

A Neglected Source for Rand's Aesthetics

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Although it has been available in audiocassette form for quite some time,¹ "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age" has never appeared in print form in its entirety. Substantial portions of the essay were published in November of 1962 in *The Objectivist Newsletter* (Rand 1962–65) and reprinted with some minor alterations in *The Romantic Manifesto* (Rand [1969] 1975).

This edited version, labeled (Rand 1962b, 3) as *excerpts* from Rand's 1961 address to the Cultural Arts Festival at the University of Michigan, was in turn closely related to her 1960 and 1962 radio talks.² In fact, the shorter version is lifted nearly word for word from the much longer taped lecture that is very likely a full-bodied replica of the 1961 version.³

While the print version runs to only 2,500 words or so, the full-length taped version totals nearly 7,800 words, and it contains *much* more than comments on "popular culture" and the Romanticism-Naturalism debate.⁴ The taped lecture discusses Rand's definition of "art" and the function of concepts, the nature of sense of life, and the relation of reason to aesthetics, and is an eloquent, powerful example of Rand's writing at its best.⁵

Truly, the manuscript of this taped lecture is the "Ur-document" for the Objectivist aesthetics. Comprehensive and stirring in nature, it should have been the lead essay of *The Romantic Manifesto*, rather than being tucked away in abbreviated form in the middle. Its general obscurity is yet another consequence of the Objectivist movement's reprehensible tendency toward an oral tradition. As a result, it continues to be difficult for scholars to trace the genesis and

development of Rand's thought and for people in general to obtain a clear, complete picture of how Rand arrived at her challenging ideas.⁶

Someday, a full-length printed version of "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age" may take its rightful place among Rand's other published works in aesthetics.⁷ In the meantime, the following review is offered as a first step toward the excavation of this remarkable work.

The General Layout and Content of the Essay

For the purpose of this review, I have divided Rand's essay into nine parts to which I have given somewhat arbitrary names based on their main discernible contents. Following are some brief comments about each section:

1. *Introductory section.* Rand begins her essay by asking the reader to imagine what life would be like in an isolated, stagnant village, in which one has only one's own inarticulate longings for something better to hang on to, and in which one's only contact with the outside world is a monthly trip to the movie theater. Rand then asks the reader to consider what would be the difference in the effect on one's motivation if the movie showed life in New York City versus life in environments like one's own. She focuses the issue with this pointed question:

What will either picture do to you? What will it do to your view of life, to your values, to your soul, to your future? If you understand the difference that these two alternatives would make to you, you understand the nature and the meaning of art in human existence.

Rand cautions the listener not to "make the mistake of concluding that the purpose of art is education or enlightenment or propaganda or a kind of narrow, didactic message. Art is the expression of man's deepest, most fundamental, most philosophical values. . . . Art is the concretization of metaphysics." She expands upon these points in her 1965 essay "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art" and in the

following sections of her lecture.

2. *Philosophy, Art, and Sense of Life.* This section contains, in rather compressed form, the material discussed by Rand in her 1966 essays "Philosophy and Sense of Life" and "Art and Sense of Life" (Rand 1966a; 1966b). She begins by giving her definition of metaphysics: "that branch of philosophy which studies the nature of reality, the basic nature of existence and of man." All men have a philosophy of life, even though most of them don't hold it as a conscious conviction and don't know the first thing about metaphysics. Most men, in other words, form their philosophies of life "subconsciously, by means of an emotional generalization, by an identified, un verbalized estimate of the value and meaning of their own existence."

Some people are motivated mainly by enjoyment or gain and tend to seek novelty, risks, adventure, and independence, while others are motivated to avoid pain or loss and thus prefer safety, routine, and the beaten path. But in each case, Rand says:

Under any superficial reason they may give for their choices, their basic reason is a philosophical estimate of man's position in the universe which they have formed subconsciously. The first kind have concluded that life is good, that success, happiness, the achievement of his values are possible to man. The second have concluded that life is evil, that man is doomed to fail, that existence by its very nature is set against him, and that disaster is his metaphysical fate.

Even if neither of these two types of people has ever consciously thought what human life is all about or how to justify their views, they have emotionally integrated their experiences into a core attitude toward life. This attitude is the basis of their immediate reaction to new experiences. One kind of person will be eager and enthusiastic, while the other will be fearful.

At this point, Rand points out the basic questions of philosophy, our subconscious answers to which form our senses of life. They are essentially the same questions found in "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art" (Rand [1969] 1975, 19).

Is the essential nature of existence benevolent to man, or malevolent? Is man, by his essential nature, good or evil? Is the universe intelligible to man, or unintelligible and unknowable? Can man be happy on earth, or is he doomed to despair and frustration? Does man have the power of choice, the power to direct the course of his own life, to choose his values, set his goals and achieve them, or is he the helpless plaything of forces beyond his control, which determine his fate?

These questions and the need for some answer to them are inescapable, Rand says. Whether we realize it or not, the answers we form to these questions are what direct us in our actions, choices, preferences, tastes, and values. We must have a philosophy of life, "a basic, comprehensive view of [ourselves] and of [our] relationship to existence."

Next comes a somewhat odd sentence. Rand says that man's "only choice is whether he forms his philosophy by a process of thought or by accidental, emotional associations—whether he holds his philosophy consciously or subconsciously—whether his philosophy is true or false." By its parallel structure, it seems to suggest that any philosophy arrived at subconsciously or by accidental, emotional association will be false, and that any philosophy formed by conscious thought will be true. Surely this cannot be the case. Since truth and falsity are attributes of the relationship between one's ideas and reality, they are independent of the method used to arrive at those ideas. One may or may not be *justified* in holding those ideas, but that is a separate issue from their truth or falsity.

Everyone's first philosophy of life is formed subverbally and subconsciously. Only a few people figure out how to convert it into a conscious philosophy and to examine and correct it if necessary. Most people, however, hold their philosophy of life not as a reasoned philosophical conviction, but in the form of an emotion. Rand invites the listener to identify this "metaphysical emotion" by introspecting:

Observe that under any specific, particular, momentary emotion you may experience, there is a deeper emotional undertone, a constant which seldom varies, a leitmotif so deeply rooted in your consciousness that you take it for granted and are seldom able to identify it. . . . That is your basic estimate of yourself and of existence. That is your sense of life.

One's sense of life, Rand says, is "the metaphysics of the subconscious." One may have a tragic or benevolent or heroic or other kind of sense of life, based on one's subconscious estimate of oneself and reality. Everyone has a sense of life, even if they have formed a conscious philosophy. There may be conflicts between their conscious ideas and their senses of life, if one is rational and the other is not; or their sense of life and philosophy may be "integrated, unified into perfect harmony." Or, a person may not have anything beyond his sense of life for guidance. But in any case, the sense of life is the aspect of each person's consciousness "that is the special domain, the realm, the concern, and the source of art."

For most people, just as their senses of life may be the only form in which most people hold a philosophy of life, "art is [their] only form of philosophical experience and [their] only source of philosophical knowledge." Now comes an early version of Rand's well-known definition: "*Art is a re-creation of reality according to the artist's values.*" She clarifies: Art is not "a creation out of a void, but a re-creation, a selective rearrangement of the elements of reality, guided by an artist's view of existence." The artist's view of existence determines both the "what" or subject of his artwork and the "how" or style (i.e., the details of the way in which he presents the subject). Every choice of what "to include or to omit, to emphasize or to ignore" is part of the artist's view of what is metaphysically important.

The view of man as a Greek god or a deformed Oriental monstrosity are both "metaphysical estimates of man . . . projections of the artist's view of man's nature." A still-life of fruit and flowers can "convey a benevolent, glowing, sunlit sense of life" or "decay, corruption, and a sense of murky doom." Whether or not an artist

includes an explicit philosophical statement in his work, he always conveys a view of existence on the sense of life level.

3. *The Psycho-Epistemology of Art*. Next, Rand discusses material found in her later essay "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art" (Rand [1969] 1975, 19–20). She asks why men need such a concrete view of existence? Why is art so deeply significant to human beings, even the earliest, primitive, prehistorical people, while animals don't produce art? The reason, Rand says, involves the nature of man's consciousness. An artwork, in contrast with a utilitarian object, is not "a means to any specific practical end, but is an end in itself." The sole purpose served by art is contemplation, which is experienced as being so pleasurable that it is "a self-sufficient, self-justifying primary." However, Rand says, "art does serve a human need, only it is not a physical, existential need; it is a need of man's consciousness."

Human beings can't survive on the automatic, perceptual level of knowledge. We need conceptual knowledge. We need to be able to "form abstractions and concepts out of [our] perceptual material, . . . to reason, . . . to think," which is not automatic or guaranteed to be free from error. In order to discover the right values and view of existence to guide one's actions, one must choose to think and to acquire knowledge. So much conceptual knowledge is needed in order to form a complete, worked-out metaphysics, that no one can retain it in his conscious mind all at once. Yet, we need that complete view and the awareness of that view in order to guide our actions. Our emotions give us the complete view in sense of life form, and art lets us be aware of that view, directly and immediately "in the form of specific, physical concretes." In a formula she later repeats in "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art," Rand says: "In effect, art brings man's concepts to the perceptual level and allows him to grasp them directly, as if they were percepts."

Rand concretizes this point with the example of the character of Cinderella:

It would take hours to list, to describe, and to define all the complex issues and attitudes of a young person's progression through poverty, obscurity, suffering, injustice, to an ultimate

triumph; and it would take much longer to isolate them from the irrelevant, accidental events in the lives of such struggling young persons as you might have observed. It is the selective product of that enormous sum of observations and abstractions that the character of Cinderella embodies, and when people refer to a girl as a "Cinderella," it is the product of that enormous sum that they convey by means of a single image.

Following this is a paragraph about Howard Roark and how holding the essence of his character in mind helped some of Rand's readers in dealing with their moral problems. This paragraph appears nearly word-for-word in "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art" (Rand [1969] 1975, 22).

Art's basic function, Rand says, "is to integrate, to concretize, and to project man's abstract metaphysical evaluation of himself and of existence. . . . [It] concretizes the values man is to seek, projects the goal he is to pursue, and holds before him the vision of the life he is to achieve. Or, if such is the artist's premise, [art projects] that values are futile, that man is helpless, that despair and resignation are his only proper states." Whether a viewer is able to identify it consciously or not, every work of art broadcasts the message, in effect, that "[t]his is the nature of existence, this is what you are to expect, these are the things you are to hold as of significance, of importance, of value to your life."

4. *Emotions and Objectivity in Esthetics*: Here, Rand anticipates much of the discussion in "Art and Sense of Life" regarding response to and evaluation of art. One's sense of life determines one's response to a work of art. More quickly than one can verbally articulate the nature of an artwork, one's emotional response to it sums up its meaning. One accepts or rejects that meaning, Rand says, "according to whether it does or does not represent [one's] own metaphysical estimate." A rational viewer will aesthetically respond to a godlike representation of man with joy, acceptance, and affirmation, while an irrational viewer will experience fear, resentment, or rejection. A rational viewer will respond to a representation of man

as a deformed monstrosity with disgust, resentment, and rejection, while an irrational viewer will feel relief, reassurance, “a suspension of his chronic fear and guilt, a justification of his hatred for existence.”

In contrast to the neo-mystics, who view our aesthetic emotions as some kind of special sense or irreducible primary, Rand says that they are the complex result and expression of a person’s sense of life. In any case, like one’s other emotions, aesthetic emotions are not “tools of cognition.” Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy, and one cannot use one’s emotions as a criterion of judgment or even a basis for intelligible discussion, if one wants to be more than a mere “soothsayer.” As Rand says: “A sense of life is not a sufficient professional equipment for an esthetician.”

The aesthetician must know much more about art than just his emotional response to it. First, he has to identify the “the objective meaning and source” of his aesthetic emotion, i.e., the subconscious philosophical premises which generate that emotion. Then, he has to convert those sense of life premises into conscious philosophical terms and “reconsider and correct” them if necessary. In this way, his philosophy of life becomes “a conscious conviction,” rather than just “a blind, unaccountable emotion.” Also, “he must learn to identify the nature of art and of all its complex elements. He must learn to grasp the abstractions of values, metaphysics, sense of life—as apart from his particular values, metaphysics, and sense of life.” (This is a very important point, and it establishes the fact that Rand grasped the principle behind the “fallacy of the frozen abstraction,” well in advance of her discussion of it in “Collectivized Ethics.”⁸) Finally, the aesthetician has to “assess an artist’s work in relation to the artist’s purpose, by a conscious rational judgment, not by a blind emotional reaction of liking or disliking.”

Even in relation to other works of equal or even greater artistic merit, some artworks will always be more meaningful to an aesthetician. Real enjoyment of art and personal meaningfulness come from “the response of one’s own sense of life to that of the artist.” But as an aesthetician, “one must be able to identify and to evaluate the work of an artist qua artist, apart from and regardless of his philo-

sophical idea—i.e., the technical, professional mastery with which an artist uses his means to achieve his ends, to project his view of life.” One may dislike an artwork’s subject, while enjoying “the skill and mastery of the artist’s style.” That is, Rand generalizes, “[o]ne may appreciate the ‘how’ of an artwork, while disapproving of the ‘what.’”

Almost no objective, professional aesthetic judgment exists today, Rand says. Even with the best of premises, it is extremely difficult, requiring “an unusual degree of introspection and philosophical training.” The neo-mystic premises of today’s main schools of philosophy treat aesthetics as “belonging to and ruled by some sort of undefinable, incommunicable, ineffable emotions, which are experienced only by some sort of special mystic elite.” As a result, “judgment, integrity, discussion, and art itself” are impossible. Rand concludes: “The unintelligible emotions and revelations of mystic oracles can be of no value or significance to anyone, except to the primordial jungle from which they stem.”

5. *Reason, Freedom, and Romanticism.* In this section, we encounter the first three paragraphs Rand includes in the print versions of her lecture (Rand [1969] 1975, 123–24). Around those paragraphs, she weaves various interesting points. She begins by noting that, except for ancient Greece, the Renaissance, and the nineteenth century, mysticism has held a monopoly on morality and art. Rand states: “It is only in these three periods that the dominant trend in art was not dedicated to the degrading and deforming of man, but to the glorification of man, of his existence, and of this earth.”

The novel, Rand says, was “the greatest artistic innovation of the nineteenth century,” the product of an upsurge of reason and capitalism, which gave men the confidence and freedom to achieve their values. Prior to the late eighteenth century, she says, the novel did not exist; earlier works are more like chronicles. Romantic novelists “lived up fully to the literary principle formulated by Aristotle, [who] said that fiction is of greater philosophical importance than history, because history presents things only as they are, while fiction presents them as they might be and ought to be.” The outstanding feature of Romantic novels is plot, which Rand says is “the dramatization of man’s free will. It is the physical form of his

spiritual sovereignty, of his power to deal with existence.”

6. *Naturalism: Man's New Enemy in Art*. The next nine paragraphs of the print version (Rand [1969] 1975, 124–26) appear in this section, along with a very helpful analysis of the metaphysical meaning of Naturalism and Romanticism, which was unfortunately omitted from publication. Despite their attempts to be merely journalistic and report on man as he was (rather than as he could be), Naturalist painters and writers necessarily projected a metaphysical view of man, the metaphysics of determinism. They viewed man as incapable of choice or purpose, values and hope and struggle as futile, and life as meaningless.

For both Romanticism and Naturalism, the meaning of a novel was not concretes or specifics, but the view of man as a certain *kind* of being and the view of life as a certain *kind* of process. The Romanticists saw man as free and purposeful and life as exciting, inspiring, and open to achievement. The Naturalists saw man as scared, petty, irrational and helpless and life as pointless and tortuous and incomprehensible.

7. *Modern Art as Anti-Man Symbolism*. In this section are the next four paragraphs of the print version (126–27), together with some fascinating material quoting and commenting on then-current magazine articles. First, Rand illustrates the modern view of man by quoting from an article by Joseph Woods Croce (*The New York Times Magazine*, 19 March 1961), in which Croce discusses the most prominent and serious playwrights of that time:

Tennessee Williams, Henri, Beckett, Genet, and Ionesco share with each other an attitude which appears to be both a despair of human nature itself and a moral nihilism. Henri is bitterly cynical in a fashion which relates him more clearly than any of the others to a tradition of worldliness. The others are not so much worldly as out-of-this-worldly. To them, man is not merely egotistical, treacherous, and cruel; he is also so absurd that he cannot be rationally presented and is to be truly revealed only as a figure in a surrealist nightmare. . . . [Williams created] the impression that to be

human is, in his view, necessarily to be sick, in one way or another. His characters seem to be involved in what one is inclined to call not a tragic predicament, but an unsavory mess.

Then Rand quotes the *Harvard Crimson* (27 March 1961):

“People claim that the new forces in drama today are concerned with nihilism, anti-theater, anti-people, and anti-God,” Edward Albee, author of the prize-winning off-Broadway play *Zoo Story*, declared last night. “Well, so they are. Be glad of it.” In a speech which concluded the four-day Quincy House Art Festival, Albee declared that the new playwrights were now concerned with the absurdity of man in the universe. “It’s a good sign, after a very long hiatus, that they’re concerned with fundamentals,” he said. “It’s a very positive movement.”

Rand concludes by pointing out the self-refuting nature of Albee’s comments. She asks the listener to “remember that absurdity is an evaluative term. If man is metaphysically absurd, so are all his works, actions, and evaluations. If so, then who is it that evaluates him as absurd, and by what standard? Draw your own conclusion.”

8. *The Psychological Roots of Modern Art*. Appearing in this section are the next three paragraphs of the print version (Rand [1969] 1975, 127–28), which deal with the psychological motives of those who sneer at commercial success. Rand also provides some fascinating insight into the psychological motives, cultural goals, and social purposes of those who promote absurdity. In a prophetic passage quoted from *The Fountainhead* (1943), Rand had the arch-villain of the novel, Ellsworth Toohey, explain to a “pretentious mediocrity” the manner in which he was going to hype him up into prominence as a playwright:

“Suppose I didn’t like Ibsen.”

“Ibsen is good,” said Ike.

"Sure he's good, but suppose I didn't like him. Suppose I wanted to stop people from seeing his plays. It would do me no good whatever to tell them so. But if I sold them the idea that you are just as great as Ibsen, pretty soon they wouldn't be able to tell the difference."

"Jesus! Can you?"

"It's only an example, Ike."

"But it would be wonderful!"

"Yes, it would be wonderful. And then it wouldn't matter what they went to see at all. Then nothing would matter, neither the writers, nor those for whom they wrote."

"How's that, Ellsworth?"

"Look, Ike, there's no room in the theater for both Ibsen and you. You do understand that, don't you?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

"Well, you do want me to make room for you, don't you?"

"All of this useless discussion has been covered before and much better," said Gus Webb. "Who had been nothing, shall be all."

This, Rand says, illustrates both the current trend in literature and the fact that "abstract principles do work in reality." She has nothing favorable to say about modern painting, sculpture, or music either, regarding modern art in general as "the ultimate leer of mysticism and the destruction of man, of reason, and of reality." She indignantly notes that one of the schools of modern art is even so brazen as to refer to itself as "non-objective."

9. *The Disaster of Modern Art, Its Cause and Cure*. In this concluding section, Rand says that the only place one can currently find a vestige of the Romantic spirit of joyousness, benevolence, confidence, beauty, and excitement is in popular entertainment. "In literature, it is the detective novel. In painting, it is the commercial art of advertisements, calendars, or magazine illustrations. In music, it is operettas, musical comedies, and occasionally popular tunes," Rand says. But why is optimism and beauty given over to superficial treatment?

Rand allows Existentialist philosopher William Barrett to provide the explanation, by way of an extended quote from his book *Irrational Man*:

The classical tradition in literature, deriving from Aristotle's *Poetics*, tells us that a drama and consequently any other literary work must have a beginning, middle, and end. The author subordinates himself to the requirements of logic, necessity, probability. His structure must be an intelligible whole, in which each part develops logically out of what went before. However, it is important to note that this canon of intelligible literary structure, beginning, middle, and end, with a well-defined climax, arose in a culture in which the universe, too, was believed to be an ordered structure, a rational and intelligible whole. What happens if we try to apply this classical Aristotelian canon to a modern work like Joyce's *Ulysses*, 734 pages of power and dullness, beauty and sordidness, comedy and pathos, where the movement is always horizontal, never ascending toward any crisis, and where we detect not the shadow of anything like a climax, in the traditional sense of that term? It is, in fact, the banal, gritty thing that we live that Joyce gives us, in comparison with which most other fiction is, indeed, fiction. This world is dense, opaque, unintelligible. That is the datum from which the modern artist always starts. . . . The Oriental song baffles the ear of the Westerner. It appears unintelligible. The reason is that the Westerner demands—or, let us say, used to demand—an intelligibility that the Easterner does not. If the Westerner finds the Oriental music meaningless, the Oriental might very well reply that this is the meaninglessness of nature itself, which goes on meaninglessly, without beginning, middle, or end. The Oriental has accepted his existence within a universe that would appear to be meaningless to the rational Western mind and has lived with this meaninglessness. Hence, the artistic form that seems natural to the Oriental is one that is just as formless,

as irrational as life itself. That the Western artist now finds his own inherited classical form unconvincing and, indeed, almost intolerable, is because of a profound change in his total attitude toward the world.

In other words, Rand says, modern philosophy has reduced art, Western civilization, and mankind to the intolerance of rationality and to the aspiration toward nothing higher than the existence of an inanimate object. Offering a scornfully worded "aha" experience to the advocates of aesthetic subjectivism and modern art, Rand says: "This, ladies and gentlemen, is the philosophical voice behind your unaccountable esthetic emotions. . . . This is the meaning of those higher secrets, ineffable visions, and mysterious depths that cannot be expressed in words. This is the explanation of your inexplicable longings."

At this point occur the final two paragraphs, which Rand retains for the printed version. Rand then asks the reader to consider the "terrifying spectacle" of our culture, which has discovered and developed awesome powers of nuclear energy, weapons of mass destruction, and space travel, but has no more inspiring an image of the being who guides and controls them than that of "the deformed figure of a brainless dwarf scurrying for cover under a garbage can."

Finally, it becomes clear that the 1961 additions to her original radio lecture were inspired both by further readings and by her 1961 essay "For the New Intellectual." In fact, the only occurrence of the word "vacuum," which served as the main descriptor in the title of her lecture, was in the following passage quoted from "For the New Intellectual":

It is into the midst of this dismal gray vacuum that the New Intellectuals must step—and must challenge the worshippers of doom, resignation and death, with an attitude best expressed by a paraphrase of an ancient salute: "We who are *not* about to die."

Who are to be the New Intellectuals? Any man or woman

who is willing to think. All those who know that man's life must be guided by reason, those who value their own life and are not willing to surrender it to the cult of despair in the modern jungle of cynical impotence, just as they are not willing to surrender the world to the Dark Ages and the rule of the brutes. (Rand 1961, 50)

Rand continues:

In the field of esthetics, those of you who are sick of the neo-savages of non-objective art should rebel against their dogma that the garbage can is the symbol of man's soul. Take them at their word. Grant them the right to reveal their souls in the appropriate form they have chosen, but do not grant them the right to speak for your soul, nor for the soul of man, nor for his sense of life. And do not grant them the title of "art." In the face of their maudlin whining that they have given up, flaunt the fact that you have not. To the motto "we who are not about to die," add: "We who are not impotent, we who are not hopeless, we who are not depraved, we whose lives are not banal nor gritty nor irrational."

The neo-mystics' philosophy has caused our cultural disaster, and "only philosophy . . . can lead us out," says Rand. What is needed is "the rebirth of a philosophy of reason—that is, a reassertion of man's self-esteem, with its three consequences: a rational morality, a rational esthetics, and a Romantic renaissance in art." Thus ends another of Rand's uncompromising shots across the bow of Western culture, another emphatic postscript to *Atlas Shrugged*.

Conclusion

This lecture is not an obscure object of curiosity. It is the wellspring of Rand's *Romantic Manifesto*. Along with "The Objectivist Ethics," it is stark, undeniable evidence of a major spurt of intellec-

tual integration and creativity right at the beginning of Rand's non-fiction writing career. Some of the best of this lecture was saved for the printed version as well as for later essays, including "The Psycho-Epistemology of Art," "Philosophy and Sense of Life," and "Art and Sense of Life." But only some of it. The entire lecture deserves to take its place alongside the other published works of Rand's canonical writings.

Notes

1. Currently marketed by the Ayn Rand Book Store (formerly Second Renaissance Books) at <<http://www.aynrandbookstore.com>>, as Tape AR25C, it is listed in the catalog as "Our Esthetic Vacuum." The tape itself, however, is labeled "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age." A similar confusion appears to exist in references to versions of this talk delivered on successive days in April of 1962. See note 3 below.

2. Apparently sometime early in 1960, as noted in a letter to John Hospers dated 17 April of that year, Rand (1995, 503) made a series of four radio broadcasts, possibly on Columbia University Station WKCR. She referred to having earlier kept a promise by sending Hospers copies of the scripts of those talks. In a subsequent letter to Hospers, dated 29 August 1960, she indicated that the third talk was entitled "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age" (507). She urged him to read it when he had time, for it "presents (also much too briefly) the essence of my theory of art, and will serve as my answer, if we disagree." It is unlikely that this talk occurred much later than 1 April 1960, and there are no known extant copies of this radio script, which is the earliest known version of her esthetic vacuum talk.

A second and longer series of radio shows was broadcast on WKCR in early 1962. The overall format of the twelve-week series of radio programs was described in the "Objectivist Calendar" (Rand 1962c) as follows: "On alternate weeks, Miss Rand will give one of the lectures she has delivered at various universities. On the other six programs, Professor John Hospers of the Philosophy Department of Brooklyn College will discuss Objectivism and the lecture of the preceding week, with Ayn Rand, Nathaniel Branden and Barbara Branden." Rand's esthetic vacuum talk was the ninth program of the series and was broadcast on 26 April 1962 with the title "Our Esthetic Vacuum." What was surely the same talk was delivered the previous day at Boston University and listed as "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age" (Rand 1962d). Both talks were based, probably with little or no revision, upon her 1961 address to the Cultural Arts Festival at the University of Michigan.

3. In a previous essay (Bissell, 2001), it was erroneously stated that the taped lecture was probably a replica of Rand's 1960 radio address. This conjecture is rendered invalid by the presence of several 1961 citations in the lecture, including a quotation from Rand's essay "For the New Intellectual." There is some indication that the tape may have been recorded at a considerably later time, because Second Renaissance Books (now the Ayn Rand Bookstore) has labeled it with a 1968 copyright date. However, the plethora of references from 1961 sources and none

from a later date, and the absence of audience noise makes it more likely that the tape is a recording of Rand's 26 April 1962 program on Columbia University station WKCR, listed as "Our Esthetic Vacuum" (Rand 1962c). Also see note 6 below.

4. As it is described in Kamhi and Torres 2000, 35 n. 10 and Torres and Kamhi 2000, 2. See also Bissell 2001, 307–8.

5. The Ayn Rand Bookstore also markets a companion tape (AR62C) labeled and referred to in their catalog as "The Esthetic Vacuum of Our Age, Q&A," but referred to on the tape as "Our Esthetic Vacuum." All the evidence suggests that it is a tape of the radio broadcast from 3 May 1962, referred to in the "Objectivist Calendar" (Rand 1962c) as "Discussion by Prof. [John] Hospers, Ayn Rand and Barbara Branden." It is worth noting that, although the radio programs were scheduled to run an hour in length (Tape AR25C, being 60 minutes in length, conforms to that plan), the Q&A tape is curiously shorter by a significant amount, being only 40 minutes long. Although Hospers' name is not listed on the tape's container or label, or mentioned on the tape itself, his voice is unmistakable, and he asks a number of questions to which Rand responds. Barbara Branden's voice, however, is nowhere in evidence on the tape. The most plausible motive for the deletion of fully one-third of the Q&A broadcast would seem to be the consignment of Hospers and Branden, as punishment for their offenses against Rand, respectively, to anonymity (unnamed moderator status) and oblivion—or, in Objectivist terms, to non-Identity and non-Existence. A similar practice is employed in the edited tapes of Rand's "Lectures on Fiction-Writing": any time that Barbara Branden or Nathaniel Branden asks a question or reads an excerpt from a book, their voices are replaced by a voice-over speaker.

6. A related syndrome is the reprehensible practice of certain editors of Rand's previously unpublished materials who have selectively omitted and/or rewritten her original words (see, for example, *The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, by Ayn Rand, in which editor Tore Boeckmann omits a great deal of material that later appeared in *The Objectivist Newsletter*, *The Objectivist*, and *The Romantic Manifesto*). The result is that scholars and new readers alike are deprived of the opportunity of seeing Rand's earliest organized thoughts on the subject of aesthetics. An expensive twenty-one-tape set of the 1958 fiction lectures (edited down to 23 hours from about 48 hours of "raw tapes") is still available for purchase through the Ayn Rand Bookstore. See LaValle 2000, 15; Sciabarra 1998a; 1998b. Scholars seeking a more comprehensive view of the development of Rand's aesthetics must continue to make use of the oral tradition—even if it too is edited.

7. I made a transcription of this tape in early 2000 and offered it to Second Renaissance Books for publication. To date, despite two reiterations of this offer, no response has been received.

8. See Rand 1964, 81. In addition, see Bissell 1973.

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