

Symposium on "Rand, Rush, and Rock"

Replies to Chris Matthew Sciabarra's Fall 2002 article

**Ayn Rand and The Music of
Rush: Rhapsodic Reflections**

Bill Martin

and the mercury is rising
barometer starts to fall
you know it gets to us all
the pain that is learning
and the rain that is burning
feel red
still—go ahead
you see black and white—and I see red
(not blue)

— Red Lenses, *Grace Under Pressure*

This essay could have been called "Ayn Rand? Don't get me started!" But then I did get started and it seemed I would never stop.

Rush is a group that justifiably has many loyal fans. The group deserves respect not only for their instrumental and compositional skills, but also because they have managed over more than three decades to play the music that they want to play, without concessions to either media-conglomerate pressures or passing musical fads. Indeed, Rush is practically a model of Howard Roark-like integrity!

I have written about Rush before, in two books, one on the progressive-rock trend of the late 1960s and the 1970s, titled *Listening to the Future* (Martin 1998) and the other, titled *Avant Rock* (Martin 2002), on creative trends in rock music from the later Beatles to more recent groups and figures such as Björk, Jim O'Rourke, Stereolab, Radiohead, etc. Before these two books, I also wrote a book devoted to the music of Yes (Martin 1996), which topic also bears, of course,

on a discussion of Rush's music and outlook. Both temporally and aesthetically, so to speak, I came to Rush through progressive rock. Perhaps as a result, and I realize that this is a generational thing, although I also count myself as an admirer of the group, I tend to consider Rush as "secondary." The progressive-rock era ran roughly from 1968–1978, from King Crimson's *In the Court of the Crimson King* to Yes's *Going for the One* (1977)—or, it might be said, to *Never Mind the Bollocks* (Sex Pistols, 1977). When I think of the most creative and virtuosic of the groups during that era, I am less likely to think of Rush. This is a very tendentious thing to say, but in some sense I have a similar view of Ayn Rand, that she is a secondary figure—not because I disagree with her arguments for the most part, which I do—but because I cannot think of her as a "major figure" in the philosophical canon.

Before aficionados of either Rush or Rand (or both) get too riled, however, allow me to qualify these last statements somewhat. There are many artists and writers who may not be in the absolute forefront of creativity or significance and yet who have made important contributions and are worthy of attention. Furthermore, one quality that is shared by Rush and Rand is that each is *sui generis*, each created a field that is uniquely their own. Even though one can trace the elements that make up their respective approaches, still, there is no one else who is really like them. With Rand, there is the additional aspect of being a "phenomenon," and therefore someone not to be ignored. Whenever I've done interviews about my work on progressive rock, or even just in casual conversation, it is almost inevitable that the question will arise, "What about Rush?" Similarly, it is still the case that undergraduates will ask about Ayn Rand. I hear this from my colleagues as well, and then they are surprised at the fact that I've spent some time trying to figure out Rand, her scene, and her appeal.

One of my first experiences with Ayn Rand was when, as a teenager in the early 1970s, I woke up to "The Objectivism Hour" (I believe it was called) on the radio (which I had left on the night before). This was on one of the FM "underground" stations: WBUS—the "magic bus"—in Miami, Florida. The station would often play

Pink Floyd, Traffic, King Crimson, Caravan (for instance, I first heard "Nine Feet Underground," from their superb album, *In the Land of Grey and Pink*, on WBUS), etc., along with "public service announcements" from then-Yippie leaders Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin (who were based at that time in Coconut Grove). Such announcements provided helpful bits of advice such as "it's not a good idea to go surfing in a hurricane" and "elections are a sham—don't vote!" (Words to live by, and I still accept both to this day.) Rand's hopeful message that day was that people who have decided to end their lives (commit suicide) should not be interfered with by the state. Not exactly what I needed to hear at that stage of my life, but still, my curiosity was piqued, as much by Rand's stern and morally upright tone as by the content of the message.

I had already developed an interest in philosophy, inspired, as I have been in most things in my life, by the intertwined influences of a Christian upbringing and the radical political and cultural currents of the late 1960s. My main experience of bookstores at that point was just the Waldenbooks at the mall, and of course the philosophy section there was not very extensive. Among the more attractive covers on display were those of Ayn Rand's books, so I bought a couple. Strangely, I can remember being attracted to some of what Rand said, and, again, perhaps even more to her forthright tone, and yet I didn't go very far with her. Most likely this had to do with certain commitments I still associated with Judaism and Christianity, even as I was breaking with certain metaphysical aspects of them (simply put, I increasingly found that I couldn't accept the God of classical theology). These commitments were, again, increasingly combined with the radical currents that some have grouped together under the heading of "'68 Thought."

Later, Kant came to play a large role in my intellectual and political life, and of course Kant is the figure whom Rand vilifies most of all. Like Kant, but like Aristotle for that matter, I could not conceive of an individualism that is not co-implicated in mutuality and a fabric of basic social obligations. This is what might be called "strong autonomy" in Kant, something that exists at the intersection of ethical regard for the Other and the intersubjective basis of

epistemology. By contrast, I would say that Rand's notion of individualism is rather weak, because it is founded upon unsustainable notions such as not owing anyone else a single moment of "my" time. In *Listening to the Future*, I address this question, albeit briefly and schematically (and perhaps a bit flippantly—e.g., when I referred to Rand's ferocious cigarette habit, specifically the way that Rand would respond to questions about the rationality of smoking by lighting up another one), in terms of the question of children. I think a good deal of social theory can be done around this question—where children come from, how they are made (and the gender relations in any given society), and what obligations people have to make the world hospitable for them and to create opportunities for them.

In his exceedingly generous treatment of my brief look at Rand's philosophy in relation to Rush, Chris Matthew Sciabarra cites the relevant passage from *Listening*, where I note that there is no room for children in her novels (at least the later, big ones), "there is no place for anyone who is not a fully-formed adult . . . People must come from nowhere, so that they will not in any way be in debt to other persons" (Martin 1998, 270–71; cited in Sciabarra 2002, 174). In *Atlas Shrugged*, then, we have the formation of an ideal society, the result of "the mind" having gone "on strike," out of a relative handful of individuals, all adults. To my mind, what this primarily demonstrates is that the problems of the Robinson Crusoe scenario—much beloved in neoclassical economics and sufficiently demolished by Marx—are not overcome by having a gaggle of Crusoes. Were John Galt and Howard Roark not children at one time, in a society with gender relations, parent-child relations, a certain level of productive technique, class relations and divisions of labor, to say nothing of a standard of living that is based in part upon colonial and imperial domination of Third World countries? Did Galt and Roark just show up one day, fully-formed, one a philosopher and the other an architect?

The fact is, these fellows didn't even show up fully formed from the head of Ayn Rand, even inasmuch as they are characters in novels, and not, for instance, real, "sensuous" (to use a term of which Marx was especially fond in his earlier writings) human beings who

go to school to study architecture or philosophy with teachers, and for whom the matter of keeping the digits limber enough to perhaps someday design another building even while breaking rocks in a quarry (for how many hours a week?—is this just an "individual" question?) would not just be a question of keeping one's head together.

This goes to the *sui generis* issue as well—even to the extent that I can admire Rush and Rand (the latter a bit grudgingly, for sure) for having "their own thing" (and leaving aside for the moment the point that a great rock group is a matter of "their," a certain collectivity where the whole is greater than the merely quantitative sum), and even inasmuch as I might accept the notion of persons as "singularities" (as per Kierkegaard, Derrida, and others), I don't think that the notion of "the" philosopher, composer, inventor, architect, or what-have-you, of the "epoch" is sustainable, at least not from a contemporary perspective. I'm not so skeptical of canon formation as to think it a mere accident that Plato or Augustine or Descartes or Kant were major figures of their respective periods. It is not only an historical accident that accounts for our greater appreciation for J. S. Bach than for Buxtehude (though Bach himself acknowledged Buxtehude as the greatest organist of their time), for Mozart than for Salieri, or for Beethoven than for Czerny—though Rand, as we know, from her great heights of musical knowledge, preferred her "tiddly-wink music" to Beethoven, and one can safely assume that Rush for her would go the way of all rock music. (Beethoven, the greatest of romantics, denigrated by someone who presumed to write *The Romantic Manifesto*—that boggles my mind into a quagmire of flummoxation.¹) The thing is, Buxtehude, Salieri, and Czerny were all very good composers, just as Rush is a very good band. In the pantheon of the great and the very good, I would put Yes and King Crimson, for example, in the former category, and Rush in the latter—but it is no simple or mean feat to join the ranks of the very good.

However, there are indeed social and historical factors that make possible the centrality of these figures. There really is such a thing, as Einstein put it, as standing on the shoulders of giants, which is the sort of thing Ayn Rand seemed completely unable to acknowledge.

Thus, Howard Roark makes such startling discoveries as “form follows function” (undoubtedly this had never occurred to any previous architect) or “there is no collective brain.” One has to wonder if Rand’s own inability to recognize great art is integral to her inability to recognize the sources of such art. The same might be said of philosophy—though the dominance of analytic and positivist models in the English-speaking countries has brought about a similar inability in many academic philosophers. What William O’Neill (1971) characterized as the “with charity toward none” point of view might instead be called the “ungenerous” cast of mind—again, not that Rand was some unique expression of this, either. It might be said that there is no “collective brain” just as there is no “collective liver.” (I’m reminded of Quine’s discussion of synonymy, where he takes up the point that “creature with a brain” and “creature with a kidney” are both descriptive of mammals [Quine 1964].) For sure, there is a point to be made here about philosophical materialism, that “there never was an idea that a brain didn’t think” (this was said by a Marxist whose ungenerous cast of mind rivals Rand’s).

Be that as it may, neither the production of ideas nor even the production of brains and livers is an “individual” thing—and, on the latter pair of organs, it might be pointed out once again that we humans (and other mammals) acquire our brains and kidneys in our mothers’ wombs. If having charity toward none is meant as a critique of the politics of pity, which is bound up with the politics of resentment, then there is something that can be affirmed there, but one already gets this in a more systematic form from Nietzsche and, it might be argued, Rousseau.

Speaking of whom: In the midst of gathering these scattered, decidedly unsystematic reflections, I happened to run into Deena Weinstein as I was coming out of a café near DePaul University, where we are both professors. Deena and I are the university’s “professors of rock music,” though I would daresay that she is the better-known, having been featured on MTV, for instance. Professor Weinstein wrote the book *Heavy Metal* (1991), and she is also known for her writing on Rush, including a study cited by Sciabarra. When I mentioned that I had been asked to discuss the Rush/Rand

connection, she offered that “it’s really all Rousseau.” It was a bitterly cold Chicago winter evening, so we couldn’t continue this line of thought out there on the sidewalk, but it seems worthy of further exploration by Rushologists. Allow me to offer a comparison similar to the Rush/Rousseau one.

Sometimes, when I have taught my department’s course on “Business, Ethics, and Society,” I’ve shown the film, *The Fountainhead*. The students, most of whom have not studied much (if any) philosophy up to that point, often find Howard Roark to be an admirable character. They are moved by him. Of course, this is also the case when young people read the novel (not only young people, certainly, but I’m driving at some questions somewhat specific to adolescents and people in the transition from adolescence to adulthood). There are some interesting particularities of the film, however. Rand was not responsible for the entire film, but she did write the screenplay, and she had a very large measure of “creative control” over the film. Indeed, one form in which this is manifest is Howard Roark’s famous closing speech to the jury. As I am sure every reader here knows, Roark is on trial for dynamiting a public housing project that he had designed, because the other planners of the project had made modifications to his design. If nothing else, this trajectory of events, culminating in the destruction of the buildings and Roark’s trial, demonstrate the centrality of aesthetic judgment in Rand’s philosophy—this is a point to which I shall return in a moment. What I wanted to mention here is that Roark’s speech to the jury is the longest speech in any film up to that time, at least in the English language. King Vidor, the filmmaker, had wanted to cut the length somewhat, but Rand put her foot down. Again, there are some things here to discuss about the centrality of aesthetic judgment. But there are some other facets of the film, specifically, that I wanted to highlight, especially having to do with its style. In particular, there is a starkness to the film that makes it, stylistically, something of a cross between film noir and Socialist Realism. (Indeed, the stark architecture of the city—though not necessarily Roark’s own buildings, also a topic to which I shall return—reminds me of visiting certain American bastions of Cold War anti-commun-

ism, such as Bob Jones University, which, in terms of their built space, would have fit in nicely with the drabest images of the former East Germany.) The heroism of Roark stands out, and yet not exactly as a "contrast," but instead because Roark's demeanor and sensibility is even more dire—if I can get away with such an expression—than that of the other people, and even of the built environment, around him.

This is a world of objects, perhaps captured best by an interesting duality that runs right through Rand's work. On the one hand, Rand's mature novels, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, are centrally constructed around speeches that the main characters make to each other, indeed, *at* each other. In other contexts as well, whether in her books of essays or in the aforementioned radio program, one feels "talked at." Perhaps this is to some extent unavoidable for any philosophical work that has some element of missionary zeal or at least some desire to convince, rather than mere musing about "the world as I found it." One reviewer of Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* ([1962] 1971) averred that the book should have been called "The Open Society *by* One of Its Enemies." Certainly, in the larger world of philosophy, one can feel "talked at" from many directions, from all over the political landscape, and Marxists are certainly no exception. And yet, I think the point I am driving at stands, even if it applies to others as well (though I would argue to a lesser degree, and more as a matter of being under sway of the bourgeois-propertarian world view, which, being the ideology of the capitalist ruling class and therefore the dominant ideology, affects opponents of capitalism too). In Rand, the fact that the idea of "being with" would just be part of the repugnant conceptual machinery of supposedly owing someone else a moment of my time, means that hers is a world of objects. In such a world, a world of the sheer "thatness" of objects, is it any wonder that "private property" would be the central notion, indeed the *defining* feature of human life? An entire study, then, might be made of the idea that the inalienable right to destroy one's personal property is some higher expression of human freedom. But if other people are just objects to me, along with other objects such as tables,

chairs, or SUVs and cell phones (just to name two classes of objects that I would readily destroy if I could!), then on what basis should I respect their "rights" (or they mine)? In Rand's claim about the right of ownership including the right to destroy what is "mine," there is even the resonance of the Christianity that she despised, especially in its modern, Protestant form (as understood by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1930]): there is hardly any point to my going to Heaven if I can't also enjoy the fact that many others will go to Hell. This is especially problematic in the context of rock music, of course, since clearly Hell will have the better band!

Just as *The Fountainhead*, the film, has much in common with film noir and Socialist Realism (and I should say, just for the record, that I like the film, I find it a fascinating work, and you can't really argue with Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal), the novel has something in common with a literary style that arose in France in the 1950s and 60s: chosisme. Literally, this means something like "thing-ism." As applied by writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, the idea of chosisme is to portray a world where persons have no special status; they are simply objects along with all of the rest. Foucault turned his into a methodology when he proposed an "archaeological" approach to consciousness. Sartre once wrote that the writer André Gide had liberated his readers from "the tyranny of chosisme"—the point being that chosisme is a French translation of the Marxist concept of reification. Indeed, Sartre's whole philosophy could be said to be set against the tyranny of the "thing," and therefore against whatever reduces people to mere things. I have invoked this chain of references because, for all of the objectification that one encounters in Rand, there is also an existentialist feel to her writing, and especially to the characters who most seem to represent her own views: Howard Roark and John Galt.² This comes through not only in the heroic aspect of their respective characters, but also in the way that each seems to be fundamentally alone—something that seems true of not only Rand, but, it should be said, Sartre too. I would say that this quality carries over to some of Rush's music as well, or at least to some of the stories they tell—especially when these are seen in contrast to the utopian communalism of the music of (especially a

group such as) Yes. But this still is not the comparison that I am driving toward.

Rand is right, I think, about her conception of ownership—but I would say that it not only includes destruction, it entails destruction, and, indeed, I would say that ownership in her conception *is* destruction. “Existence exists,” absolutely, and what is mine is mine, absolutely. Contrast this philosophy of property to that tradition that runs from Aristotle to Aquinas, Locke, and Jefferson. Jefferson said that “the earth belongs to the living,” in “usufruct,” this last meaning “stewardship.” There is no “absolute” right to ownership in this tradition. This comparison of theories of property deserves the kind of treatment that it would not even make sense to embark upon here, but my point is that an absolutist conception of property cannot help but go hand-in-hand with a good deal of existential angst and even a dire, siege mentality. Are these conceptions and outlooks the natural outgrowth of deep insecurity—of a kind that is completely understandable—or is it the other way around? Probably some of both. What is fascinating is that all of this angst and insecurity could kill an ordinary person (in which case they should be free to end their life without outside interference!), but in Rand’s heroic characters there is an indomitable optimism that cannot be extinguished. Recall the final scene in *The Fountainhead*, where Dominique Francon (that is, Patricia Neal) rides the construction elevator up the side of the world’s tallest building, looking up to the tall, handsome, smiling, and heroic Howard Roark (Gary Cooper), who stands firmly upright, hands on hips. The entire tableau is a monument to phallogocentrism, and Nietzsche’s mountain is replaced with the skyscraper. That Rand could not stand so tall is not the point, though I don’t think it is inappropriate to argue for some relationship between her ostensible outlook and the fact that she did not seem to be a happy person.

Ayn Rand is not Howard Roark—so what? Could *anyone* be Howard Roark? If the answer is “no,” what follows?

Returning to my students who have seen *The Fountainhead* in “Philosophy 228: Business, Ethics, and Society,” it does not seem to me that coming away from Rand with the ideal of striving to be a person of character is such a bad thing—not hardly! It is basically an

Aristotelian lesson that, if people do not acquire strength of character until adolescence, thanks to the breakdown of child-rearing in this society, then at least it is better than not at all. Indeed, even to be a bit hard on Rand as someone who basically appeals to adolescents and people in transition from adolescence to adulthood (a transition that some people never really make—and indeed one might argue, in both a Kantian and a Freudian vein, and probably a Marxist vein as well, that Humanity-writ-large still has a good deal of growing up to do) is not exactly fair. One might instead recognize her as a latter-day Aristotelian who at least implicitly grasps that the categories of “childhood,” “adolescence,” and “adulthood” were not at all the same things in Aristotle’s time and place (and the middle term is a very recent development in the grand scheme of things, and it still does not exist in some parts of the world) as they are in the modern, industrial world. Although I find Rand’s dismissal of rock music to have some overtones of racism and Eurocentrism (but, I hasten to add, these same attributes can be found in what Theodor Adorno said about rock and jazz, and simple lack of musical sophistication—not something Adorno could be accused of, I suppose!), I also wonder if she was bothered by what might be called rock music’s “normative adolescence.” After all, anyone who deals with progressive rock, even if simply as a listener and fan, is confronted with legions of critics who claim that rock music must submit to a categorical imperative to remain musically unsophisticated and lyrically oriented toward adolescent themes. Any attempt from within rock music to approach creativity and craft in the same ways that people in other, shall we say, “developed,” “adult” forms of music, whether that be Western classical music, jazz, Indian classical music, or what-have-you, is to be rejected tout court, as “inauthentic,” as not proper to rock music’s essence.³ What is great about rock music isn’t its essential adolescent outlook, but rather its lack of an essence altogether. But I also wonder if the “adolescent normativity” of at least a great deal of rock music is simply too close for comfort, given the orientation of much of Rand’s own work.

Still, okay, it’s not such a bad thing to be inspired by Howard Roark. It is not so bad to be inspired by the idea of “objective truth,”

if the alternative is a blithe, "it all comes down to what you think"-relativism. It is not so bad to be inspired by the idea of integrity. The strengths of these inspirations can be affirmed without ignoring the limitations. But then, let us not forget that the objective truth, the "is" of the real world of capitalism, is that the owners of the means of production and their top administrators (CEOs and top corporate managers) are not heroic artists, indeed they are neither heroic nor artists. Let us not forget that, for Aristotle, there is no such thing as the "virtuous person" who exists in isolation from the quality of the social fabric and the possibilities for pathways to flourishing—in other words, for Aristotle, as we might have learned in Philosophy 101, the good person, the good life, and the good society are bound together inextricably. Meanwhile, for Rand, there is about as much to the concept of "society" as there is to the collective brain. My own view is that Kant has a good deal in common with Aristotle, but that Kant is writing in a time of the overwhelming pressure of social systems, where to talk in terms of parenting and character will not deal adequately with the social currents that whip people around and shape possible conceptions of the good in persons, life, or society. In brilliant essays such as "Perpetual Peace" and "Idea for a Universal History, From a Cosmopolitan Point of View" and "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?," Kant (1983) laid the foundations for a philosophy that takes global social relations into account. When this philosophy is joined with some serious political economy, the idea of "not owing anyone a moment of my time" seems silly and bizarre in the light of what is really involved in putting food on the table or a roof over our heads. Indeed, this notion of independence sounds like what it is: the rebellion of the sensitive adolescent with artistic or intellectual aspirations. Well, as they say on "Seinfeld": "Not that there's anything wrong with that"—as far as it goes. Which is also to say, as far as the model of Howard Roark goes.

This role model, a character in a novel, served as a standard for lyricist Neil Peart during a period when Rush was developing rapidly as a creative force. Again, nothing wrong with that.

I have been promising a certain comparison. As much as I don't

necessarily think that it is a bad thing to be inspired on some levels (obviously I'm hedging a good deal here) by Howard Roark, I am thinking of two role models that might have been better. For one thing, if you think Howard Roark is a romantic artist-hero, check out Ludwig van Beethoven—he's the one who said to one of his major patrons, a member of the ruling aristocracy of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, "What you have is through an accident of birth, what I have achieved is by my own effort; there are many princes, there is only one Beethoven." I will return to Beethoven as role model in a moment.

The other person I am thinking of is the real-life Howard Roark: Frank Lloyd Wright. Now there was an innovator, a real artist, and it might be useful to compare him to Howard Roark on various points. For instance, Wright had a mentor, namely Louis Sullivan. Wright had his own artistic standards, among them the refusal to build any projects where occupancy by Black or Jewish people was restricted. As I recall, African-Americans and Jews hardly appear in Rand's narratives—I suppose that would be an instance of "tribalism" to have marked these identities—the result being that the main characters are all white, northern Europeans.⁴ There is nothing unusual in this for the time period, so it isn't that Rand was any more a participant in furthering invisibility than were most white writers in that period, but my point is that Roark's politics are largely "aesthetic," that is, they have to do with the independence of the artist.

Rand takes one side of Aristotle and one side of Wright, and a bit of Nietzsche, at the same time striving to be perspicaciously, if not studiously, against Kant. In taking an architect as the paradigm of the capitalist, or at least of someone with the proper, "radical capitalist" point of view, Rand has raised an interesting and problematic example. Before I go further into this as both a political and an aesthetic question, and as a question at the intersection of politics and aesthetics, there is a point to be made about Beethoven and Wright as regards the music of Rush.

One thing that distinguishes Rush from the "first tier" of progressive rock groups is that the latter took up a good many influences from beyond rock into their music. Indeed, this is one of

the reasons that progressive rock is often confronted with the dreaded charge of "pretentiousness," because the best groups presumed to stand on the shoulders of giants such as Sibelius, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Davis, Coltrane, Taylor, Shankar, etc. (It can be added to this last, "just as the Beatles did before them." More on this in a moment.) It is often said, and I have said it myself, that the formula for Rush is: one part Yes and one part Led Zeppelin. I think that formula is good enough. (I don't know if readers of this journal will know, by the way, that there were plans at one point to form a band with two former members of each of those bands: Robert Plant and Jimmy Page from Zeppelin, and Chris Squire and Alan White from Yes. They were going to call it XYZ—Ex-Yes/Zeppelin. However, the record companies and artistic management put the kibosh on this plan, though I'm sure their judgment was guided by the highest principles of aesthetic judgment and integrity, as is generally the case with our heroic capitalists!) I don't want to say that the members of Rush do not have respect for the elements that went into first-tier progressive rock, namely what the Beatles had already taken up into their music and that groups such as Yes and King Crimson took even further. But there is something to the way that Rush takes off from elements more purely within rock, even if at the further reaches of it, that deserves discussion. The point is not that one cannot get to some good music this way. Instead the point is that Rush has had, in their music at any rate, about as much use for the larger history of music and art, as did Ayn Rand.

The difference is that I am sure that the members of Rush would never tell anyone that theirs is the only music worth listening to (indeed, everything I've ever read about the band members leads me to believe that they are exceedingly generous toward other artists. Most recently, for instance, I read a tribute from Rush bassist and vocalist Geddy Lee to the late John Entwistle). Despite this, I find some of the fans of Rush to be pretty narrow. I mean, for instance, if the topic of discussion is progressive rock, and there are bands such as Yes and King Crimson to discuss, why is it that their main contribution is to ask, "What about Rush?" All right, fans of Rush tend to be more narrowly into rock than, say, fans of Yes and King

Crimson.⁵ They also tend to be into heavy metal. That's fine, or at least I don't think it's not fine. But there is in that corner of rock music a tendency to enter cul-de-sacs, where rock music does not develop very much in terms of either creativity or craft.⁶

While Geddy Lee, for instance, would of course never hesitate to acknowledge the influence and/or greatness of other bass guitarists, Ayn Rand is clearly convinced that she is the only philosopher who ever mattered, whether canonical or contemporary—and she did not hesitate to tell this to her readers. Even the great cult leaders of analytic and continental philosophy, Wittgenstein and Heidegger, never thought or said this. Wittgenstein perhaps came close, but then he had the good grace to at least think that he wasn't worth reading either. (Some years ago I heard Thomas Flynn, of Emory University, present a paper where he remarked that Sartre had said that he would rather read detective novels than Wittgenstein. I could not restrain myself from blurting out that Wittgenstein felt the same way.)

But I still wonder what accounts for the narrowness of some Rush fans. I tend to think it is a generational thing, and by "generation" I don't necessarily mean nineteen or twenty years, but more a certain relationship to the counterculture that inspired the later Beatles and the first generation of progressive rock groups. In *Rocking the Classics*, Macan (1997, 144–66) has an insightful discussion of the transition from a counterculture to what sociologists call a "taste public." Although Macan and I disagree on the political interpretation of the counterculture (and therefore to some extent over the meaning of the transition away from it), it is still safe to say that this transition is one that is away from the politics of the rebellions that took place around the world and in the imperialist citadels in and around 1968. While I doubt that the members of Rush would have much in common with the point of view that Rand (1967, 236–69) expressed in "The Cashing In: The Student 'Rebellion'" (or perhaps I should say that I just don't know and maybe it would be better if I didn't know), which is an attack on the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, neither the redemptive utopia of "Close to the Edge" (Yes) nor the technological dystopia of "21st-Century Schizoid Man" (King Crimson) seem to be motivating

themes in the earlier music of Rush. This changes, arguably, by the time of *Grace Under Pressure* (my personal favorite) and *Power Windows*, but, by then, if they are still taking something from Ayn Rand and Howard Roark, then it is a vision that has matured and broadened considerably.

Returning to Beethoven and Wright: The “Beethoven” point has to do with listening to and learning from others, something Rand seemed to have no interest in doing. The “Frank Lloyd Wright” point here is just that it would have been interesting if Rush had taken his work as inspiration rather than—or at least alongside—Howard Roark’s fictional life. “Architectural metaphor” is a term used in music; I think we could use some music that is inspired by Wright’s architecture and other work from the Prairie School. I would also like to hear more music that is inspired by Art Deco, a movement with which Wright’s designs might be associated in important ways. Perhaps Rush could look into this?

Wright loved the outdoors and breathing clean air, and Ayn Rand drove him crazy with her cigarette smoking when she visited Taliesin West (Wright’s school for architects, located in Arizona) to get a look at how “real architects” go about their work (Secrest 1993, 497–98). Wright didn’t much like cities. That isn’t quite right—in fact, he hated them. Wright considered himself a socialist. Now, we can debate the extent of Wright’s influence on the creation of Howard Roark—given that, on at least some level, it does not especially matter, and, on another, Roark is decidedly not Wright, and vice-versa.

What I want to focus on instead is the point that the architect, especially one who is creative and innovative, is a peculiar kind of artist. One of Howard Roark’s most famous lines is: “I don’t intend to build in order to have clients. I intend to have clients in order to build” (Rand [1943] 1993, 26). Much can be said about this statement. On the “aesthetic” side, it is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s claim that no great work of art was created with an audience in mind. I always thought that Jon Anderson of Yes had his priorities right when he said, “I just try to do the right thing, and then I hope somebody likes it” (*Yesyears Retrospective*, 1991). It isn’t that the

audience doesn’t matter, but instead that, if one creates art on the basis of what one is first of all hoping an audience will like (which nowadays means a “demographic”), then one is not thinking first of all about what would be good art.

Moving to the “political” side, however, the architect faces a problem that is perhaps unique among the arts, or close to it. A person can write a novel and hope that someday she will have readers for it—but, if the readers do not come, the novel still exists, it is no less a novel for the fact of not having attracted or reached readers. And, after all, at least one person read it, even if that person is also the author—and no author is a Robinson Crusoe, even if she has indeed washed up on the shore of some isolated island, clutching her manuscript for dear life. Philip K. Dick wrote a series of novels that came to be called the *Valis Trilogy*. Unknown for several years was the fact that a fourth book in the series existed in the form of a manuscript that was in the midst of a mess of papers of various kinds and purposes. Even if this manuscript had not been published and attracted readers, as *Radio Free Alburnith*, it would still have been “built.” Something similar can be said for most of the other arts, I would think, though it is certainly the case that there are vexing ontological questions about the form of existence and the materiality of musical works and films, in particular. If I write music in the conventional, Western way, with marks on paper, then I would seem to be in the same position as the novelist, and not yet having attracted listeners does not keep me from “building” my music. But marks on paper do not by themselves seem to be music, *not yet*. I may need people to interpret those marks. I may need some way to record the music, such that it can be reproduced as sound. And yet these are relatively minor problems, at least as practical matters (as philosophical issues they remain difficult), and in many ways they become “more minor” every day.

With film there are similar ontological questions, but there is another problem that cannot be addressed by thought alone: money. If I want to write a novel, all I have to do is get some paper and a pen and start writing. Even a typewriter or personal computer is not so hard to acquire, if that is my priority. Of course, I am assuming a

social fabric in which things such as basic literacy and a ready supply of electricity are taken care of, and that is to assume a lot, in fact. It seems to me that there are all kinds of ways in which this social fabric remains unexamined by Rand, as it is, for that matter, by most people most of the time, especially in the “advanced capitalist” countries. Be that as it may, I don’t have to have great financial resources, relatively speaking, to embark upon writing a novel. But what about when it comes to making films or designing buildings, especially big buildings? Most anyone is free to put some marks on paper and thereby design a building, but if none of the buildings are actually built, what’s the point? A person may be a “failed” musician, in some sense, if they are not able to get anyone to play or listen to their music, but I would still say this person is a musician—and perhaps, as has happened more than a few times, enthusiasts of the music come along later rather than sooner. If this happens after the musician has died, we don’t say this person was not a musician while they were alive, and has only become a musician posthumously (as appealing as this idea may be from a Nietzschean perspective). But what would we say about an “architect” whose designs were never built, not a single one of them?

Now, Howard Roark did not look upon any job as “too small”—he designed a gas station, and he brought the same craft and effort to this task as he would to designing a skyscraper. Indeed, the film especially makes a point of this. But an “architect” who never had a building built would be like an airplane pilot who never actually flew an airplane. After a while, you wouldn’t allow that this person is an actual pilot, just that he or she had hoped to become one.

Even on “aesthetic” grounds, then, Howard Roark’s statement has to confront the money issue. That is, even if, as an architect, I don’t build in order to have clients, but instead I have clients in order to build, still, I had better have some clients by and by, or else I won’t be doing any building, and after a while I won’t be an architect. So, I may have as a principle that I am going to design my buildings according to what I think of as my own visionary, innovative principles, but if I’m really going to be an architect, I’m going to have to deal with clients one way or another. My decision to not build

because there are no clients who will support my vision will become, over the course of years and decades, a decision about whether or not to be an architect at all. Again, I don’t know if there is any other art form that is in this situation, except perhaps film.

How does Rand deal with this quandary? Basically with a happy ending—Roark stands by his principles and ultimately goes from the rock quarry to building the world’s tallest skyscraper.

Rand stuck by her principles in demanding that her version of Roark’s speech to the jury be presented in full in *The Fountainhead*. For her, there was a happy ending, too, at least on this point. Somehow, I’m sure Rand would attribute this to the great possibilities afforded to her by American capitalism. She’s probably right about that, but then, of course, she was using the speech to praise that system. Even so, the further “progress” in the colonization of every nook and cranny by the imperatives of capital since the making of *The Fountainhead* (1949) means that no Hollywood film made today would have such a speech. Think of the original *Thomas Crown Affair* (1968), with Steve McQueen and Faye Dunaway, as compared to the more recent remake (1999), with Pierce Brosnan and Rene Russo. In many ways I prefer the remake, but there was one scene in the original that I cannot imagine being placed in a Hollywood film today, namely the famous and superb chess scene.⁷ From the beginning of the scene, when Faye Dunaway says “let’s play,” to the end, when she says “check” (it’s typical of filmmakers that they don’t know the difference between “check” and “checkmate”), about four and a half minutes pass without a word. Could anyone imagine a scene of chess and flirtation of that length today, without a word being said, and without something (a bus or a 747) crashing or exploding? So of course the scene was not part of the remake. The irony is that the remake has Thomas Crown stealing a painting so that he can enjoy looking at it for an evening, whereas the original caper is a bank heist, and it is easier to imagine suave Pierce Brosnan actually playing chess, as opposed to brash, all-American Steve McQueen, whose other hobbies include tearing up the beach in his dune buggy.

The larger point that I am driving toward is that an artist may be able to make the decision to place aesthetic principles and other

values over the “A is A” of capitalism, or, to use Marx’s expression, what is “Moses and the prophets” to capitalism, to “accumulate, accumulate, accumulate”—but the capitalist qua capitalist could not care less about what he “builds” (and, in the age of what Frederic Jameson [1991] calls “money money”—as opposed to, say, “oil money,” “steel money,” etc.—the capitalist may build nothing at all), and, indeed, the capitalist qua capitalist *absolutely cannot* make decisions in the pursuit of some value other than profit and simply let the chips fall where they may.

We could go a good deal further with this point in terms of Rand’s philosophy, because the fact is that Rand does recognize that there is a difference between the value of money and the value of artistic endeavor. She recognizes this issue in essays such as “What Is Capitalism?” (Rand 1967, 11–34), but the difference also runs through *The Fountainhead*—obviously, the value of what Roark is attempting with his designs does not depend on whether or not people with the kind of wealth required to execute them have any aesthetic sense at all. Rand addresses this issue by saying that, despite the difference between market value and aesthetic value, to have any other social mechanism than the invisible hand determine what is going to be produced will lead to an economy of coercion. When I see the pap and pabulum that the “culture”—if it can even be called that—of this postmodern capitalist society has devolved into, it is hard for me to think of Rand’s response to the value difference as amounting to much more than Homer Simpson saying, “yeah, but what are you gonna do?” Well, a real argument about this will have to wait for another day, but just to underline the main point, no *real capitalist* could say what Howard Roark said about building and clients.

Obviously, Rush accept the difference between market value and aesthetic value too—for one thing, they are not deterred by Rand’s views of rock music; for another, they have pursued their own vision of good music apart from a central concern with some of the more lucrative commercial venues. But then, financially, their story has a happy ending too, and it is a lot easier to validate the market from that standpoint. Maybe that is the difference between the struggling artist and the truly *starving* artist, or the person who cannot be an artist

because market discipline has determined that she and the others around her will starve.

I’m sure this is the sort of thing that is discussed in this forum all of the time, but one problem that is often overlooked in discussions of capitalism is the use of the term “market.” The word has a relatively benign and even innocuous ring to it. Rand, like many ideologists of capitalism, tends to use the word in a folksy way, as if “the market” was just that area of the village where people brought the fruits of their labor and engaged in barter—and not what it really is in the epoch of capitalism and even more so in the epoch of imperialism and imperialist globalization, a mechanism that operates on a global scale and that depends on a basic division between the few who own the means of production and the great many who do not. An even more quaint term is “marketplace”—here one especially sees the unreality of the folksy outlook, because not only are global market mechanisms not tied to particular places (though, in my view, they are still tied in significant ways to nation-states and their ruling classes), they are progressively destroying places and any sense of place—through outright spoilage, homogenization (creation of the McWorld, absorption of people into electronic media and cyberspace, etc.).

This rambling set of reflections opened with some lines from the song “Red Lenses,” from Rush’s 1984 album, *Grace Under Pressure*. There are many interesting lines from that album. However, I might add, before mentioning one of these lines, that the lyric writing is another area where I cannot think of Rush as being in the first rank of progressive rock groups. Indeed, to borrow another argument from Macan, Rush came into its own at a time when the more abstract and “poetic” lyrics that were coming from Yes (often people think of Jon Anderson as the primary lyricist for the group, but Steve Howe has written or co-written some of the best lyrics too, as have Chris Squire and even Alan White), King Crimson, Genesis, etc., were giving way to more “direct” and sometimes even clumsy forms of expression. Still, I think Rush’s potential for more visionary work really showed itself with *Grace Under Pressure* (even if, as Rushologists know better than I do, there was some dissension within the ranks,

especially because of the heavy reliance on keyboards and the somewhat smaller role for electric guitar than on previous albums). One line in "Red Lenses" refers to "thinking about the overhead—the underfed." This makes me think of the value difference as expressed by Roark—basically what clients are about and what the art of building is about.

Long ago, Aristotle (1984, 44–50) set out the distinction between "maintaining a household," on the one hand, and the "mere getting of money," on the other. The first of these is the true stuff of economics, the Greek term for which (*oikonomia*) refers to the household, while the latter, merely seeking after money, if it becomes the dominant ethos in a society, will lead to disaffection and, ultimately, social ruin. This line of thought is taken up into the philosophies of Aquinas, Locke, Jefferson, Hegel, Marx, Sartre, and Derrida, among many others. Seemingly, Rand has some affinity for it too, but then it also seems, when "the big money" speaks, she is there to listen. (Two especially egregious examples of this are the essays on labor unions and the student movement in Rand 1967.)

One reason the "architectural metaphor" is useful in music is that a piece of music can create a world, or at least a dwelling, that people can inhabit (for at least a little while). The metaphor would seem to situate the artist on the side of maintaining a household, rather than the mere seeking of clients. Why did Rand not confront this contradiction in anything like its full depth—the contradiction that Marx expressed as that between a system of production that is fully socialized and is fully dependent upon this socialization (and that *requires* immiseration, exploitation, alienation, and violent crises as part of its "normal" course of operation) and a system of accumulation that is oriented toward the relative handful who own the means of production. I'm sure there is a range of reasons, having to do with everything from class background and outlook to issues of individual psychology (Rand's overwhelming need to feel self-made and independent), but intellectually and theoretically, I think the missing term is *history*. Rand has the category of ill-gotten gains, but she seems to associate it with simple theft rather than with anything that is systemic and has a trajectory. Thus, she is likely to speak of

ownership or the law or even "rules" (as in the essay on the student movement) without any depth on the question of how some have come by ownership of the far greater part of social wealth and the means for creating it, and what mechanisms they use (especially of the state and its police powers and so-called "system of justice," but also the generation of ideology, whether that is through education, the "free press," the churches that sanctify private property and tell people to accept their lot, or the culture industry more generally). With *Grace under Pressure* and its closely-associated follow-up, *Power Windows*, Rush is starting to question these things.

In the end, though, what does Ayn Rand's (or anyone's) philosophy have to do with musical form, and vice-versa? I think it is good to have a little skepticism regarding the "aboutness" of music. I would at least hold to that skepticism to this extent: even if I don't like some of the ideas that a band is taking up and trying to represent in their music, that isn't the end of the story. And, as I have said before, the very fact that Rush is the sort of group that wants to dig into ideas and try to do something with them in their music already places them in a category separate from most of the musical "product" floating around out there. Lastly, I think the most recent Rush album as of this writing, *Vapor Trails*, is quite good, and I am even more impressed with Geddy Lee's solo album, *my favorite headache*. It's a very "Jewish" album, I think, and if one wants to find a historical sense in which to locate political concepts and human striving—and if one wants to find this sense in a way that is itself historical—then I think Judaism and those old Israelites, especially the prophets, are the place to go. Otherwise, one is only "living in the present tense," to borrow the title from an excellent song on the album.

Of course, Alissa Rosenbaum had, at one time, a relationship to Judaism—but, like I said, don't get me started . . .

Notes

1. Incidentally, I would be curious to know if anyone has ever addressed the "soundtrack question" for *The Fountainhead*. I do not recall Max Steiner's film score music being especially "dire." One contemporary master of dire music, to my mind, is Mark Snow, the composer who did the music for "The X-Files" television

series and film. Clearly, Snow's music is much influenced by that of Krzysztof Penderecki, a composer whom Rand would probably dislike even more than Beethoven.

2. It is worth noting that Hazel E. Barnes devotes a section to Rand in the book, *An Existentialist Ethics* (1967).

3. Edward Macan (1997) has dealt effectively with the "authenticity" question in *Rocking the Classics*, and I have also dealt with the question, and with its connection to the typical charge of "that ain't rock n' roll," in my books on music. Given that Sartre did the most to place the question of "authenticity" on the philosophical map, it might be mentioned that, for him, authenticity had nothing to do with "essence"—or, I should say, authenticity has a purely negative relationship to "essence," an appeal to an essentialism of who a person "is" is the most inauthentic gesture that one could make. I'm bothered by the "normative adolescence" too. I should add, too, that rock music can be about adolescence and yet not necessarily be adolescent in its approach, a prime example being *Quadrophobia* by The Who.

4. The editors point out to me that there are examples of minor Jewish characters in Rand's works—for example, Sol Salzer in the play "Ideal" (in Rand 1984, 185–256) and Mr. Slotnick in *The Fountainhead* (Rand [1943] 1993).

5. A good example of this is the comments that some of the classical musicians made in 2001 when Yes toured with various orchestras. Many of them pointed out that not only had they been Yes fans for a long time, but that they were led to classical music by Yes. I might add that one violinist—whom a friend of mine talked with—said that the music she played on the "Yes Symphonic" tour was some of the hardest she had ever played.

6. For instance—and perhaps there are things that I am not hearing or that I haven't devoted enough time to exploring—I find heavy-metal bass playing pretty boring, with just a few exceptions, primarily Geezer Butler of Black Sabbath. But I put Black Sabbath on a whole other plane than almost every other heavy metal band, and one of the key differences is that the bass player and drummer (Bill Ward) are not just banging out some noise cushion for the guitarist. Fans of Rush, of course, appreciate—how could they not?—that Geddy Lee and Neil Peart are superb practitioners of their respective instruments, but sometimes I wonder if they really get much more than the purely technical aspect (in a word, chops). If they did, then their sights would also be set on Chris Squire, John Entwistle, Jack Bruce, and Paul McCartney, and on Bill Bruford, Alan White, the extraordinary percussionists of King Crimson (a category that includes Bruford, of course), Keith Moon, Ginger Baker, and Ringo Starr. Indeed, I take it to be a kind of litmus test of rock musicians whether or not they appreciate the brilliance of Mr. Starkey. Not to be snotty, but is it hard to imagine more than a few Rush fans dismissing Ringo on the basis of what really amounts to pyrotechnics? Let me add that I don't think Peart, either, is a pyrotechnician or histrionic player for the most part, but I do think it is the purely "chops"-side of things that some Rush fans appreciate, and, as I said, I think this leads into a musical cul-de-sac.

7. Rand didn't care much for chess, either. See her "Open Letter to Boris Spassky" in Rand 1982, 63–69. Leonard Peikoff said of philosophy that "[i]t is not a chess game divorced from reality designed by British professors for otherwise

unemployable colleagues" ("Introduction," viii). Admittedly, that is funny!

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