

Guggenheims and Grand Canyons

The Stoddard Temple has an improperly balanced plan, which leads to spatial confusion. There is no balance of masses. It lacks a sense of symmetry. It's proportions are inept.—Peter Keating

Gehry's building is neither sculpture (i.e., art) nor successful architecture, since his attempt to make a bold formal statement results in structural incoherence—as evidenced by the "disorienting spaces" (...).—Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi

Gazing into the Abyss

I see order and chaos as moments in a larger continuum...
—Eve Laramée'

As I began to outline this essay, it was just past sunrise and I was sitting at the rim of the Grand Canyon. Literally.

From the rim, I gazed into the deep abyss, brimming with beautiful proportions and sublime contrasts. Marvelous are the causal forces perpetually at work in the Colorado River, functioning with nature's materials to produce the chaotic gash that is the canyon. My mind recalled the day before, hiking one of the many canyon floors, listening to the distant rapids and looking up at the towering walls carved over the millennia. From the rim, looking down into the pastel silence, the impressionistic canvas of light without sound transcends the turbulent forms and functions deep in the canyon. Such a realm of steep and strange contrasts triggers the sublime.

Sitting on the rim, I recalled reading the Introduction to Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi's opus *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand* (2000a). The Introduction stated that the book was to be a philosophical explication of Rand's aesthetic theory, *absent* any consideration of beauty, one of the central

concerns of aesthetics across the centuries. According to Torres and Kamhi:

the term esthetics, as Rand uses it, is synonymous with "the philosophy of art"; it does not mean "the study of beauty and related concepts," the much broader sense in which it has been generally understood (16).

This claim troubled me, for apparently they were going to defend the weakest element in Rand's theory of aesthetics, at least as presented in *The Romantic Manifesto*.

Sitting on the rim, the aesthetic principles before me were no different than if I were on top of the Empire State Building. From the 86th floor balcony, the city below is a pattern of chaotic forms and functions, alive with color and movement, an aesthetic complexity stimulating the sublime. The city expresses numerous strange attractions, born of a dazzling display of human thought and ingenuity, created for those people navigating the canyon walls of the skyscrapers. I thought of *The Fountainhead* and Rand's poetic description of Dominique's ride on the Staten Island Ferry:

In the vast emptiness of sky and ocean, the city was only a small, jagged solid. It seemed condensed, pressed tight together, not a place of streets and separate buildings, but a single sculptured form. A form of irregular steps that rose and dropped without ordered continuity, long ascensions and sudden drops, like the graph of a sudden struggle. But it went on mounting—toward a few points, toward the triumphant masts of skyscrapers raised out of the struggle (1968, 317).

In *The Fountainhead*, Rand was deeply concerned with the meaning of the beautiful in nature and culture, precisely in her descriptions of the chaotic forms of nature and the strange attractors of Roark's buildings (Vacker 1999). Further, as Gregory Johnson observed:

Rand's aesthetic signature is captured better by the concept of the sublime, an experience

in which elements of chaos—mind boggling magnitudes and fearsome powers—are incorporated into an elevating aesthetic phenomenon by the experience of man's cognitive mastery and moral superiority over them (2000, 232).

Clearly, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* express the natural and technological sublime, a modern aesthetic style born of post-Kantian aesthetics and industrial utopianism (Nye 1994). Rand's passionate explication of the sublime is the main reason those novels have become such revolutionary classics. Yet, *What Art Is* claimed 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.

Sitting on the rim, my mind wandered to Frank Gehry's design for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the chaotic architectural masterpiece that has received much the same criticism as Roark's Stoddard Temple in *The Fountainhead*. The world's foremost exponents of Rand's aesthetic theory, Torres and Kamhi also denounced the museum design (2000a, 198-9). After returning home, I read their book, suspecting that something other than a theory of art was being defended in *What Art Is*.

Three Great Divides

The flowing life which comes from the sense of order in chaos ... is here absolutely absent.—Gordon Prescott

Without doubt, Ayn Rand presented a provocative theory of art in *The Romantic Manifesto*. Since the publication of the book, Rand's artistic pronouncements have inspired acolytes and infuriated critics. While the work contained numerous insights into the cognitive nature of art and its role in human living, it embraced a flawed view of the complex relation between art and aesthetics. Rand was often a vocal critic of modernist tendencies in the arts, yet the book's key assumptions expressed one of the great modernist divides—art versus function, specifically *material* function. In contrast, *The Fountainhead* expressed a naturalistic and functional view of aesthetics,

expressed in fractal forms that anticipated the insights of chaos theory. Two decades later, the intuitions of Rand the artist were overwhelmed by the rationalizations of Rand the philosopher.

In *What Art Is*, Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi defended and explicated Rand's theory of art, as presented in *The Romantic Manifesto*. They accepted the essentials of Rand's definition of art, concluding that art is a selective recreation of reality according to an artist's fundamental values or fundamental view of life (2000a, 103-8). Torres and Kamhi affirmed 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 (25-7). The *psychological* function of art is to condense abstract knowledge and values into concrete perceptual units (24-5), thus bringing concepts to the perceptual level, allowing us to grasp them directly as if they were percepts (27). Torres and Kamhi agreed with Rand that art exists as an end in itself, as an object of pure contemplation without any didactic or *material* functions (24). The purpose of art is not to teach, but to show "that which could be real, ... that which is consistent with reality" (28, ellipsis in Torres and Kamhi).

The goal of this essay is not to quibble over various details of Torres and Kamhi's explication of Rand. Rather, the task is illustrate that the Rand presented a *psychology of art* that rests upon dualistic foundations which undermine its viability as a *philosophy of aesthetics*. Torres and Kamhi ardently defended this duality, arguing that Rand's theory of art is a "coherent" and original "totality" (16, 19). Unfortunately, the overall philosophy of aesthetics in *The Romantic Manifesto* is neither original nor coherent. For Torres and Kamhi to explain this coherent totality, they too must embrace the duality of art versus material function, while embracing another modernist divide—*art versus beauty*. Like *The Romantic Manifesto*, *What Art Is* also contained numerous insights into the nature of art and its origins in the requirements of human cognition. Nevertheless, the value of these contributions are neutralized by the deeper and more

damaging aesthetic duality lying beneath their arguments.

Torres and Kamhi's systematic explication also rests on a third great divide—*order versus chaos*. This alleged duality has created an aesthetic abyss which plagues the entirety of human culture and utopian ideals (Vacker 2001). While Torres and Kamhi have certainly resurrected Rand's theory of *art* from academic oblivion and thrust it into public discourse, they have also consigned Rand's *aesthetic* vision to the walls of museums past, where it can hang in perpetuity by the curators of contemplative culture.

Museum Walls, not Canyon Walls

It is one man's ego defying the most sacred impulses of all mankind, of every man on the street, of every man in this courtroom.—Ellsworth Toohey

Mr. Roark, who seems to be a publicity hound, received reporters with an air of swaggering insolence and stated that the public mind was hash.—The *Banner*

Torres and Kamhi claimed Rand's theory of art provides a rational and objective foundation against the chaotic onslaught of modernism, yet they expressed the modernist philosophical trajectory in constructing their defense. Further, 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. Their approach to art and aesthetics is much different than Chris Sciabarra, who has sought to restructure Randian scholarship toward a more organic understanding of her philosophy, especially aesthetics (1995: 202-229). Nevertheless, the obsession for narrow categorization dominates the academic arts and sciences of modernity, and it should be challenged by all thinkers seeking to increase the quality of art and aesthetics.

Two of the central foundations of modern art were the divorce of art from beauty and material function, both of which had been central of the "great theory of beauty" that

dominated the art of the Greeks and art since the Renaissance (Tatarkiewicz 1972).

Paradoxically, it was the divorce of art from beauty and function that modern architecture sought to bridge with the aesthetic maxims of "form follows function" and "machines for living." Neoclassical architecture (and all its contemporary derivatives) certainly served a material function, but its primary effect was to symbolize the cognitive authority of past orders and the moral legitimacy the current order. The ornate details, historical friezes, and sculpture-as-columns were all intended for the "contemplation" of the citizens, inspiring submission to the regime. For all its flaws, modern architecture sought to eradicate such authoritarian traditionalism (the tradition that Rand assailed in *The Fountainhead*). Beauty in modern architecture was to be expressed, not in moral symbols or sentimental forms, but rather in the unity of form and function with the nature of the materials of modern production. Further, this unity of form, function, and materials was supposed to express the laws of nature revealed by the clockwork cosmos of Newton and the machines of a thermodynamic universe. Unfortunately, in the blind worship of mechanization, standardization, efficiency, and functionalism (apart from form), most modern architecture failed to realize its potential. Thus we got mirrored glass silos with no individual identity, capable of reflecting the face of anyone, and the twin towers of the World Trade Center, simulacra anticipating the age of cloning.

While modern architecture expressed the Aristotelian functionalism passed down through the aesthetics of Aquinas (Eco 1988), the other modern arts embraced the Platonic formalism recast in the aesthetics of Immanuel Kant. In his *Critique of Judgment* (1957), Kant systematized the "purposeless" theory of beauty and laid the foundation for modern aesthetics. For Kant, beauty was experienced in the disinterested contemplation of harmonious forms (supplied by subjective consciousness), apart from the actual object or its purposes. Free and pure beauty expressed "purposiveness without a purpose," or a unifying form which demanded

universal agreement so as to maintain social order. Ultimately, beauty was felt as *form* apart from function and *order* apart from objects—*pure order in itself and of itself*.

Without doubt, the Kantian duality between beauty and purpose inspired many of the modernist tendencies of the 20th century. Since fine art exists within the broader realm of aesthetics, art also came to be seen as an expression which should serve no function other than subjective contemplation. Since modern design and craft sought to create material objects of beauty and function, fine art soon divorced itself from beauty as well. After all, under the Kantian imperative, the beauty of an empirical object was marred from the outset. Any material function consigned the art to the tainted world of "design" (or craft), placing its value well beneath pure expression for mental contemplation. Such thinking runs rampant throughout the arts world, where function is seen as limiting the freedom of the artist to use pure form in expressing personal subjectivity.

For Rand, art is for pure contemplation, without any material function, existing as an end in itself. This claim is neither unique nor original, for it is clearly within the post-Kantian modernist trajectory. While Torres and Kamhi defended Rand's insights into the cognitive role of art, they criticized her ambiguity on the relationship of architecture to art, embracing the divide which sees any beauty or material function as necessarily reducing the object to the lower realm of design. As explained by Torres and Kamhi, Rand saw architecture existing in a unique artistic class, creating structures that serve utilitarian functions while expressing human values (190). Torres and Kamhi rightly argued that Rand's position on architecture cannot be reconciled with her own definition of art. Yet, rather than question the underlying modernist duality, they employed various historical and scholarly sources to justify their argument that architecture is not "art" (191-6). Apparently, the architectural unity of form and function with the nature of the materials does not serve the "deepest" of human values (190-1). If Howard Roark had only the benefit of reading *What Art Is*, then maybe he

would not have been such an egoist intent on remaking the world by unifying nature and art through his radically innovative architecture.

Following Rand, Torres and Kamhi then proceeded to reduce all the "decorative arts" to mere "craft." Their argument also embraced the Kantian duality between empirical reality and abstract reason, for such crafts appeal to the lower realm of sensory pleasure and not the higher realm of conceptual thinking (202). Thus, fashion and furniture not only have degrading material functions, they also appeal to lower forms of cognition. While Torres and Kamhi proudly referred to how the "ordinary person" and "the public" are skeptical of much modern art, they have no problem discounting the aesthetics of the clothing worn by the ordinary public and the furniture which fills the architecture they call home. As in art, most fashion and furniture lacks greatness, yet it cannot be denied that such objects serve important *aesthetic* purposes (none of which are inherently shallow or superficial).

Nevertheless, Torres and Kamhi claimed that such functional objects remain important in creating "a sensually stimulating and emotionally gratifying human environment" (213). They claimed that the responsibility for "designing beautiful everyday objects" has been abandoned, precisely because craft has been mistakenly elevated to the status of art (213). Further, they claimed that Rand's aesthetic theory provides a foundation for restoring the lost tradition of beauty in design. In reality, the modernist dualities have helped produce the banality and sterility of much modern design, precisely because such practices were considered merely *functional* and a lower form of aesthetic activity. After all, practitioners of these activities are not artists, but mere designers or craftspeople. If the realms of architecture and decorative aesthetics are to better attain lofty heights, then we must elevate the aesthetic value of these practices, acknowledging that they can express our deepest and most universal values. Since *The Romantic Manifesto* and *What Art Is* both embraced the modernist dualities, they can only

help fail in the restoration of these important aesthetic practices.

In defending the cognitive foundations of art, Torres and Kamhi actually reduced aesthetic experience to the sterile contemplation of our "deepest values" (107) and divorced such values from the functional objects which surround us in living our lives. In such an aesthetic spirit, high art is for contemplation in concert halls and on museum walls, while low design merely functions in household halls and beautifies urban canyon walls.

Aesthetics, as Anti-Aesthetic

A college professor wrote a letter to the editor about his spiritual experiences and stated that he could not have experienced them in a place like the Stoddard Temple—from *The Fountainhead*.

In embracing the duality between art and beauty or function, Torres and Kamhi claim to be overcoming "conceptual confusion" with "conceptual clarity." To accomplish this task, they conflated "philosophy of art" with aesthetics, and defined beauty out of aesthetics (16). Such philosophical contortions may work in defending an old order, but they do little to clarify the problems of divorcing beauty and function from aesthetics.

They rightly claimed that Rand's theory shares many important points of correspondence with Aristotle, yet they ignored the fact that beauty was integral to his vision of art and nature. Beauty was both a *formal* cause existing at the beginning of artistic thought and as a *final* cause toward which the actions of art and production are directed. For Aristotle, beauty was a naturally perfecting movement toward the better or best, the highest end for the objects of art and nature. The overall function of art was to imitate and perfect the essential principles of nature, thus revealing the true and the good through the beautiful (Charlesworth, 1957). Despite Aristotle's narrow view of the forms of beauty (order, symmetry, and definiteness), his theory provides a naturalistic and evolutionary foundation for understanding how the aesthetic experience can include a wide range of things, objects and activities, both natural and human-made.

While art reflects fundamental values, it is not at all clear why beauty and functionality are to be excluded from such values. As Torres and Kamhi pointed out, Rand seemed to ascribe philosophical importance to beauty in both art and architecture (as clearly suggested in *The Fountainhead*).

In her famous example, Rand observed that a cold sore on the lips of a beautiful woman wearing an exquisite evening gown would be an issue of insignificance in real life, but its inclusion in a painting would be of profound philosophical significance. Such a painting would be "corrupt, obscenely vicious attack on man, on beauty, on all values" (1974, 34). Naturally, if we see beauty as superficial appearances, then it would seem that Rand's declaration is without merit. However, beauty can have a much deeper meaning, perhaps in the perfect relation of form and function in both art and nature. The importance of beauty need not be associated with symmetrical and sentimentalist visions of beauty, all of which were exploded by Roark's chaotic buildings in *The Fountainhead*.

For Torres and Kamhi, Rand "overstates the case" in linking beauty and glamour to "all of man's values" (49). Simply put, beauty must be excluded as a central value in aesthetics. In *What Art Is*, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what values are important or fundamental to art. Torres and Kamhi made numerous references to "metaphysical" values and value judgments, including:

- the concretization of a moral ideal (31)
- the efficacy of man's consciousness (33)
- the artist's metaphysical outlook (52)
- a view of man's existence (52)
- (our) deepest values (107)
- a view of the nature of reality (108).

Certainly, art can express such values. To the best of my knowledge, *What Art Is* neglected to explain why beauty and material function are excluded from such deep values. Further complicating matters, Torres and Kamhi referred to aesthetician Louis Arnaud Reid, who held that the greatest art deals with values that

are "profound and lofty and broad and far reaching in the complexity of their implications" (59). Properly understood, this phrase refers to the sublime, long considered central to aesthetics. By omitting beauty and sublimity, Torres and Kamhi present a theory of "aesthetics" that is essentially *anti-aesthetic*.

The Realms of the Aesthetic

Instead of being austere enclosed, this alleged temple is wide open, like a western saloon. (...) Nobody in his right mind would kneel within Mr. Roark's temple. The place forbids it. The emotions are of a different nature: arrogance, audacity, defiance, self-exaltation.—Ellsworth Toohey

Any comparison of the realms of aesthetics and art indicates that they are not co-extensive, for aesthetics is a much broader intellectual realm than fine art. *Encarta Dictionary* (1999) defined aesthetics as: 1) the branch of philosophy dealing with the study of aesthetic values such as the beautiful and the sublime; 2) the study of the rules and principles of art; 3) a particular idea of what is beautiful or artistic. While definition two would permit Torres and Kamhi's narrow explication of aesthetics, the question remains as to why they feel it is necessary to dismiss beauty and material function. Torres and Kamhi devoted an entire chapter to the scientific support of Rand's theory (109-30), yet neglect to discuss any of the scientific literature which illustrated that "beauty" has an evolutionary and biological basis with profound meaning for human cognitive development (Rentschler, Herzberger, and Epstein 1988). Other scientific work has connected complexity and chaos theory to the deep beauty found throughout nature and in the greatest works of art and literature (Turner 1991). While these works were listed in their bibliography, that they were not discussed remains puzzling. It seems that a book presenting a "biocentric" (2000, 109) theory would certainly would want to mention research that connects beauty to biology, the brain, and the cutting-edge science of chaos theory, unless one is seeking to exclude beauty and sublimity in protecting definitions and preserving an old aesthetic order.

Virtually every aspect of reality can be experienced or evaluated from an aesthetic perspective, including not only art and design, but also nature, philosophical worldviews, social systems, utopian models, and scientific theories and models (Sparisou 1989, Turner 1995). Beauty has long been a fundamental motivation in the scientific quest for discovering truth (Chandrasekhar 1987), even inspiring intellectual revolutions in scientific theory and practice (McAlister 1996). So, while Torres and Rand exclude beauty and sublimity from the fundamental values of aesthetic, such values have long been fundamental value for humans in modeling their universe and civilizations.

Certainly, philosophers may debate the specific contours of the term aesthetics, it remains unnecessary to exclude judgments and experiences of the beautiful and sublime. Rather than fret over a timelessly perfect definition of aesthetics, the point here is to illustrate that the aesthetic realm involves a much broader range of issues and objects than art. The first *Encarta* definition could be a starting point for understanding the realm of aesthetics. Generally speaking, we can define aesthetics as: the branch of philosophy which seeks to understand the beautiful and sublime, the ugly and the ridiculous, all of which may be experienced or expressed in natural and human-made objects. While space limitations here do not permit a full explication of this definition, we can suggest the possible parameters for this definition and how art, architecture, and science might relate with each other from an aesthetic perspective. Aesthetics would include two overlapping realms—the natural and the human-made. Nature would include things such as super novae, solar systems, sunsets, storms, canyons, deserts, beaches, snow, flowers, certain animals (etc.), all of which have long been experienced as beautiful or sublime. The human-made realm would include things such as scientific models, political systems, art, architecture, commodities (product design, fashion, and decorative objects).

From this perspective, things such as architecture and fashion are not the same as things we call "art." Yet, like art, they are

important aesthetic practices which can express profound meaning by integrating functionality with beauty or sublimity. In any effort to define strict categories or hierarchies, the complexity of reality will blur any neat definitional lines.

Scientific models involve elements of nature and the imaginative aspect of human reason which seeks to correlate knowledge to reality (via the creation of a model). Obviously, the model is a human-made concept, which is intended to represent systems in the natural world, such as Newton's clockwork cosmos, Einstein's relativity, Hawking's black holes, all of which owe their success to their aesthetic features and their assumed correlation to reality. Landscape architecture involves both the natural and the human-made, wherein design is to applied to nature to create an attractive integration of the natural and the human-made. Architecture often involves creating furniture to be integrated into the design and structure of the building, as exemplified in the houses of Frank Lloyd Wright. The lines between literature, theatre, music and visual arts are blurred by the art of cinema, which can effectively use almost any combination of these singular arts. The point is that the complexity of reality does not fit into neat hierarchical boxes, as apparently preferred by Torres and Kamhi.

While Torres and Kamhi would likely dispute the following claim, paintings often serve important *decorative* functions when integrated into the interior design of a house (though that should not be their primary function). As much as I admire many of the paintings by Rembrandt, they would not function well in my industrial warehouse loft with 18-foot ceilings and 14-foot windows. Rembrandt does not fit well with my minimalist preferences—two reclining chairs from the Eames aluminum group, futon mattress on the floor, several bookshelves, a rug designed by Mondrian, and a cantilevered cypress and glass desk. Almost any classical painting would be less aesthetically pleasing than my choice, which has been to leave the walls blank (and lean against them my prints from museum furniture exhibits and posters of utopian films). None of this meets the criteria of art for Torres

and Kamhi, which means my choice of urban living has less aesthetic value than a suburban house adorned with Norman Rockwell and landscape paintings!

Encarta defined *beauty* as: the combination of qualities that make something pleasing and impressive to listen to or touch, or especially to look at. While generally true, the topic is more complex, precisely because different individuals may value different qualities as being beautiful. For the more conservative or neoclassical mind, beauty is found in proportions that express simplicity, symmetry, regularity, linearity, uniformity, synchronicity, stability, unity, totality, and order. For the more imaginative or postclassical mind, beauty is found in proportions that express complexity, asymmetry, irregularity, nonlinearity, variation, asynchronicity, turbulence, emergence, individuality, and chaos. These two visions cannot be reconciled, for they are rooted in different (deductive v. inductive) cognitive processes, with advocates of the first vision of beauty usually seeking to impose simple forms on everything in reality that resembles the complex forms of the second vision. The aesthetic and utopian consequences of these two visions are complex, and are fully explored in my forthcoming book (Vacker 2001).

In a purely philosophical sense, beauty can be imagined as "purposeful proportionality, where the proportions between form and function are perfectly realized in final causality." Yet, here too, people prefer different forms, functions, and finalities. This conception of beauty is inclusive of the ethical values which guide the determination and achievement of purposeful ends. People also differ on normative ends, primarily because of their estimation of the formal outcome of each ethical position. Most people believe egoism or individualism leads to a greedy society of competitive, dog-eat-dog chaos, while altruism or utilitarianism leads to a compassionate society of cooperative, harmonious order. Once we remove the veneer of ethics, we find aesthetic commitments to ordering "chaos" on a social scale.

Encarta defined the *sublime* as: 1) so beautiful as to seem heavenly; 2) of highest

moral or spiritual value; 3) excellent or particularly impressive. These can serve as a starting point, further making us wonder why beauty and sublimity are to be excluded from our deepest values. The sublime is felt when the elements of chaos—huge magnitudes, fearsome powers, deep complexity (and so on)—confront our senses and stimulate our imagination in an exalting aesthetic or spiritual experience (Johnson 2000). As the disproportionate and comical, the ugly and the ridiculous represent oppositions to the beautiful and sublime. Beauty and sublimity are among the deepest human values, and as aesthetic values, it is they that inspire revolution and utopia, and thus change the world, for better or worse, depending on how they are imagined and realized (Vacker 2001).

Encarta defined *art* as: 1) the creation of beautiful or thought-provoking works, e.g. painting, music or writing; 2) beautiful or thought provoking works produced through creative activity. While certainly not perfect definitions, they are both inclusive enough to recognize the importance of beauty, deep values (presumed to be meant by "thought-provoking"), and creative activity on the part of humans. In contrast to Torres and Kamhi, *Encarta* sees aesthetics as encompassing the beautiful, sublime, and art, with art including the products of creative activity that can be beautiful and/or thought-provoking.

Contemplating Definitions

The correlation of the transcendental to the spatial in the building under consideration is entirely screwy.—Gordon Prescott

For Rand, art is a selective re-creation of reality according to the artist's most fundamental values. This raises a question: why is art a "re-creation" and not a "creation," for *re-creating* implies that something (which constitutes the work of art) already exists or has already been created? *Encarta* defined *re-create* as: to create something again, or re-produce it. In contrast, *Encarta* defined *create* as: 1) to bring somebody or something into existence; 2) to produce something as a result, or make

something happen; 3) to use imagination to invent things or produce works of art.

Regarding the term re-creation, it is obvious that Rand does not mean mere imitation. Nevertheless, what exactly is an artist *re-creating*, creating again, or re-producing? What did Rand *re-create* in *The Fountainhead*? Certainly, New York City and granite quarries previously existed, but it is implausible to claim that Rand literally *re-created* these things in her novel. It seems more accurate to say that *The Fountainhead* is a fictional *representation* of how reality is or might be, as an artistic product expressing Rand's deepest aesthetic values. Simply put, *reality* is not literally being *re-created* in *The Fountainhead*.

The best examples of efforts to re-create (or simulate) reality are found in Las Vegas and Celebration, Florida. In Las Vegas, the hotels "New York-New York" and "Paris, Las Vegas" are attempts to simulate reality on a gargantuan scale. New York-New York contains replicas of Grand Central Station, Greenwich Village and a 300-foot Brooklyn Bridge, plus a scaled down skyline that includes the RCA, Chrysler, and (47-story) Empire State Buildings. Paris, Las Vegas has its own versions of the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower.

Celebration is the town privately owned by the Disney Corporation, constructed to house Disney workers. In building Celebration, the architects and planners explicitly decided to *re-create* the small-town America of the 1950's. Even though the Las Vegas hotels and Celebration serve a material function, they are nevertheless selective re-creations of reality according to the artist's fundamental aesthetic values.

When an architect conceives of a building, the first step usually involves creating several renderings of the building on paper, often from different perspectives to illustrate the overall structure and form of the building. Apparently, since such renderings are meant to inspire the construction of the building, then they would be serving a function and thus must be design, not a valid form of art. Yet, it is clear the renderings are still fiction, created to "show" the building, if it were to be designed in this manner at this

location. The building concretizes the architects view of life, showing how the building "could be and should be."

When the building is completed, it is the actual creation of some thing in reality, but not a "re-creation of reality." If an artist happened upon the building and decided to paint the building on canvas, then that painting would necessarily be a work of art. It would be re-creation of reality according to the artist's fundamental values, all expressed in the techniques used to represent the building on the canvas. The purpose of the canvas is to show a selective aspect of reality, not any didactic or material ends.

So, we are left with the following dilemma. The drawings which gave birth to the building cannot be a work of art because they anticipate the reality of the building, nor can be the reality of the building itself. The only thing that can be a work of art is the "re-creation" of the building on the canvas. Even more paradoxical is the idea that an actual creation in reality has less aesthetic value than a supposed "re-creation" of reality!

As Torres and Kamhi noted, Rand recognized that art is "builds the model" precisely because it is the "technology of the soul" (30). While true, Rand ascribed much of this power to ethics, which she saw as the "engineering" that provides the "blueprints" for human living (30). Apparently, for Torres and Kamhi, such architectural metaphors can be ascribed to moral ideals in art, but art cannot be ascribed to aesthetic ideals architecture. Sensing that the "model building" idea might actually lead to a material functionality for art and blur the categories, Torres and Kamhi quickly discounted the idea as non-universal to art, and belonging mostly to ethics and literature. Model building may not be universal to art, but it is a key function in aesthetics and one certainly not limited to ethics or literature. In fact, it is in the realm of architecture and utopian design that we find the largest models of the world, the aesthetic expressions of the most fundamental philosophical and cultural values.

World's Fairs have long aspired to re-create or simulate a future reality, models conceived

"to show" the world to come in the future. Perhaps the best American examples were the famed 1939 and 1964 New York World's Fairs, which re-created on a gargantuan scale the future to come with industrial science and corporate planning. World's Fairs bring abstract concepts about the future to the perceptual level, allowing us to directly experience them *as if* we were in the future. If it is not art to portray the future at a World's Fair, then why is it art to portray the future in *Atlas Shrugged*? After all, the World's Fairs projected a future utopian society to come, if society adopted the technologies and worldviews expressed in the Fair. *Atlas Shrugged* projected a future dystopian society to come, if society adopted the technologies and worldviews expressed in the novel. For Torres and Kamhi, no paradox exists, for art is for contemplation, and any "model building" in concrete reality is a lower form of aesthetics.

Torres and Kamhi discount photography for the very fact that it "discloses" something that exists and uses mechanical technology to do so. Photographers are mere "scribes," not "poets" who "construct" re-creations of reality (181-2). Apparently unaware of airbrushing and digital photographic techniques, they claimed:

The photographer—unlike the composer, painter, sculptor, or poet—does not select and shape every minute detail of the work. Though he may choose, for instance, the angle or perspective from which he will photograph a given subject—a person, say—unlike a painter he cannot modify or rearrange various features, such as a strand of hair or the set of the mouth. Once the photographer release the shutter, the camera takes over, indiscriminately recording everything reflected in the light caught by the lens (182).

In reality, all elements of the 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. For example, the faces and bodies of supermodels are altered

before (make-up), during (lighting), and after (airbrushing) the shutter is released. In many ads, the color, lighting, and subjects are completely adjusted after the "photo," via digitalization. Reality is not merely captured on film, for such aestheticization *constructs* reality to *expresses* something about reality. Precisely because "photography" can reveal and express deep meaning in actual reality, it is at least the aesthetic equal to painting.

In a revealing comment, Torres and Kamhi even mentioned a photographer who mistakenly "deemed himself an artist" and exhibited his work in the "fine arts" section of the "Great Exhibition of Works of Industry of All Nations" (the first World's Fair). His "soberer colleagues" displayed their work in "the section devoted to 'Philosophical Instruments and Objects Depending on their Use'—that is, in exhibits pertaining to such physical phenomena as optics and light" (185). Apparently, paintbrushes are the timelessly superior technology, and all succeeding visual technologies are imposters in the temple of high art. Nevertheless, the definitional lines between painting and photography have been forever burred by digitalization, something Torres and Kamhi overlooked in laying the Luddite foundations for an aesthetic renaissance.

"Objectivists" have long claimed to have a rational philosophy based on *reality*, offering a radiant future for humankind. It seems ironic that Objectivism's philosophy of art displays a disdain for reality in defending a "re-creation" of reality. If the fictional re-creation of reality is intrinsically superior to creating actual reality or a future reality, then it seems the philosophy of art is doomed to cultural obsolescence in a perpetual gaze. In *What Art Is*, contemplation replaces construction, definitions dictate reality, and the past conquers the future, all together insuring a final destination upon the stability of a museum wall.

Renaissance Aesthetic or Reactionary Art?

The Stoddard Temple is a brazen denial of our entire past, an insolent "No" flung in the face of history.—Ellsworth Toohey

Howard Roark built a temple of the human spirit. (...) I do not condemn Ellsworth Toohey. I condemn Howard Roark.—
Dominique Francon.

For Torres and Kamhi, the declining standards of much modern art are emblematic of the aesthetic and classification "chaos," both of which must be ordered in the restoration of a past tradition of artistic purity expressing our deepest values and most precise definitions. While many works of modern art certainly express a nihilistic and entropic trajectory, it is not because art has been suborned to beauty or material function. Rather, this pattern is the result of art being divorced from beauty, sublimity, and material function.

Naturally, true art is secured away in the sacred orders of museums and high culture, far from the chaotic spectacle of mass media and popular culture. The art world has surrendered the material and functional world of popular culture to architecture, fashion, television, photography, advertising, and movies, all of which are lower forms of activity, not belonging to the realm of art, at least according to Torres and Kamhi. If their explication of Rand's theory were taken to its logical conclusion, then none of these activities could have any aesthetic value, precisely because they are not art, and Rand's philosophy of aesthetics applies only to art—the visual arts of painting and sculpture, and the performing arts of dance, music, and acting, and the art of literature (of which drama and film are derivatives). Torres and Kamhi believe that Rand's theory of "aesthetics" will provide the foundation for a renaissance in art and craft.

This belief is deeply flawed. In essentials, *The Romantic Manifesto* essentially presented a *psychology of art*, which Torres and Kamhi mistakenly defend as a *philosophy of aesthetics*. The artistic insights may inspire a few scholars and artists, but it is not likely to inspire any renaissance in aesthetics, precisely because it is *anti-aesthetic* in the philosophical sense. When beauty, sublimity, and function are divorced from aesthetics, very little is left, other than contemplation of the moral ideals of pedantic heroes or the pulp kitsch of the neighbors next door.

If there is to be an aesthetic renaissance, it may in-part be inspired by *The Fountainhead*, precisely because the novel expressed a postindustrial vision of beauty and sublimity united through the fractal architecture of Roark's buildings. For Torres and Kamhi, any radical integrations of chaos theory and aesthetics must be summarily dismissed, with the superficial declaration that such aesthetic ideas flout the requirements of cognition, are the antithesis of art, and "constitute a lamentable degradation of culture" (2000b, 33). If Torres and Kamhi understood the insights of Rand-the-artist in *The Fountainhead*, then they would realize that she anticipated many of the insights of chaos theory. The reality is that chaos theory is inspiring revolutions across the intellectual spectrum, from philosophy of science to media studies to architectural theory and design. Like the many academics wedded to a timelessly symmetrical and stable order, Torres and Kamhi must resist and denounce any signs of an actual *aesthetic* revolution.

If there exists one building that might have been designed by Howard Roark, then it is Frank Gehry's design for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. Created as the centerpiece in the utopian revitalization of a decaying industrial area, the museum has inspired an economic and cultural renaissance in the city. The museum attracts visitors from around the world, all coming to see the spectacular structure which clearly suggests the emergence of a radical postindustrial aesthetic. Since no brief description will suffice to illustrate the aesthetic issues at stake, it is necessary quote the lengthy description from my forthcoming book:

Emerging from the former industrial wasteland is a shimmering postindustrial model, an undulating titanium building, with multiple curvilinear sections, of many sizes and dimensions, flowing through space-time in a chaotic rhythm, a turbulent harmony. Gehry integrated the pre-existing historical and industrial context through a combination of traditional Spanish limestone, industrial glass, and postmodern titanium. A mere 1/3

millimeter thick, the titanium surface is pillowy; thus the titanium sheets do not lie perfectly flat and a strong wind can make the surface of the museum appear to ripple or flutter. The visual effect is profound, suggesting an organic nature to the exterior texture, especially on the riverfront side, where the museum sits right next to the surface of the water and the light plays off both the water and the titanium.

In a futurist sense, the Guggenheim is a clear move beyond the linear finality and rigidity of most modernist architecture, suggesting an embrace of the postmodern future that is emerging around us in such a fragmented way. In a cubist sense, the turbulent harmony of the museum represents the capture of motion from multiple perspectives. (...) In an industrial sense, the turbulent forms resemble a pile of curvilinear steel boxes, haphazardly tossed on the ground next to a river. In an evolutionary sense, the forms suggest that mutant bacterial crystals are emerging from the death of toxic waste. In an organic sense, the forms resemble a complex flower, its petals unfolding upward in chaotic patterns, while simultaneously falling away toward the Earth from which it emerged. In a relativist sense, the forms express the unending warps and curves of Einstein's space-time. In a symbolic sense, one long section resembles the prow of a ship, perhaps a simulacra harking back to the shipbuilding past of Bilbao. Extending from beneath the long leaf-like or prow-like form is a much longer section that wraps underneath a bridge, only to evolve into an asymmetrical and warped tower on the other side. Whether as blocks or crystals or petals, the forms exhibit the paradox of irregular regularity, or self-similarity, at many different scales and from many different perspectives. The fractal forms reveal surprising variation and unpredictable patterns in the theme of the structure. The overall formal effect is quite complex, at once chaotic and turbulent, yet flowing and organic. The Guggenheim is an architectural

vortex for experiencing art, where the overall emergent structure suggests finality and causality without a final cause. (...)

Within this formal external turbulence, a functional interior atrium explodes upward from the river level, containing twisted limestone obelisks, curvilinear walls of glass, warped stair towers, and slanting plaster walls (housing the various mechanical needs of the structure). The balconies provide viewers with a staggering visual perspective, apparently reminiscent of past utopian models.

Frank Gehry's Guggenheim is perhaps the most Roarkian building since Fallingwater, and, like Roark and Wright's buildings, it too suggests a new aesthetic for a new age.

It would be natural to think that fans of *The Fountainhead* would embrace the building, seeing the obvious philosophical similarities constructed in real life, right before their eyes. No so for the world's foremost exponents of Rand's "aesthetic" philosophy—Torres and Kamhi denounced the Guggenheim in *What Art Is*. Here is their reasoning:

As described by Michael Kimmelman, for example: "The building seems a conglomeration of vast, diverse, occasionally disorienting spaces, punctuated by paintings and sculptures. It never altogether cedes the stage and sometimes hogs the spotlight. But then, as a work of architectural sculpture, it is more compelling than much of the art inside." Another critic similarly describes the building as "resembling a huge sculpture from afar." We would argue, however, that Gehry's building is neither sculpture (i.e., art) nor successful architecture, since his attempt to make a bold formal statement results in structural incoherence—as evidenced by the "disorienting spaces" cited by Kimmelman, and by the fact that the building subverts its primary function by detracting from the works exhibited (2000a, 198-9)

This line of reasoning perfectly illustrates the underlying static order embraced by Torres and Kamhi, where every creative activity must fit with its proper classification and express the traditional forms. Otherwise, disorienting "chaos" will prevail. Further, since the building is superior to the works of art it contains, it is violating its function. Apparently, all museum architecture must be dumbed down to the level of the art that its curators decide to include. It seems Rand had it backwards in *The Fountainhead*, for sculptor Stephen Mallory should have been the hero, with Roark's role being to design temples which merely function to house Mallory's sculpture.

Following the reasoning of Torres and Kamhi, the Guggenheim in New York should have never been built, precisely because Wright's design "resembled a sculpture from afar" and his "bold formal statement" made the building aesthetically superior to the art it housed. Apparently, Torres and Kamhi would not disagree, for they criticized the external form of Wright's Guggenheim for being "incongruous amidst the urbane uniformity of Fifth Avenue rectilinear apartment buildings" which resulted in "absurd and disastrous consequences" for the architectural site (423, 195). Further, they criticized the famed spiral walkway for not permitting visitors to "view art in an undistracted state of physical equilibrium" (422).

Lurking beneath all of Torres and Kamhi's defenses, definitions, classifications, and fundamental values is a neoclassical longing to preserve a past order, one of hierarchy, stability, equilibrium, and timeless forms, much like those mentioned above regarding conservative beauty. When the world's foremost exponents of Randian art sound much like the aesthetic inquisitors at Roark's Stoddard Temple trial, then something is seriously misguided about the aesthetic philosophy they claim to represent.

Considering the weighty endorsements on the book's back cover, *What Art Is* seems destined to become the world's foremost explication of Randian "aesthetics." If so, then there will be another Grand Canyon to

embrace—the blind worship of a *past* order in an aesthetic war against the chaotic *future*.

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