

Langer and Camus: Unexpected Post-Kantian Affinities with Rand's Aesthetics

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Ever since Kant divorced reason from reality, his intellectual descendants have been diligently widening the breach. . . . It has been said that Kant's dichotomy led to two lines of Kantian philosophers, both accepting his basic premises, but choosing opposite sides: those who chose reason, abandoning reality—and those who chose reality, abandoning reason. . . . The philosophy departments of today's universities are the battleground of a struggle which, in fact, is only a family quarrel between the analysts and the existentialists. (Rand 1965b, 246–48)

In 1958, a year after she launched her Objectivist philosophy with the publication of her monumental novel *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand began to disclose in an organized way her ideas on the nature of art and language in her private lectures on the principles of fiction writing. Two more years elapsed, however, before she began to *publicly* share these ideas in her university and radio lectures and her writings in *The Objectivist Newsletter* and (later) *The Objectivist*, and it was only much later that she compiled most of these pieces in *The Romantic Manifesto* ([1969] 1975). Over the course of a little more than a decade, Rand refined and expanded on her insights, but published nothing additional on art and aesthetics during the last ten years of her life.

By contrast, Susanne K. Langer (1895–1985), an American educator and philosopher of the Linguistic Analyst school,¹ had already by 1953 published two major works on aesthetics: *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) and *Feeling and Form* (1953). Albert Camus (1913–1960), a French writer associated with the Existentialist movement,² was not to survive the Eisenhower era, but had by 1951 already published his own literary and artistic manifesto in an extended essay,

The Rebel, translated into English in 1956. Despite the significant differences between their respective intellectual frameworks and Rand's, a careful study reveals some fascinating and illuminating parallels between these three noteworthy mid-twentieth century aesthetics theorists.

It might seem that any attempt to achieve enlightenment by consulting the works of an Analyst or an Existentialist is tantamount to praying for a miracle. The official Objectivist take on post-Kantian philosophy, after all, is essentially that it is an unmitigated evil, a continuation and culmination of Kant's insidious "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy. Writing during the early days of the Vietnam War and the "Student Rebellion" that swept American campuses, Rand (1965b, 246) said: "With rare and academically neglected exceptions, the philosophical 'mainstream' that seeps into every classroom, subject, and brain in today's universities, is: epistemological agnosticism, avowed irrationalism, ethical subjectivism."

The situation had not improved when Rand's designated spokesman, Leonard Peikoff (1982, 139) wrote: "Today academic philosophy in America has disappeared. It has reached the dead end of the Kantian dichotomy of thought versus reality. With its practitioners divided between absurd word-chopping and wordy absurdity-worship, it has completed a full retreat: a retreat by one group from asking any significant questions, a retreat by the other from any means of answering them." Like the proverbial stopped watch that is correct twice a day, truth achieved by post-Kantian philosophy would seem to be accidental at best. As Nathaniel Branden recently put it (28 February 2000): "It is impossible to write an entire book and not say anything that is true." To say the least, such dire assessments of the Analysts and Existentialists certainly do not encourage those seeking insight into the nature of art to delve into the works of writers such as Langer and Camus.

Far from being mired in "absurd word-chopping," however, Langer (1953, vii) sees "the business of philosophy [which] is to unravel and organize concepts, to give definite and satisfactory meanings to the terms we use in talking about any subject" as the

means to an end. By constructing in this manner “an intellectual framework for philosophical studies, general or detailed, relating to art” (ix), she very incisively deals in *Feeling and Form* with a number of significant questions. Among them are “the nature of art and its relation to feeling, the relative autonomy of the several arts and their fundamental unity in ‘Art’ itself, the functions of subject matter and medium, the epistemological problems of artistic ‘communication’ and ‘truth’” (viii–ix).

Similarly, far from being mired in stereotypical Existentialist “wordy absurdity-worship,” helpless to answer “any significant questions,” Camus has some very enlightening things to say about the nature of art. This essay seeks, then, to reveal some of the most worthwhile and Rand-compatible nuggets to be found in their writings.

Art as “Re-creation of Reality”

An instructive place to begin a comparison of the aesthetic views of Rand and Langer is with their concept of art. By far the most prominent and focused advocacy of the view of art as “re-creation” or, more specifically, “re-creation of reality,” is found in Rand’s essays collected in *The Romantic Manifesto* ([1969] 1975). Scattered, unsystematic references to this idea, however, can be also found in the works of several other writers on aesthetics and art.³

Langer (1953), however, sharply denies that any art involves “re-creation of reality” (or its traditional synonym “imitation of nature”), pointedly asking: “Is there any justification for the fairly popular notion that one should speak rather of *re-creating* than of creating things in art?” (10) Her reply is characteristically emphatic: “[A]n object that already exists—a vase of flowers, a living person—cannot be re-created. It would have to be destroyed to be re-created. Besides, a picture is neither a person nor a vase of flowers. It is an image, created for the first time out of things that are not imaginary, but quite realistic—canvas or paper, and paints or carbon and ink” (46). Further: “[T]he average man—as well as too many a critic—really believes that artists ‘re-create’ fruits, flowers, women, and

vacation spots for him to possess in a pipe dream” (54). And: “[L]ong after art theory had passed the naive stage, and every serious thinker realized that imitation was neither the aim nor the measure of artistic creation, the traffic of the image with its model kept its central place among philosophical problems of art. . . . Yet the idea of copying nature is not even applicable to all the arts. What does a building copy? On what given object does one model a melody?” (46).

Yet, it has been argued since at least the early 1970s⁴ that the *fundamental* meaning Rand intended in her use of the phrase “re-creation of reality” is *not* the “mimetic” portraying of things-from-reality, but instead the creation of an imaginary universe or world or reality, a world-in-miniature, or *microcosm*. “Re-create” or “create anew” is meant not in the literal sense of “create *again*” (no more possible for the universe as a whole than, as Langer rightly points out, for specific things in the universe), but instead in the sense of “create *in a new form*.”

At about this same time, similar realizations apparently were occurring to Rand and various members of her Inner Circle. Allan and Joan Mitchell Blumenthal (1974) remarked that the ancient Greeks viewed music as a microcosm, and Peikoff (1976) acknowledged that the artist “creates a universe anew.” Peikoff first publicly stated the microcosm view, with Rand’s endorsement, in his book on Nazi Germany (1982). In it, he described how the work of artists in a given culture or period of history “becomes a microcosm embodying and helping to spread further the kinds of beliefs [advocated by] the prevailing consensus (or some faction within it)” (169). The explicit integration of the “re-creation” and “microcosm” views of art, however, was not officially made until 1991, in a passage that is largely a reworking of material from a 1976 lecture course in which Rand participated. Peikoff (1991, 417) wrote:

The artist is the closest man comes to being God. We can validly speak of *the world* of Michelangelo, of Van Gogh, of Dostoyevsky, not because they create a world *ex nihilo*, but because they do *re-create* one. Each omits, rearranges,

emphasizes the data of reality and thus *creates the universe anew*, guided by his own view of the essence of the original one. . . . The result is *a universe in microcosm*.⁵ (emphasis added)

Unfortunately, by the time Peikoff had finally made an official clarification of the “microcosm” version of art as “re-creation,” Torres and Kamhi had already begun a journal, *Aristos*, in which they promulgated their *mimesis* version of re-creation. Thus, as a result of nearly two decades of failure to publish and elaborate upon the “microcosm” version, there is now a vigorous controversy within Objectivist circles as to what Rand really meant by “re-creation of reality.” Recent attempts by this author to lift the “microcosm” view to widespread acceptance have had a mixed reception (Enright 2001; Hospers 2001; Kamhi 2003; Torres 2003).

However, Stephen Halliwell (2002), an Aristotelian aesthetician, came out in solid support of the view of art as a microcosm. He asserted the “strong presumption” that Aristotle was “staking out a case” for viewing artistic *mimesis* as:

equivalent to fiction, if by “fiction” we here understand the modeling of a world whose status is that of an imaginary, constructed parallel to the real, spatiotemporal realm of the artist’s and audience’s experience. (166)

Notwithstanding Halliwell’s welcome, scholarly comments regarding Aristotle, perhaps the strongest and most rigorous support for the view of art as microcosm appears to come, again ironically, from Susanne Langer (1953). While she vigorously eschews the term “re-creation,” she adheres to it in all but name, in her overwhelmingly consistent and careful explication of the microcosm view of art. Her view, moreover, was presented publicly five years before Rand (1958) made the first *private* presentations of her own view of art as “re-creation of reality.” Even the casual reader of Langer soon gets the idea that, to her, creation of a virtual *world* is what art is all about.

Another irony is that Rand, who explicitly *defined* art as “re-creation” was not *nearly* so consistent or rigorous in her application of

the idea of art as microcosm to the various branches of art as is Langer, who explicitly *rejects* the idea of art as “re-creation.” For one thing, Rand (1971, 46) *denied* that architecture re-creates reality, a denial that leads Torres and Kamhi (2000, 200) to argue that architecture should be excluded from the concept of “art,” as Rand defined it. For another, Rand (1971) was not at all clear whether and to what extent music involved re-creation of reality. She was inconsistent as to whether re-creation of reality requires the presentation of entities (46), which music does not do—or merely an intelligible subject (75), such as a melody, which music can do. Also, Rand seems to have been drawn off track into exploring the *mimesis* issue—i.e., how music re-creates *things from* reality—focusing mainly on emotions and whether or not they are in music, losing sight of how music might function in creating an imaginary world or “microcosm.” Torres and Kamhi (2000, 87–90) have picked up what they see as Rand’s unconsummated focus on “*mimesis*” and attempt to show how the *mimesis* view of re-creation (and imitation) applies to music. Notwithstanding the merits of their efforts, they do not succeed in salvaging the definition of “art” as Rand *intended* it to be taken, as the re-creation of reality, by means of the creation of a “microcosm,” i.e., the remaking of this world by making an imaginary world.

Thus, much of the application of Rand’s definition to the various forms of art was left unstated, and her very definition frequently misinterpreted. A good place to start, then, in redirecting and clarifying the Objectivist aesthetics is by surveying the monumental job Langer has done in carrying out essentially the same task. In so doing, we must not lose sight of the fact that Langer would probably not approve of our saying that *reality* was “re-created,” any more than she does other people’s saying that *things from reality* are “re-created.” She takes the term “re-create” in the literal sense of creating *again*, which she correctly regards as impossible. Instead, we will acknowledge while setting aside the superficial difference in terminology and focus rather on the more basic fact that Langer, like Rand, views art as the creation of a universe in microcosm, an imaginary world. (Each quoted instance of Langer’s microcosm position will be given

in capital letters, so as to distinguish it from Langer's own italicizing.)

Langer on Art as Creation of an Imaginary World

Langer (1953) begins identifying the artist's task that, she says, is "to produce and sustain the essential illusion, set it off clearly from the surrounding world of actuality, and articulate its form to the point where it coincides unmistakably with form of feeling and living" (68).

Here Langer introduces the dual system of terminology she uses throughout her writing. She refers both to the *illusions* (primary and secondary) of a given form of art and the fact that the form of art presents an *imaginary world or universe*. It is clear that these are not incommensurable expressions, but instead intimately related ways of expressing the same thing. The particular kind of illusion(s) employed by a particular kind of art *is* the form in which the imaginary world is created by that kind of art:

[T]he work of art . . . if it is successful, detaches itself from the rest of the world. . . . Every real work of art has a tendency to appear thus dissociated from its mundane environment. The most immediate impression it creates is one of "otherness" from reality—the impression of an illusion enfolding the thing, action, statement, or flow of sound that constitutes the work. (45) . . . This detachment from actuality, the "otherness" that gives even a bona fide product like a building or a vase some aura of illusion, is a crucial factor, indicative of the very nature of art. (46) . . . The setting forth of pure quality, or semblance [a term Langer prefers to "image"], creates a new DIMENSION, apart from the familiar world.⁶ (50)

Moreover, this illusion is often so powerful and convincing that "the created WORLD is more immediately real and important than the factual world" (181)

The visual arts (pictorial art, sculpture, and architecture), Langer says, are all concerned with setting up a primary illusion of "virtual

space.” Though they each do this in a different way, they are all aimed at “the making of the UNIVERSE in which the symbolic form exists” (79).

The illusion or “virtual scene” created in “pictorial art” (i.e., painting or drawing) is that of “a single, self-contained perceptual space, that seems to confront us as naturally as the scene before our eyes when we open them on the actual world” (86). Langer further explains how sculpture and architecture each have their own primary illusions and modes of creating a world. The illusion created in sculpture is “the semblance of organism” (88), “a semblance of the self and its WORLD” (95). Architecture, whose illusion and mode of re-creation is more subtle than the others, presents an illusion of a *place* or an “ethnic domain” (92). Langer states:

A place . . . is a created thing, an ethnic domain made visible, tangible, sensible. As such it is, of course, an illusion . . . primarily of self-contained, self-sufficient, perceptual space. But . . . it is organized as a functional realm made visible—the center of a virtual WORLD, the “ethnic domain.” (95) . . . A UNIVERSE created by man and for man . . . is the spatial *semblance* of a WORLD, because it is made in actual space, yet is not systematically continuous with the rest of nature. (97) . . . Architecture creates the semblance of that WORLD which is the counterpart of a Self.⁷ (98)

Langer describes music as “a UNIVERSE of pure *sound*, an audible WORLD” (104). The primary illusion in music is virtual time (109), and secondary illusions are virtual space (117) and virtual motion (108). In music, “the REALM of experience, so radically changed [from the plastic arts], is entirely full. There are forms in it, great and small, forms in motion, sometimes converging to make an impression of complete accomplishment and rest out of their very motions . . .” (104).

“The primary illusion of dance,” Langer says, “is a virtual REALM of Power—not actual, physically exerted power, but appearances of influence and agency created by virtual gesture” (175).

She says that “the nature of the dance illusion [is] the illusion of Powers, human, daemonic or impersonally magical, in a non-physical but symbolically convincing ‘WORLD’ . . . ” (178)—in other words, “a REALM of ‘Powers,’ wherein purely imaginary beings from whom the vital force emanates shape a whole WORLD of dynamic forms by their magnet-like, psycho-physical actions . . . ” (184). What is created in all forms of dance is “the image of a WORLD of vital forces, embodied or disembodied” (193). “The play of virtual powers manifests itself in the motions of illusory personages, whose passionate gestures fill the WORLD they create—a remote, rationally indescribable WORLD in which forces seem to become visible” (195). The primary illusion of a dancer’s work is “*the WORLD in which his body dances*” (197). “The dancer, or dancers, must transform the stage for the audience as well as for themselves into an autonomous, complete, virtual REALM” (204).

Regarding poetry, Langer states that “the poet’s business is to create an appearance of ‘experiences,’ the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced REALITY, a piece of *virtual life*” (212). The “experiential character of virtual events makes the ‘WORLD’ of a poetic work more intensively significant than the actual world” (216), and “if the reader cannot grasp the presented ‘WORLD,’ something is wrong with the poem or with his literary comprehension” (217). Langer also indicates the equivalence in terminology she uses: “I prefer to speak of ‘virtual life,’ although I may sometimes use the phrase ‘the WORLD of the poem’ to refer to the primary illusion as it occurs in a particular work” (228). Langer tries to divorce her view from that of the “escape from reality” of a neurotic’s “private world,” by saying that “a WORLD created as an artistic image is given us to look at, not to live in” (228).

Every successful work of literature, Langer says, is “an *illusion of experience* . . . [and] . . . there need not be any person in the virtual ‘WORLD’ who sees and reports” (245). In addition, “there are countless devices for creating the WORLD of a poem and articulating the elements of its virtual life” (246). Langer further notes that “the poetically created WORLD is not limited to the impressions of one

individual, but it is limited to impressions” (265). The impression of an “eternal present” in lyric poetry is created when the poet “creates a sense of concrete REALITY from which the time element has been canceled out, leaving a Platonic sense of ‘eternity’” (268). The sense of “historical projection” found in balladic poetry is due to the use of past tense in a way that events seem “like a REALITY lived and remembered” (273).

As for prose fiction, its use of discursive language is not for the purpose of discourse, Langer argues, but in order to create “the illusion of life directly lived, a WORLD in which thinking and conversation may occur” (297). Moreover, “a novel, to be vital, needs more than character study; it requires an illusion of a WORLD, of history perceived and felt” (299).

In drama, Langer explains, the stage is used, “with or without representational scenery, to delimit the ‘WORLD’ in which the virtual action exists” (322). In comedy, the “illusion of life, the stage-life, has a rhythm of feeling which is not transmitted to us by separate successive stimulations, but rather by our perception of its entire *Gestalt*—a whole WORLD moving into its future” (348). However, Langer argues, it is inappropriate to use farce or “comic relief” in heroic tragedies. She maintains that “there is no integral, implicit comedy—no everyday life—in the ‘WORLD’ of the play, to which the clowning naturally belongs and from which it may be derived without disorganization of the whole” (362). Langer later notes that the real source of deep satisfaction and joy in tragedy is “the vision of a WORLD wholly significant, of life spending itself and death the signature of its completion” (405).

The preceding material from Langer’s *Feeling and Form* would be of use to anyone seeking to “fill in the gaps” in Rand’s development of her “microcosm” model of art as “re-creation of reality.” Despite Langer’s eschewing of the latter term, it is clear that she and Rand are espousing fundamentally the same view.

A Mystery Artist-Philosopher: Did Langer Linger Over Rand?

As Riggenbach (2001) pointed out in these pages, Rand and Langer have a significant overlap in their philosophical interests—notably, in epistemology and aesthetics. Indeed, as Riggenbach discloses, Langer anticipated Rand’s concept of “sense of life” by at least half a decade (280).⁸ Langer cites the Spanish Existentialist Unamuno ([1913]1921) who, four decades earlier, wrote about sense of life as an attitude or feeling “when life is viewed as a whole” (Langer 1953, 351), as well as Centano (1941), who wrote about “Livingness . . . a sense of life, deep and intense” (11). Just as Rand in her aesthetics stressed the relationship between art and sense of life, so too does Langer (1953, 253), who writes: “Every good work of art has, I think, something that may be said to come from the world, and that bespeaks the artist’s own feeling about life.”

It should also be noted that the passage quoted by Torres and Kamhi (2000, 341 n. 5) and highlighted by Riggenbach (2001, 280) as Langer’s having anticipated Rand’s concept of “sense of life,” *also* presages Rand’s concept of “emotional abstraction.” Langer (1953, 372) states: “[I]t is the continuity of thought that systematizes our emotional reactions into attitudes with distinct feeling tones, and sets a certain scope for an individual’s passions.” Compare this with Rand (1966b, 27), who wrote: “[E]motional abstraction [is a process of] classifying things *according to the emotions they invoke*—i.e., of tying together, by association or connotation, all those things which have the power to make an individual experience the same (or a similar) emotion.”

With such striking mutual interests and commonalities in their approaches and conclusions, one naturally wonders whether Rand and Langer might have met and conversed or at least corresponded at some point relatively early in their careers, say, in the 1940s or early 1950s. Those who knew Rand’s aesthetic thinking best during the early years of the Objectivist movement do not recall her mentioning or discussing Langer or her ideas. Barbara Branden (10 March 2002) said that she didn’t recall Rand ever mentioning Langer, and that she

didn't believe they ever met or talked. Nathaniel Branden (14 February 2000) said that, to the best of his knowledge, Rand and Langer did not know each other. Hospers (13 February 2000) said that he didn't "think Ayn Rand even so much as heard of Langer. I mentioned Langer to Ayn several times, but there was no name recognition."

Yet, there is this haunting passage, suggesting that someone very much like Rand *did* make Langer's acquaintance prior to 1953:

I once heard an excellent artist, who is also an articulate philosopher, say: "When I was a young child—before I went to school, I think—I already knew what my life would be like. Not, of course, that I could guess what my fortunes would be, what economic situations and what political events I'd get into, but from the very beginning of my self-consciousness, I knew *what anything that could happen to me would have to be like.*" (190–91; emphasis in original)

This is so Randian in outlook and attitude that one wonders: Was this unnamed "excellent artist" and "articulate philosopher" Ayn Rand? This resort to anonymity by Langer is strikingly uncharacteristic of her. She was a very meticulous scholar and conscientious citer of her sources. (This is also eerily reminiscent of Hospers's omission in both his 1967 encyclopedia article and his 1982 book of any mention of Rand or anyone else as a proponent of the art as "recreation of reality" view.) Considering how unpopular Rand's political and philosophical ideas were during this particular period, could Langer have been trying to use the quote for illustrative purposes, without compromising or diluting its effectiveness (or her own credibility) by revealing the speaker as someone out of favor in academic circles?

Perhaps buried in the holdings of the estates of Langer and/or Rand are the answers to these questions. This issue should already have been resolved, of course, with the publication of massive amounts of Rand's personal writings in *Letters of Ayn Rand* (1995) and *Journals of Ayn Rand* (1997) but, alas, such is not the case. As has been

carefully documented by Chris Matthew Sciabarra (1998b, 134–36), Rand’s journals were subject to certain substantive alterations by their editor.

If Sciabarra’s unsettling revelations about Rand’s journals are just the tip of an iceberg of unknown size, there may be much more than a missing Rand-Langer connection lying hidden within the Ayn Rand Archives. Consider, for instance, the major difficulties Sciabarra encountered (1999a; 1999b) in attempting to gain the Ayn Rand Institute’s cooperation in researching Rand’s university career.

Given such impediments as currently exist, the prospects of gaining adequate access to the Archives for a realistic attempt to uncover the details of a Rand-Langer relationship (if it existed) are not encouraging. Still, one can hope that some day a more enlightened policy toward bona fide Rand researchers will emerge.⁹

Did Rand Understand What Camus Knew? “The Rebel” and “The Romantic Manifesto”

Unlike the “mystery relationship” between Langer and some unnamed artist-philosopher, no apparent “smoking gun” has been found that suggests a personal link between Rand and Camus. Nonetheless, the parallels and affinities between their aesthetic views are uncanny and illuminating.

First, there is the matter of how they view the basic nature of art. As already noted, Rand (like Langer) viewed art as the creation of an imaginary universe or “microcosm.” Camus (1951), who views artists as engaging in a kind of struggle characteristic of revolution and rebellion, says:

In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it, and *the construction of a substitute universe*. Rebellion, from this point of view, is *a fabricator of universes*. *This also defines art*. (255; emphasis added)

Camus is speaking generally here: “This tendency is *common to all the arts*. The artist *reconstructs the world according to his plan*” (255;

emphasis added).¹⁰ He also refers to the artwork as “the re-created universe” (269). Rand, in her well-quoted definition of art, said similarly that the artist re-creates reality “according to his metaphysical value-judgments.”¹¹

Such re-creation or reconstruction, however, is not wholesale. Rather, it is selective. Rand’s ([1969] 1975) definition explicitly stated this point, and she immediately expanded upon and clarified her definition:

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

Camus (1951) makes a similar point further on in his discussion:

This correction which the artist imposes by his language and by a *redistribution of elements derived from reality* is called *style* and gives the *re-created universe* its unity and its boundaries.¹² (269; emphasis added) . . . *To reproduce the elements of reality without making any kind of selection would be, if such an undertaking could be imagined, nothing but a sterile repetition of creation.* (270; emphasis added)

Style is very important to both Rand and Camus. Rand (1966b) viewed style as the product of the way the artist’s mind works, or his “psycho-epistemology” (40). Camus (1951, 271) also sees the artist’s mind as presupposed by his style:

Whatever may be the chosen point of view of an artist, one principle remains common to all creators: *stylization, which supposes* the simultaneous existence of reality and of *the mind*

that gives reality its form. (emphasis added)

Another important value to Rand and Camus is integration, which Camus refers to as “unity.” Speaking specifically of literature, Rand (1968, 81) said that the theme is the “integrator” of an artwork, and more generally (1966b, 40) that the theme “is the link *uniting* [an artwork’s] subject and . . . style.” For Rand, the fundamental conflicts in art occur between subject and style, usually with the subject matter not being worthy of the style.¹³

For Camus (1951, 271), however, the crux of unity in art is the relationship between the artwork’s form and content, which to him is fundamentally an issue of style:

A work in which the content overflows the form, or in which the form drowns the content, only bespeaks an unconvinced and unconvincing unity. In this domain, as in others, any unity that is not a unity of style is a mutilation.

While the labels Camus attaches to these tendencies toward pure content and pure form are, respectively, “realism” and “formalism” (269), it is clear from the context of his remarks that he is referring to what Rand (1962) called “Naturalism” (124) and “non-objective art” (128), respectively.

Camus (1951) regards these two tendencies as “heresies,” in the sense that they each reject the re-creation of reality. Reproduction of reality without selectivity is not *re-creation* of reality, but “sterile repetition” of reality; and imaginatively rearranging the elements of reality without intelligibility is not re-creation of *reality*, since no “substitute universe” has been presented:

The realist artist and the formal artist try to find unity where it does not exist, in reality in its crudest state, or in imaginative creation which wants to abolish all reality. (269)

Rand similarly pointed to the fundamental disunity engendered by these two approaches to art. She decried the Naturalistic bifurcat-

ing of the individual human being from his values and (later) his character (1969, 117), and (1971) the non-objectivistic disintegration of the individual human being's mind by unintelligible smears, grunts, etc. These certainly qualify as "mutilations," whether of the subject or viewer of art (77).

Unlike Rand, however, Camus (1951, 268) thinks that both "formal art and realist art are absurd concepts." Formalism (i.e., non-objective art) attempts to completely reject reality, which is impossible:

Formalism can succeed in purging itself more and more of real content, but there is always a limit. Even pure geometry, where abstract painting sometimes ends, still derives its color and its conformity to perspective from the exterior world. (269)

Rand would probably have agreed with this point. She was more concerned to argue (1971, 75), however, that paintings containing only attributes of entities and not entities themselves were still too far removed from reality to perform any important aesthetic function. Rand went further, roundly condemning the kind of modern art that reduced painting to "smears." Such art, she said, "demonstrates—by the negative means of an absence—the relationships of art to philosophy, of reason to man's survival, of hatred for reason to hatred for existence" (77).

Realism, says Camus (1951), has a corresponding defect. It results in "a degraded unity, a leveling off of human beings and of the world" by means of the technique of

describing men by their outside appearances, in their most casual actions, of reproducing, without comment, everything they say down to their repetitions, and finally by acting as if men were entirely defined by their daily automatisms. . . . This type of novel . . . logically ends, with its emphasis on the pathological, by giving itself as its unique aspect *the supposedly average man*. (265–66; emphasis added)

Though realism tries to affirm nothing but reality, however, Camus holds that art is, in fact, never realistic, because it “cannot dispense with a minimum of interpretation and arbitrariness” (269):

To be truly realistic, a description would have to be endless . . . [T]he realistic artist ought, logically, to fill several volumes with descriptions of characters and settings, still without succeeding in exhausting every detail. Realism is indefinite enumeration. (270)

Rand (1962, 124) had a similar view about the logical impossibility of Naturalism and its claim that writers “must content themselves with a faithful transcription, a carbon copy, of any existing concretes.” While, she noted, it is held by such authors that “a writer must reproduce what they call ‘real life,’ allegedly ‘as it is,’ exercising no selectivity and no value-judgments,” they are nonetheless “extremely selective in regard to two attributes of literature: *style* and *characterization*” (1963a, 164).¹⁴

Without selectivity, it would be impossible to achieve any sort of characterization whatever, neither of an unusual man nor of *an average one who is to be offered as statistically typical* of a large segment of the population. (164; emphasis added)

Thus, it is apparent that both Camus and Rand held, at least implicitly, the view that there is a continuum of “relatedness to reality” of artistic content, the extremes of which fall outside the bounds of art. If content (Camus) or subject (Rand) is *totally* elevated relative to form or style, the result is something that does not *re-create* reality. And if form (Camus) or style (Rand) is *totally* elevated in importance relative to content or subject, the result is something that does not re-create *reality*. That is, the extreme forms of realism, Naturalism, formalism, and non-objective art—assuming they are possible to execute—are not art, in the sense of “re-creation of reality.” And to the extent that they flirt with those limits, such artworks are defective.

This comparison of Camus and Rand would not be complete without a brief note as to their views on Romanticism. “Romantic activities,” Camus (1951, 260) wrote, “undoubtedly imply a rejection of reality. But this rejection is not a mere escapist flight.” It is not a rejection of reality per se, but only reality *as it is*: “The world of the novel is only a rectification of the world we live in, in pursuance of man’s deepest wishes” (263).

This resonates well with Rand’s invocation (1963a, 168) of Aristotle, who said that “history represents things only as they are, while fiction represents them ‘as they *might be* and *ought to be*.’” She drew the battle lines between Romanticism and realism/Naturalism most unequivocally when she stated:

If the projection of value-goals—the projection of an improvement on the given, the known, the immediately available—is an “escape” . . . then a hard-core realist is a vermin-eaten brute who sits motionless in a mud puddle, contemplates a pigsty and whines that “such is life.” *If that is realism, then I am an escapist.* (167–68)

To which Camus and Langer, one suspects, would have enthusiastically replied, “Take us with you!”

Notes

1. It is noted by *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2003) that Langer “wrote extensively on linguistic analysis and aesthetics,” and Ragz-International (2003) comments that Linguistic Analysis is the school emerging from Wittgenstein’s work: “This school believes that language itself is the object of philosophical investigation. Traditional problems in philosophy can be solved if language is rid of its obscurities and confusion. Other philosophers in this school were Gilbert Ryle, John Langshaw Austin, Susanne K. Langer, and Willard Van Orman Quine.”

2. Peikoff (1970) referred to Camus and Simone de Beauvoir as two of “many borderline Existentialists and lesser lights.” Camus eventually broke away from the more nihilistic Existentialism of Sartre and fashioned his own more humanistic viewpoint, rejecting “metaphysical revolt” (which he saw as a desire to destroy the world). It is ironic that the book in which Camus’s views most closely resembled those of Rand also generated a bitter dispute and ultimately a split between him and Sartre. See Olafson 1967, 15–18.

3. See, for instance, references in Langer 1953, 77; 1967, 99–100 to usages of “re-creation” by American aesthetician DeWitt Parker (1926) and French psychologist and musician Philippe Fauré-Frémiet (1934; 1940). See also Koestler (1964, 336–37),

who uses the term “re-create” twice in reference to stylistic economy.

4. This writer submitted an essay (1974) propounding these ideas for publication in *Reason Papers* in July 1974, and the essay was rejected due to the comment by an anonymous screener that the concept of a “microcosm” did not provide significant clarification of Rand’s view of art.

5. Also see Peikoff 1991: “Since art is a re-creation of the universe from a personal perspective, it offers man, in effect, a new reality to contemplate . . .” (448; emphasis added). Further see Peikoff (in Rand [1957] 1992): “[A] novel (like a statue or a symphony) does not require or tolerate an explanatory preface; it is a self-contained universe, aloof from commentary, beckoning the reader to enter, perceive, respond” (ix).

6. Arthur Koestler (1964, 306) more succinctly explains this connection: “Illusion, then, is the simultaneous presence and interaction in the mind of two universes, one real, one imaginary.”

7. Langer comments further on “architectural works like the great cathedrals, Greek temples, and some especially impressive places, such as museum halls that seem to enclose their treasures in a completely harmonious WORLD” (167). Compare this to Tracinski (1998, 11), who writes: “Architecture creates a man-made, idealized world—an environment created by the architect to fit the kind of life he sees as proper to man.”

8. For references to “sense of life,” see Langer 1953, 291, 327, 331, 339, 351, 372. The calculation of “at least half a decade” is based on the 1953 publication date of Langer’s *Feeling and Form* and the 1960 date of Rand’s radio address, “Our Esthetic Vacuum,” which is the first occasion on which she is known to have expounded her concept of “sense of life.”

9. Also see Kamhi 2003, 458–59.

10. This is also quite reminiscent of DeWitt Parker (an early twentieth century aesthetician), who wrote that “a work of art is a reconstruction of sensuous reality into an image of desire . . . building up in the imagination a little world that shall satisfy his wishes” (1926, 48, 30).

11. Despite the parallelism in these statements, because of the relatively prosaic expression of Camus’s view (“according to his plan”), it resembles more closely Rand’s statement (1963b, 169) about the relationship of art to ethics: “[E]thics is the engineering that provides the principles and blueprints [for the choices and actions that determine the course of one’s life]. Art creates the final product. It builds the model.”

12. By “correction,” Camus refers to the fact that attempts by an artist to precisely copy things from reality tends to “falsify their appearance” (269). Compare this to Rand’s insight (1971, 47) that selectivity, rather than photographic realism, can result in the subject of a still life looking “more real than it is in reality.”

13. See, for instance, Rand 1966b, 41; 1971, 49.

14. Rand was similarly critical of Naturalism in painting. See especially Rand 1963a, 166; 1966b, 41.

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