So like architecture, then, music in Rand’s scheme, cannot reasonably be said to re-create reality in any way.

What can be said, however, as clearly indicated by the quoted passage above, is that music possesses *expressive* power. Running through Rand’s discussion of music is the idea that music may both express and arouse emotions. The question is, how does music do this without the aid of representation? As she observes, contrary to the other arts, which rely on the representation of physical objects to arouse emotions, music seems to have “the power to reach man’s emotions directly.” It is consequently “experienced as if it reversed man’s normal psycho-epistemological process” (1975).¹⁸ But how can this be so, since emotions are, by definition, intentional, that is, evaluative responses to objects in reality? Rand’s attempt to answer this difficult question takes its point of departure in Helmholtz, hypothesizing a connection between the mathematical relationships in melodic and harmonic patterns and certain features of the cognitive processes that attend our emotive life. The question of the viability of this hypothesis is something that need not detain us here.¹⁹ The important point in this context is that Rand tries to explain the emotional power of music in terms of its structural rather than its representational aspects, thus, as in the case of architecture, ending up with a view of music that appears inconsistent with her own definition of art. The logical consequence of this, it seems, would be, also as in the case of architecture, either to revise the definition so as to include

music, or to exclude music from the canon of fine arts.

In an attempt to resolve this difficulty and to salvage music's status as an art form fully consistent with Rand's definition, Torres and Kamhi (2000) have sought resort in what Scruton (1997, 146) refers to as the "resemblance" theory of musical expression. According to Scruton, this theory holds that "expression in music is founded in analogy or resemblance between a piece of music and a state of mind." One version of this is Susanne Langer's "isomorphic" theory, according to which music resembles the internal attributes of emotive life, what she describes as its "forms of growth and attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm, or subtle activation and dreamy lapses" (Langer 1953, 27). Another version is Peter Kivy's "contour" theory, which holds that the sonic shape of music resembles the external manifestations of human emotive life in vocal and bodily behavior.²⁰ Torres and Kamhi refer to both, apparently embracing both, though it seems that they draw most heavily on the latter version. Criticizing the many attempts to explain mimesis in music in either literary or visual terms, to view it as "telling a story" or "painting a picture," they argue that the object of representation in music is not visual but aural. "Since music consists of *sounds*," they write, what it selectively re-creates must be "*auditory* in nature," involving, more specifically, "*vocal expression and the sonic effects of emotionally charged movement*" (Torres and Kamhi 2000, 88–89).

A serious problem with this argument is that it attributes to the resemblance theory a mimetic dimension rarely professed by its proponents. The point apparently missed (or ignored) by Torres and Kamhi is that most advocates of the resemblance theory, including Langer and Kivy, use it to explain the expressive power of music and not to assert its mimetic nature. Their argument is usually restricted to the view that music *resembles* certain forms of emotional expression or experience. This does not necessarily mean that it *imitates* them.²¹ To claim as much, as do Torres and Kamhi, is to confuse mere resemblance or likeness with representation. Furthermore, it is to turn natural means of emotional expression into the objects of representation, as if this merits aesthetic attention. But, as Kivy (2002,

40) cautions, the analogy between the sonic shape of music and the vocal and bodily manifestations of emotion must not “be construed as the theory that music ‘represents’ the voice and gesture of human expression, the way that paint on canvas represents the visible features of the world.” To be fully valid, a mimetic account of musical expression must show that music somehow represents or re-creates the kinds of existents that arouse our emotions in real life—something it can only do (and then in a strictly limited way) by the aid of a verbal text, whether in the form of poems (as in lyric songs), or a dramatic narrative (as in operatic music), or a “programme” (as in Liszt’s tone poems), or even just a title (like Rimsky-Korsakoff’s “Flight of the Bumblebee”). As for “pure” or absolute music, it appears that it is best seen as an essentially nonrepresentational form of emotional expression. Its means of expressing emotion, that is, lies in its structural integration of tonal elements rather than in any selective re-creation of reality. To what extent this structural integration owes its expressive power to some form of resemblance to or analogy with natural manifestations of emotive life is a question that remains to be settled.²²

If, however, emotional expression in music cannot meaningfully be said to rely on representation, it can, according to Rand, nonetheless be *experienced* as representational, on the subjective level of the listening process. Thus, although a musical work does not represent anything, it has the power to communicate emotions that evoke in the listener’s mind a flow of apparently random images—of fleeting scenes and situations that correspond to but are not part of the emotional content of the work—giving rise to an experience of music as a dream. This is a view suggested by Rand (1975, 51) when she writes that while listening to music, one’s mind

evokes subconscious material—images, actions, scenes, actual or imaginary experiences—that seems to flow haphazardly, without direction, in brief, random snatches, merging, changing, vanishing, like the progression of a dream. But, in fact, this flow is selective and consistent: the subconscious material corresponds to the emotions projected by the music.

To put this differently, one could say that the intentionality of the emotions expressed in music is provided by the listener. The concrete images that flow through the listener's mind are, however, not entirely subjective, but are potentially if not actually represented in the music through its emotional content. Although the composer, in creating his work, may have been inspired by some particular event or personal experience, the listener will respond with his own set of images—selected on the basis of the emotions he perceives in the music. This is so, Rand explains, because

[s]ubconsciously (i.e., implicitly), man knows that he cannot experience an actually causeless and objectless emotion. When music induces an emotional state without external object, his subconscious suggests an internal one. The process is wordless, directed, in effect, by the equivalent of the words: “I would feel this way if . . .” (51)

What Rand seems to have in mind here is the imagined experience of *isolated* situations—I would feel this way “if I were in a beautiful garden on a spring morning,” or “if I were on the barricades”—rather than any coherently structured plot. However, as her description of the Halley Concerto in *Atlas Shrugged* (1957, 20, 1083) clearly indicates, she also seems to have entertained the view that music can evoke a more structured form of response, one resembling the experience of a narrative.

Drawing on this description, Bissell (1999; 2004, 335–55) has argued for the view (ignored by Rand in her theoretical writings) that the structural pattern of a musical composition may resemble a literary plot, giving us “the opportunity to reenact, solely within the perceptual field of hearing, the volitional process of integrating actions and values and goals into a complex plan of goal-directed action” (1999, 77). Like Torres and Kamhi (2000), Bissell offers his argument in order to show how music, like literature, sculpture, and painting, can be viewed as a selective re-creation of reality and hence as consistent with Rand's definition of art. However, since his interpretation of what Rand means by selective re-creation in art differs in essential

ways from theirs, his theory of musical re-creation takes on a very different tack. In consonance with his microcosm theory of artistic re-creation, music (more specifically, dramatic music) is for Bissell not an “imitation” of anything in the perceptual field but a creation of a tonal world that, in a way analogous to a plot in literature, can be experienced as a pattern of purposeful action, involving such things as conflict and resolution, rising and falling, and a dramatic climax. The metaphysical value-judgment it expresses is consequently, as in a literary plot, “that of man’s power to choose goals and achieve them—or not, as tragic literature and music represent” (2004, 339).

It is here important to note that the plot Bissell believes the attentive listener perceives in dramatic music is enacted entirely in musical terms, involving the organization of tonal elements into melody, harmony, and rhythm. So his argument is not that music somehow presents a fictional story, depicting actual human figures and actions. As Bissell writes, commenting on Scruton:

Music . . . creates not an imaginary *fictional* world, that refers to or depicts *fictional* people, but an imaginary *tonal* world of melody and harmony that functions as the “subject” of music, as a “musical individual,” a *virtual* person that the music is about, that engages in certain kinds of *virtual* motion and action, and to which we sympathetically respond, as if it were a real or fictional person. This is the basis for the commonplace that dramatic music seems to “tell a story.” In respect of the musical events that surround the “virtual person” in a piece of dramatic music, there really *is* a story being told: a *musical* story. (340)

I believe this is a theory that makes a great deal of sense in structural terms, as well as in imaginative and emotional terms, but not in representational terms. Some music, especially in the Romantic canon, may indeed create the impression of goal-directedness, projecting the tensions of conflict and struggle in ways analogous to a literary plot. Yet what such music presents, unless assisted by an operatic libretto or a “programme,” is just the *emotional* and hence

generalized structure of a plot. As listeners, we may participate in the movement of this plot, sharing sympathetically in the pattern of life and feeling it conveys. We may even, on an imaginative level, construe a kind of fictional story, seeing before us a pattern of action involving actual (and not just virtual) people and events.²³ But none of this turns music into a representational art. To be representational, music has to present concretes from reality, what Bissell refers to as a figural or secondary re-creation of reality. I fail to see how music does this. The “virtual” plot he detects in dramatic music is simply not concrete enough to count as representation in this sense. Consequently, Bissell’s literary analogy, just like Torres and Kamhi’s vocal analogy, seems to me insufficient to support any mimetic claims for music. What it does support, however, are *expressive* claims for music. Although Bissell makes this a secondary issue, a clear implication of his view is that the plot pattern experienced in dramatic music is expressive of a sense of life and hence of emotion (350–52). We may very well call the musical entity in which this sense of life is embodied a “microcosm.” But the important point about this microcosm is that its means of expression are not representational but structural.

Returning now to architecture, we find an even clearer case of an art form that relies on a structural rather than a representational mode of expression and that consequently poses problems for Rand’s mimetic definition of art. Nonetheless, some attempts to construe architecture as a mimetic art, consistent with Rand’s definition, have been made and need to be considered. Foremost here is Bissell’s contention that architecture, along with the other arts, can be seen as a microcosmic re-creation of reality. His argument is that architecture, on the primary level of re-creation, is a “special kind of microcosm” that “creates the image of ‘human domain,’ of a *world in which a certain kind of person lives in a certain kind of habitation*” (325). To substantiate his claim on the secondary or figural level of re-creation (i.e., in representational terms), he draws a comparison to music, arguing that “in a manner parallel to the way that some music presents an auditory metaphor of entities in action, architecture presents a visual metaphor of entities in nature exerting force against one

another” (330). In this way, he contends, architecture, like music, is able to create the impression of a certain kind of world. Citing Tracinski (1998), he gives the example of Wright’s Fallingwater, which can be seen to present “a world that is ‘rationally ordered, harmoniously integrated, and seamlessly joined with nature’” (329). This, however, is hardly sufficient to establish architecture as a representational art form. Rather, it just confirms its expressive potential, its capacity to project a metaphysical view by organizing physical parts into a meaningful structural entity.

It is mainly by virtue of this expressive potential that it is possible to class architecture with music as a valid art form. In both cases, we have forms of artistic construction that share with the representational arts the power to convey a sense of life but that, unlike the representational arts, rely on a structural mode of expression. This structural-expressive kinship between music and architecture is one that Rand exploits in her description of the Monadnock Valley summer resort in *The Fountainhead*, which is rendered largely in musical terms from the perspective of the boy on the bicycle. The houses, we are told,

were like variations on a single theme, like a symphony played by an inexhaustible imagination, and one could still hear the laughter of the force that had been let loose on them. . . . he did not see it—he heard it in chords—he thought that there was a common language of thought, sight and sound—was it mathematics?—the discipline of reason—music was mathematics—and architecture was music in stone. ([1943] 1971, 506)

Yet we should not push the analogy between music and architecture too far. Obviously, there are differences. While music can be said to be primarily an expressive medium, architecture is first of all utilitarian, something that seriously restricts its expressive possibilities. It is only in rare cases that architecture can be said to transcend its utilitarian function and rise to the level of art. Often this is when it serves an elevated and spiritual rather than a mundane function. It is not accidental, for example, that in *The Fountainhead* the most

important example of how architecture can express spiritual values is the Stoddard Temple. Since a temple traditionally is a place dedicated to the worship of a deity, it is a type of building that readily lends itself to the expression of a sense of worship, in this case directed at man, seen as a heroic being, rather than a deity. But normally, buildings do not offer this kind of exalted sense-of-life expression. They are just constructions, built to serve a variety of practical and everyday purposes that give the architect few opportunities to express his metaphysical vision.

Architecture's functionalism may, however, also lend itself to aesthetic appreciation on the formal level, by giving rise to theories that emphasize organic principles of construction. This is central in Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, whose notion of organic architecture is summed up in Sullivan's famous doctrine that "form follows function." The influence on Rand of this doctrine is clearly evident in *The Fountainhead*, where Roark's buildings to a significant degree assume the quality of art because of their structural integrity. This integrity is much more than a harmonious ordering of parts into a pleasing whole. Rather, it can be compared to the purposeful organization of a living organism, as indicated by Roark's words to the Dean on the beauty of a building:

Nothing can be reasonable or beautiful unless it is made by one central idea, and the idea sets every detail. A building is alive, like a man. Its integrity is to follow its own truth, its one single theme, and to serve its own single purpose. A man doesn't borrow pieces of his body. A building doesn't borrow hunks of its soul. Its maker gives it the soul and every wall, window and stairway to express it. (24)

Roark here speaks of the building as a living entity, possessing, like a person, a structural unity that is determined by its inner truth, as if it has grown organically from within rather than being made from without. It is, I believe, this idea of a building as a living organism, where every part is integrated to serve a central idea, that above all prompts Rand to view architecture as a valid art form. But whatever

the aesthetic merits that may be adduced in support of architecture as an art, the fact remains that it is chiefly utilitarian. Its expressive and aesthetic properties are, at best, secondary, the incidental product of its utilitarian function. For this reason, it is best seen as a hybrid art form that, only with some qualification, should be included among the fine arts.

To conclude, then, it seems difficult to support any mimetic claims for either music or architecture. In both cases, we are dealing with nonmimetic arts that—despite all the efforts to the contrary—pose serious problems for Rand's definition of art as a selective re-creation of reality. Yet, if we go beyond Rand's definition and consider her overall theory of art, especially her notion of art as sense-of-life expression, it becomes easier to find room for these art forms. This is especially true of music. By virtue of its special language of melody, harmony, and rhythm, it has the capacity to express emotions corresponding to an artist's sense of life, thus conforming to Rand's notion of art as metaphysical projection on an emotive level. What it offers is an experience, if not of a world, at least of felt life. The same, I believe, is not equally true of architecture. Its expressive power remains marginal, subservient to its utilitarian function. So it is chiefly in regard to music that Rand's expressionism can be seen as a prop, helping to rescue this art form from being denied its status as a valid art form by the mimeticism of her definition.

The implication of this, of course, is that Rand's definition, to be considered fully adequate, requires some kind of revision, one that makes it congruent with the expressionism that so clearly informs her overall theory. It is beyond the scope of this essay, however, to attempt any such revision. The point I wish to make is simply that Rand's theory of art, seen as a whole, encompasses an expressive dimension that resolves the limitations of her definition by making it easier to account for the inclusion of music and architecture among the major arts.

Conclusion

In the course of this essay, I have tried to show the many ways in

which Rand's basically mimetic theory of art is strongly infused with elements traditionally associated with expressive theories, especially in their Romantic variants. This expressionism is incipient in Rand's conception of art as metaphysical concretization, embodying an artist's basic value-concepts, but it emerges more fully through her notion that the value-concepts embodied in art take the specific form of a sense of life. Since a sense of life, according to Rand, is a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, involving an emotional appraisal of reality, the sense-of-life aspect of her theory brings it into close alignment with Romantic views of art as emotional expression. Since, moreover, Rand holds that a sense of life constitutes the essence of a person's character, her theory also reveals an affinity with the Romantic emphasis on art as a form of self-expression, revealing an artist's personality.

A major point emerging from my discussion is that the expressive dimension of Rand's theory, though generally subsumed under her basic mimeticism, also exerts a destabilizing pressure on this mimeticism. This problem is made especially acute through Rand's comments on music and architecture, both of which she regards as valid art forms but fails to accommodate to her definition of art as a selective re-creation of reality. My suggested solution is that both these art forms, though in different degree, are more adequately accounted for through the expressionism that informs Rand's overall theory of art. The further ramification of this is that Rand's theory is perhaps best seen as a version of expression theory, with the mimetic arts (literature, painting and sculpture) forming one subgroup, and the non-mimetic arts (music and, with some reservation, architecture) forming another. In the first case, the means of expression are representational, involving a selective re-creation of reality; in the second case, the means are structural, involving the integration of elements into an entity that has the power to express a sense of life without constituting any clear form of mimetic re-creation. To what extent this is a view that calls for a revision of Rand's definition is, however, a question I choose to leave open.

Notes

1. I here deviate from Torres and Kamhi (2000), who take the genus to be “a selective re-creation of reality” (103). “Selective,” however, is in my view better seen as part of the differentia, forming a unit with “according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments,” since it is perfectly possible to distinguish between selective and non-selective modes of re-creating reality—as most clearly manifested in the opposition between stylized and nonstylized (realistic) art. This, it seems, is also the view taken by Peikoff (1991, 423), although he never makes the point explicit.

2. Torres and Kamhi (2000, 28) also link Rand’s notion of re-creation in artistic production to mimetic theory, noting especially its resemblance to Aristotle’s concept of “artistic *mimesis*.” In contradistinction from Plato’s disparaging view of the mimetic arts for presenting “a slavish copying of nature,” they argue, Aristotle saw mimesis as “a process of selecting and transforming aspects of human experience and awareness so that the ‘likeness’ produced conveys through its particular appearance a more general (universal) significance.” It should be noted, however, that the “universal” Aristotle had in mind was a pattern of causality rather than any metaphysical estimate of the world, as in Rand’s case. On this point, see Halliwell 2002, 193–95.

3. In his comments on English translations of mimesis, Halliwell (2002) dismisses the traditional use of the term “imitation,” preferring the more inclusive term “representation.” His reason for this is that imitation today is too often narrowly (and usually disparagingly) understood as “a limited exercise in copying, superficial replication, or counterfeiting of an externally ‘given’ model” (14), thus doing violence to the wide variety of meaning that historically occurs in mimetic theory, even in its early variants. This variety of meaning is better captured, Halliwell maintains, by the term representation. As he notes, “from an early stage, when applied to poetry, visual art, music, dance, and the like, mimesis amounts to a concept (or family of concepts) of representation, which . . . can be broadly construed as the use of an artistic medium . . . to signify and communicate certain hypothesized realities” (16). Rand’s use of the word re-creation falls well within this broad notion of representation, only specifying more precisely its intermediate position between imitation and creation. Significantly, the term imitation is one Rand never uses in regard to artistic creation.

4. This is a task Torres and Kamhi (2000) avoid. Instead, they make the rather summary claim that “[t]o our knowledge, [Rand’s] definition subsumes all, and only, those works that commonly fall under the traditional category of (‘fine’) art—with the exception of architecture . . .” The only works it does exclude, they claim, are the ones they believe *should* be excluded, namely, “those that have been regarded as ‘controversial’ or ‘avant-garde’ in the twentieth century” (104). But this surely is too categorical. To really test the validity of Rand’s definition, one needs to go into the whole canon of works traditionally labeled art and see to what extent they may indeed be regarded as metaphysical concretizations. The conclusion, I fear, will not be as conclusive as the one suggested by Torres and Kamhi, even given their emended version. Here a lot of work remains to be done.

5. On this point, see Halliwell 2000, 98–99. Interestingly, Halliwell also speculates that Plato’s opposition to tragedy may be related to a detection in tragic poetry of a world view which “if it were true, would negate his own philosophical enterprise at its roots” (98).

6. For an historical outline of the heterocosmic model, see Abrams 1953, 272–85 and 1989, 169–82.

7. For a brief but informative historical survey of Neoplatonic aesthetics, see Abrams 1953, 42–46.

8. One possible source of influence is Nietzsche, especially in view of the fact that Nietzsche developed his own views on art in struggle with Schopenhauer's aesthetics, which he ultimately rejected because of its pessimistic metaphysics. When, for example, Rand (1975, 106) rather inelegantly refers to "the venomous muck" of Schopenhauer's universe, it is likely that her source is Nietzsche. But this, of course, is difficult to document. For an interesting account of Nietzsche's relation to Schopenhauer's aesthetics, see Young 1992.

9. The extent to which theories of art in the Neoplatonic tradition should be seen as mimetic or expressive is an open question. Basically, Neoplatonic theory must be placed in the mimetic tradition, since what the artist purports to present is ideal reality, reality in its true and essential form, stripped of its shadowy surface qualities. But as Abrams (1953, 44) points out, since the mental image the artist forms of the Platonic Idea need not, according to Neoplatonic theory, be empirically verified, it "becomes vulnerable to contamination by the personal and idiosyncratic" and may consequently be "replaced by more mundane emotions." This, he believes, is what happens in German idealist theory (represented by Novalis, Schelling, and the Schlegels), which consequently takes on an expressive, even erotic, dimension largely absent in Neoplatonic theory.

10. For another account of how expression and mimetic theories historically often are merged, making it difficult to distinguish between the two, see Krieger 1976.

11. The fusion of mimetic and expressive elements in Rand's account of art is noted by Enright 2001, 345, though without any reference to the historical antecedents for such fusion.

12. In addition to its role in Tolstoy, the idea of art as a means of inducing the right emotions was also common in much Renaissance and Neoclassical poetic theory, which emphasized the value of literature as an instrument in teaching its audience how to feel correctly, especially by appealing to feelings of sympathy. Ultimately, the idea goes back to Aristotle's notion that the purpose of tragedy is to bring about the catharsis of pity and fear.

13. Rand's views regarding the relevance or irrelevance of an artist's specific philosophy for an *aesthetic* evaluation of an artwork seem to be inconsistent. Thus, at one point, when discussing the role of sense of life in art, she says that "[t]he truth or falsehood of a given artist's philosophy as such, is not an esthetic matter" (1975, 39). But at another point, when discussing the importance of "selectivity in regard to subject," she suddenly states that both style and subject, both means and end, are important in judging a work aesthetically, declaring that "there is no esthetic justification for the spectacle of Rembrandt's great artistic skill employed to portray a side of beef" (166). Since an artist's choice of subject in Rand's view reflects his sense of life, this seems to me to contradict her more general view that an artist's particular view of life is aesthetically irrelevant.

14. My summary of Croce's self-expression theory draws on Osborne 1970, 232–33.

15. On the interrelation between the moral and aesthetic aspects of sincerity in the experience of art, see Casey 1973 and Abrams 1953, 312–20.

16. According to Kamhi (2003, 430), Rand came to have "second thoughts" about her stated views regarding architecture's status as an art form. Her source is Harry Binswanger who, when asked why there was no entry on architecture in *The Ayn Rand Lexicon*, answered that Rand herself had chosen to omit it because "she had decided that it was 'more utilitarian.'" I find this most curious. What Rand came to think years after her published statements is totally irrelevant to an interpretation of her thought. What we have to consider is what she had to say in the works she left behind her. Whatever her "second thoughts," the fact remains that Rand's recorded

view on the matter is that architecture is a valid art form, even if in a class by itself. No omission from the *Lexicon* can change that.

17. For a dismissive view of the idea that music is representational, see Scruton 1997, 118–39.

18. The notion that music affects the listener's emotions directly rather than indirectly through representation is formulated along lines similar to those of Rand in Ferguson 1960. As Ferguson writes, "the representative arts . . . begin with portrayed circumstance which, as we apprehend it, generates by a kind of inference its feeling-correlative." In music, by contrast, the process is the "converse" and "begins with portrayed feeling which generates an inference of appropriate causal circumstances. But in both the result is an image and a valuation of experience" (56).

19. Rand's use of Helmholtz has been criticized by both Bissell 1999, 63–64 and Torres and Kamhi 2000, 83.

20. Kivy's most recent discussion of the "contour theory," including his reflections on its difficulties, can be found in his *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* (2002, 40–47). It was originally presented in Kivy 1988.

21. Arguments for music as an *imitation* and not just a *resemblance* of the human voice occurs mostly among eighteenth-century theorists, who, like Torres and Kamhi, tried to find a place for music within the mimetic conception of art. For examples of this, see Abrams 1953, 91 and Kivy 1997, 10.

22. One of the best accounts of the resemblance theory of musical expression is offered by Ridley 1995, especially chapters 4, 5, and 6. For a refutation of the theory, in all its variants, see Scruton 1997, 166–67.

23. For a discussion of the role of imagination in the fictional construal of music, interpreted in representational terms, see Walton 1994. Walton argues that a musical composition serves as a "prop" used by the listener to imagine or "make-believe" that it represents a fictional world. This is a view akin to Rand's claim that the listener to a musical composition experiences a flow of apparently random images that correspond to the emotions expressed in the music. Unlike Rand, however, Walton makes no reference to the cognitive nature of the emotions to explain his theory.

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