Screen of Vision: Ayn Rand and the Possibilities of an Objectivist Aesthetics of Cinema

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis is my attempt to establish a foundation, based on the philosophy of Objectivism as it was developed and elaborated by the Russian-American novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand, for the construction of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema. After contextualizing and explicating Rand's philosophy, I make the case that, propaedeutic to the construction of a new aesthetics of cinema, it is incumbent upon film scholars to refute the irrational and immoral philosophical premises that have long been destroying the philosophy of art in general and the discipline of film studies in particular. Due to the troubling combination of its contemporaneity, extremism, and considerable influence, I focus initially on the philosophical school of poststructuralism – which I contend has, since the 1960s, served as the default philosophical foundation for film scholars – before ultimately moving on to refute what I call the Kantian aesthetic tradition, of which I demonstrate poststructuralism is a deadly symptom. Upon clearing away this philosophical debris, I set about arguing for the probative value of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema by reigniting long-dormant debates about the validity of interpretation and the role of evaluation in film criticism. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate the value of an aesthetic orientation which I term aesthetic perfectionism, for it is my contention that perfectionism – which has recently emerged at the heart of key developments in film studies through the work of Stanley Cavell, which I argue motivated Rand's philosophical enterprise, and which I argue should motivate the philosophical enterprises of all scholars who strive to do justice to all that the cinema has to offer – is the key to unlocking an Aesthetics of Life capable of transforming the discipline of film studies.

Acknowledgments

To try to thank everyone who has contributed to my being here, writing these acknowledgments for this thesis, is a task that seems to me to be beyond Sisyphean. It is simply an impossible task to thank everyone who deserves to be thanked and to adequately express to everyone how thankful I am. There are, however, two groups of people for whom the more-than-Sisyphean effort required of me to accomplish this task has been earned.

The first group of people that I would like to thank are the people in my professional life. Of course, this group of people extends very widely to encompass the professors who introduced me to and guided me down the path of film studies during my time as a BA student at Columbia College Chicago and an MA student at the University of Chicago – professors such as Gary Fox, Dan Dinello, Dan Sutherland, Laurence Knapp, Jeff Smith, and Ron Falzone at Columbia and Tom Gunning, D.N. Rodowick, and Dan Morgan at Chicago. Professors Knapp, Smith, and Falzone in particular inspired me at a crucial turning point in my academic life; I would like to imagine having provided at least a meager return on their investments in me. But, in the interest of brevity, I will try to limit myself to the people who have entered my professional life since I arrived here in Cardiff.

First, I must thank the School of Journalism, Media, and Culture (JOMEC) at Cardiff University for awarding me the International Student Scholarship, which allowed me to come here all the way from Chicago, Illinois to write this thesis. During my time in Cardiff, I had the good fortune to encounter a number of people who helped me to enjoy my time here. The most important of those people I will list alphabetically. At one time or another, in one way or another, these fellow PhD travelers provided me with much-needed personal and/or professional support. I trust they all know why their names are on this list: Gemini Anderson, Hiu M. Chan, Evelina Kazakevičiūtė, Idil Osman, Sumit Mistry, Matthew Pudner, James Rendell, Qays Stetkevych, and Rebecca Wright. Special thanks to Hiu and Qays for reading and commenting on portions of this thesis and to Evelina for reading and commenting on this thesis in full.

The second group of people that I would like to thank are the people in my personal life. Once again, this is a group of friends and family that extends very widely. Going back to my childhood, I think of the time spent with my friends Brent Concialdi, Danny Gius, Alex Handwerker, Steve McKiernan, Brad Schiller, Jordan Shafran, and Zack Strauss – friends who were willing to spend their Friday nights in what, looking back, I realize was my first film class, in which I showed them Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon*,P Steve McQueen in *The Getaway*, and Robert De Niro in *Heat*. Why I was lucky enough to have friends who were willing to put up with my level of psychotic movie obsession, I will never know, but one thing that I do know is that the truest words in film history are the last words of the film *Stand by Me*: "I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve." And then, extending to my family, there is my grandfather, Joseph Barrowman, an architect and an early fan of Ayn Rand who actually helped organize Rand's speaking engagements in the Chicago area in the 1960s. Fast-forward to Christmas 2016 and he had a massive giftbox of Rand reading material for me to take back with me to Cardiff as I was preparing to finish my thesis. But, again, in the interest of brevity, I will limit myself to the people who have been a constant presence in my life during the time that I have been working to complete my PhD.

First, my friend, Alex Handwerker. One of the members of my inaugural film class, I have known Alex for nearly two decades now, and we have been watching and talking about movies for all twenty years. Though we have often been separated geographically – first during the years that Alex was serving in Afghanistan as a United States Marine and second during the years that I have been here in Cardiff – our friendship has never faltered. Movies punctuate my life, but Alex punctuates the movies in my life. I cannot say that about anybody else. I hope he knows how much it means to me to be able to say that.

Second, my sister, Alexa Hurley (née Barrowman). Like my parents, Alexa has suffered through many impromptu lectures of mine as I ranted and raved about whatever happened to be the topic of conversation. Unlike my parents, though, she has never been required to pretend to care about anything that I happen to be ranting and raving about. So, for her patience with her crazy movie-obsessed nerd of a brother, she deserves considerable thanks.

And the fact that she has recently read *Atlas Shrugged* and begun to borrow copies of Rand's books means, fortunately for me and unfortunately for her, that there are likely to be many more impromptu lectures to come.

Third, my mother, Flora Kelekian Barrowman. A PhD thesis is supposed to be 80,000 words, but that would not be nearly enough words to even begin to convey the debt of gratitude that I owe to my mom. In addition to the years of financial and emotional support, my mom has always been my greatest audience and my biggest fan. Even after the brutal eight- or twelve-hour shifts to which she has become accustomed over the course of her 30+ years as a nurse, when it took all the energy she had left just to keep her eyes open, she was never too tired to watch whatever the latest movie was that I was obsessed with and listen to me extol its virtues. The energy and the dedication that I have to my life and my work, I learned from her.

Fourth, my father, Chris Barrowman. How to thank the man without whom this thesis would not, *could not*, exist. It was courtesy of my dad that I was introduced to both Bruce Lee and Ayn Rand, two of the biggest influences in my personal life and my professional life. Whenever I have trouble getting my head around something, whenever I think that the world is spinning out of control, I can always rely on my dad to cut through the nonsense and anchor me in reality. Honesty is not always the most pleasant policy, but it is always the best policy, and my adoption of that policy is my attempt to follow my dad's example.

Bridging the space between the professional and the personal, I owe a few more debts of gratitude. In 2008 – the same year that, as a first-year undergraduate student, I happened to take my first film class – after spending two years on the Sherdog Mixed Martial Arts Forums discussing MMA, I discovered a sub-forum in which people were talking about movies. While there, I discovered a thread called "Serious Movie Discussion." Over the last ten years, hardly a month has gone by in which I was not in the SMD arguing about movies. Internet culture, especially Internet film culture, is often derided and denounced, especially in the hallowed halls of academia, but the education that I have received in the SMD has been invaluable to my growth as a scholar. The necessity to clarify my thoughts, to support my opinions, and to withstand criticism has made me ten times the scholar that I would have been had I not had the tremendous fortune of being able to spar with some of the sharpest minds that I have encountered either in or out of the academy.

Preface

"Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it – or at least similar thoughts" (Wittgenstein [1921] 2001: 3). These are the words that open the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the first and only book published by the German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein during his lifetime. As I thought about what I could say in the first Preface that I have ever had occasion to write, I found Wittgenstein's words ringing in my ears. Given both the ideas that I express in this thesis and the manner in which I express them, understanding (to say nothing of agreement) is something that I suspect will be hard to come by. To describe myself as a *disagreeable* thinker would be an understatement. My embattled – though, fortunately for me, not (yet) embittered – supervisor, Paul Bowman, once described me as *truculent*. I liked that description, and, as my scholarship has become more and more polemical, I have worn it as a badge of honor.

Of course, polemics are not to everybody's liking. Indeed, many have argued that polemics defeat the purpose of academic inquiry and thus have no place in – or are even anathema to – proper scholarship (Foucault [1984] 1997; Mouffe 1999; Giroux 2000; Brown 2001; Bowman 2003, 2007). Ruminating on this issue, the American philosopher Stanley Cavell posited that the place that one thinks polemics have in philosophy – or should have, if they should have a place at all – is not so much a point of disagreement regarding the practice of philosophy as it is a "variance" in scholars' conceptions of "the role of moral judgment" in philosophy (Cavell 1995: 204). Inspired initially by the mercilessly trenchant polemics of the British film and cultural critic Andrew Britton, whose blistering tour de force "The Ideology of *Screen*" (Britton 1979) still stands in my estimation as the single most impressive piece of film scholarship ever written, it has been the work of the Russian-American novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand that has demonstrated most clearly to me the value of polemical philosophy in its ability to strip away the superfluities, the obfuscations, and the inanities and lay bare the fundamental issues, both intellectual and moral, with which philosophers are confronted upon taking up the mantle of a thinker. The irony is that, by devoting myself to a thesis on the philosophy of Ayn Rand, I almost do not even need to preface my work with a consideration of the place of polemics in philosophy, because, regardless of how scholars feel about polemics the very mention of Rand's name is apt to draw polemical fire from virtually every corner of the academy.

On an episode of the political talk show *The Rubin Report*, in which Dave Rubin had on as his guest Yaron Brook, the present Chairman of the Board at the Ayn Rand Institute, Rubin remarked how "just by saying 'Ayn Rand,' a certain percentage of people go bonkers" (Rubin in Rubin and Brook 2016). Expressing a similar sentiment, the American political commentator Ben Shapiro sardonically observed that, in any given university course, the chances are that, if you want to do well in the course, "citing Ayn Rand probably [will not be] the best strategy" (Shapiro 2013: 30). Given this intellectual climate, it was the opposite of a surprise when, nearing the completion of this thesis, I came across a call for papers for a conference that is to take place at the University of Reading in the fall of 2018 entitled "Ayn Rand from the Left." The conference organizer, Neil Cocks, mentions in the call for papers, in the absence of anything even resembling an argument, that Rand's work is "clearly" so "irredeemable" – not to mention "so vulgar, so confused, so…silly" – that even holding a conference to criticize her appears to transgress academic propriety (Cocks 2017).

These sentiments typify what might be called the "reception" of Rand in academia, though I think "repression" would be more accurate. It is no secret that academia has in the 21st Century degenerated into a far-Left echo chamber – if not into a full-on cult (cf. Boghossian and Lindsay 2018) – something that public intellectuals Left, Right, and Center like Brook, Shapiro, Sir Roger Scruton, Jordan Peterson, Gad Saad, Sam Harris, Camille Paglia, Bret Weinstein, Steven Pinker, and Jonathan Haidt, to name only a few, are fighting to change. And yet, in the vitriolic responses with which the mere mention of Ayn Rand is invariably met, I find the same thing that Cavell found with respect to what he diagnosed as the longstanding academic repression of Ralph Waldo Emerson: That "it does not follow from [Rand's] institutionalized silencing that [she] failed to raise the call for philosophy"; on the contrary, "the fact of [her] call's repression would be the sign that it has been heard" (Cavell 1995: 210). Thus, I would say that my principal aim in this thesis is to try to pave the way for a (more) reasonable reception of Rand's philosophy. I have found in her work ideas and insights that are more probing, provocative, and promising than I have found anywhere else, and it would be an absolute disgrace if the minds best-suited to inherit her philosophy failed to at least consider, if not realize, its promise.

Now, to preface my work in such grandiose terms may make it seem like I wrote this thesis on a soapbox. This brings me back to Wittgenstein's prefatory remarks. In his preface to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein said that his purpose in writing it would be achieved "if it gave pleasure to one person who read and understood it" (Wittgenstein [1921] 2001: 3). That is an understandable, even sympathetic, purpose. But it was not my purpose. To quote the creed of the protagonists in Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged*: "I swear – by my life and my love of it – that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine" (Rand 1957: 1069). I aimed at doing different things at different points in this thesis – among them, paving the way for a (more) reasonable reception of Rand's philosophy, documenting and criticizing the history of film studies, and highlighting potentially fruitful avenues for the future of film studies – and a number of those aims were taken in consideration of other scholars and of the scholarly community more broadly. But my driving purpose was very simple: I wanted to honestly understand and express myself.

This thesis was written by me and for me. I have been trying, each and every day, to better understand and consistently improve upon the person – and, following from that, the scholar – that I am and can potentially become. This philosophy of life, manifest in the life and work of Ayn Rand, is what I discuss in this thesis as the philosophy of perfectionism. It is not a philosophy for everybody. It is unendingly challenging and, for some, unbearably painful. But its satisfactions and rewards are well-worth the effort. My proof for that claim is this thesis. It has been a challenging and painful journey of self-discovery, a journey over the course of which I have learned more about myself and about the world in which I live than I could have possibly imagined when I initially started writing it, yet I would not trade a single painful blow taken or a single challenge overcome. From this perspective, I need to slightly tweak Wittgenstein's opening words from the *Tractatus* for my purposes: Perhaps this thesis will be understood only by people who have themselves already had the thoughts that are expressed in it, or at least similar thoughts – and who are strong enough to live up to them.

Art is the fuel and the spark plug of a man's soul; its task is to set a soul on fire and never let it go out. The task of providing that fire with a motor and a direction belongs to philosophy.

– Ayn Rand ([1969] 1975: 145)

Introduction – Towards an Objectivist Aesthetics of Cinema

It is absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with his limbs, but not of being unable to defend himself with rational speech, when the use of rational speech … can confer the greatest of benefits … Before some audiences, not even the possession of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction … [Here] we must be able to employ persuasion, just as deduction can be employed, on opposite sides of a question – not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that, if another man argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to confute him.

– Aristotle (350 BCEf: 4622-4623)

In response to questions regarding one's reasons for practicing a martial art, one of the most common answers given is *self-defense*, the desire to equip oneself with the tools necessary to live confidently in the world ready for whatever *physical* attack may come. By contrast, in response to questions regarding one's reasons for practicing philosophy, self-defense is rarely given as an answer. The precedent for philosophy-as-self-defense is the work of Aristotle, for whom philosophical argument was precisely a form of *combat*.[1] In more recent history, the most prominent practitioner of philosophy-as-self-defense has been the Russian-American novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand. In her fiction writing, most notably in *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), but more extensively in her later non-fiction writing, Rand developed a philosophical system which she called Objectivism. Following Aristotle, Objectivism was intended by Rand to serve as a form of self-defense, as a means to equip oneself with the tools necessary to live confidently in the world ready for whatever *intellectual* attack may come.

In an address given, fittingly enough, at West Point to the graduating class of 1974, Rand maintained that one must study even philosophical ideas that seem to be "blatantly false," to "make no sense," and to "bear no relation to real life," for if one fails to understand such ideas then one is "vulnerable to the worst among them" (Rand 1974a: 7-8). Connecting philosophy to military combat, Rand elaborated:

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[1] For examples of his propensity for combat metaphors, see Aristotle (350 BCEb: 566; 350 BCEc: 1654; 350 BCEf: 4680, 4697).

In [the military], you know the importance of keeping track of the enemy's weapons, strategy, and tactics – and of being prepared to counter them. The same is true in philosophy: You have to understand the enemy's ideas and be prepared to refute them, you have to know his basic arguments and be able to blast them (Rand 1974a: 7-8).

Following the philosophical precedents set by Aristotle and Rand, I intend in this thesis to use the principles of Objectivism as a means of self-defense against the prevailing philosophical tendencies of academic engagements with the cinema. Throughout the history of film studies, scholars have frequently stepped onto the philosophical battlefield ill-equipped for combat, and, as I will argue at length in this thesis, this has led scholars to countenance a wide variety of irrational and immoral ideas deleterious not only to the art of film but to the very concept of art.[2] More recently, as part of the "film-philosophy" movement, scholars have sought to recalibrate the discipline of film studies and provide it with a solid philosophical anchor.[3] This is a welcome development for film studies. However, so long as the unexamined philosophical premises that have plagued the discipline since its inception remain operative and unchallenged, film studies will be unable to make any meaningful progress in this direction.[4] Thus, prior to any attempts to make ground in the realm of film criticism, I will work here in this Introduction and continue in the next two chapters to clear away the most substantial philosophical debris in order to establish a foundation for the construction of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema.

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[2] For genealogies and critiques of these ideas and the forms they have taken in film studies, see the work of Robin Wood (2002, 2006), Andrew Britton (2009), William Cadbury and Leland Poague (1982), Noël Carroll (1982, 1983, 1988a, 1988b, 1996), David Bordwell (1985, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1996a, 1996b), and D.N. Rodowick ([1988] 1994, 1991).

[3] Film-philosophy is still in the process of establishing itself as a viable alternative to film studies orthodoxy. For the probative value of film-philosophy, see, beyond the individual contributions to the groundbreaking *Film-Philosophy* journal and the work of such philosophical heralds as Stanley Cavell ([1971] 1979, 1981a, 1996, 2004, 2005b) and Carroll (1988a, 1988b, 1996a, 1996b, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2008, 2009, 2010), the work of contemporary scholars such as Rodowick (1997, 2001, 2007, 2015), Stephen Mulhall ([2001] 2008), Daniel Frampton (2006), David Sorfa (2006a, 2006b, 2016, 2018), Thomas E. Wartenberg (2007), Daniel Shaw (2008, 2012, 2017), Berys Gaut (2010), Robert Sinnerbrink (2011, 2015), Daniel Morgan (2011, 2012), Robert Pippin (2012, 2013, 2017), and Daniel Yacavone (2015). Additionally, for my own take on film-philosophy beyond the scope of this thesis, see Barrowman (2018a).

[4] Observing that "film studies has recently declared itself in need of reconception," Cavell expressed his hope that "part of this reconception will take the form of a wish to understand how it got to its present form" (Cavell 2004: 319). From this perspective, this thesis is my attempt to aid in the understanding of how film studies got to its present form on the one hand and to suggest the new form that it should take on the other.

Objectivism served, for Rand, as a comprehensive view of existence, what she liked to call "a philosophy for living on Earth" (Rand 1974a: 10). Rand broke Objectivism down into five major branches, and I will discuss all five in turn: (1) Metaphysics, (2) Epistemology, (3) Ethics, (4) Politics, and (5) Aesthetics.

(1) Metaphysics

Objectivism is built on what Rand designates *axiomatic concepts*. An axiom, as she explains, is "a statement that identifies the base of knowledge and of any further statement pertaining to that knowledge, a statement necessarily contained in all others, whether any particular speaker chooses to identify it or not." Furthermore, an axiom "defeats its opponents by the fact that they have to accept it and use it in the process of any attempt to deny it" (Rand 1957: 1040). The axiom at the heart of Objectivism is *existence exists*, the propositional form of which is *A is A*. The axiomatic concepts that result from this axiom are *existence*, *identity*, and *consciousness*; they follow from the axiom and its two corollaries: First, that something exists which one perceives, and, second, that one exists possessing consciousness, consciousness being the faculty of perceiving that which exists. To simplify: *Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification* (Rand 1957: 1016).

Existence, identity, and consciousness are thus, Rand affirms, the "irreducible primaries" implied in all human activity:

> From the first ray of light you perceive at the start of your life to the widest erudition you might acquire at its end, whether you know the shape of a pebble or the structure of a solar system, the axioms remain the same: That *it* exists and that you *know* it (Rand 1957: 1016).

This common-sense metaphysics quite conspicuously flies in the face of most of what has been offered by modern philosophers.[5] However, the fact that Rand's views were fundamentally

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[5] Having invoked the notion of common sense, I am reminded of the pithy dictum of the Roman philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius: "There are certain common conceptions of the mind which are self-evident only to the wise" (Boëthius cited by Johannes Caterus in Descartes 1984: 70). Interestingly, among her fellow 20th Century philosophers, Rand's closest philosophical allies are Edmund Husserl and Ludwig Wittgenstein. For both Husserl and Wittgenstein, ideas akin to "existence exists" anchor their philosophical projects. In Husserl's case, consider his emphasis on what he calls "original self-evidence," that which is "behind" all axioms (Husserl [1939] 1970: 365); in Wittgenstein's case, meanwhile, consider his claim that we do not *assume* that "existence exists" but that, more

antithetical to much of what constitutes modern philosophy was precisely what impelled her to articulate her ideas and provide justification for a metaphysical perspective which does not merely acknowledge the primacy of an *objective reality* but which also acknowledges the ability of human beings to *acquire knowledge of* objective reality. The sides in this philosophical battle, in Rand's terminology, are that of *reason*, which is the province of logic and which alone provides the means of acquiring knowledge of the world, versus *mysticism*, which is the province of whim and which thus represents a rejection of logic and, as a consequence, cannot provide the means of acquiring knowledge of the world.[6]

From the Objectivist perspective, there are two fundamental questions – "*What* do I know?" and "*How* do I know?" – that undergird every human thought and action. Far from providing the backdrop for philosophy, however, Rand laments and explores the calamitous consequences of the fact that the efforts of most philosophers through the ages have consisted of "attempts to escape one or the other of the two fundamental questions":

> Men have been taught either that knowledge is impossible (skepticism) or that it is available without effort (mysticism). These two positions appear to be antagonists but are, in fact, two variants on the same theme, two sides of the same fraudulent coin … Philosophically, the mystic is usually an exponent of the *intrinsic* (revealed) school of epistemology; the skeptic is usually an advocate of epistemological *subjectivism*. But, psychologically, the mystic is a subjectivist who uses intrinsicism as a means to claim the primacy of *his* consciousness over that of others [while] the skeptic is a disillusioned intrinsicist who, having failed to find automatic supernatural guidance, seeks a substitute in the collective subjectivism of others (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 79).

In Rand's estimation, the fundamental mistake of mysticism is the tendency to "start in midstream"; that is, rather than starting with *the primacy of existence*, it is *the primacy of consciousness* that serves as the first principle. To start from the primacy of consciousness,

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accurately, "in the entire system of our language-games, it belongs to the foundations … [as that which] forms the basis of action, and therefore, naturally, of thought" (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 52e). I will return to these salient connections between Rand, Husserl, and Wittgenstein in Chapter 1.

[6] For her most salient rehearsals of the battle between reason and mysticism, see Rand (1957; 1960; [1966-1967] 1990).

however, is to countenance a contradiction, for a consciousness with nothing to be conscious *of* is a contradiction in terms. "You can become aware of the fact that you are conscious," Rand maintains, "only *after* you have become conscious *of* something – and in fact long after"; it is only after one is conscious of the world that one is able to "identify the fact that it is some function in [the] mind that is performing this process of awareness" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 246).[7]

In the form of his famous formulation "I think, therefore I am" (Descartes [1637] 2003: 23), René Descartes is responsible for placing the primacy of consciousness in the position of first principle in modern philosophy.[8] Immanuel Kant, meanwhile, revived the mysticism of Platonic philosophy and, by secularizing ancient dogmas, provided mysticism with a new lease on life.[9] Furthermore, adding insult to injury, Kant also injected into philosophy a pernicious fatalism. In the first line in the preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant alleges that the "fate" of reason is to be "burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity

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[7] For her most sustained considerations of the primacy of existence, see Rand (1957, [1966-1967] 1990). For insightful subsequent commentaries on the Objectivist metaphysics, see Leonard Peikoff (1982, 1991), David Kelley ([1990] 2000), Chris Matthew Sciabarra ([1995] 2013), Allan Gotthelf (2000), Roger E. Bissell (2007, 2008, 2014, 2015, 2018), Harry Binswanger (2014), and Jason G. Rheins (2016).

[8] The primacy of consciousness is an example of a fallacy that Harry Binswanger refers to as *the fallacy of pure self-reference* (Binswanger 2014: 248-251). However, it warrants mentioning that, even though Descartes was mistaken to place the primacy of consciousness in the position of first principle, this is not to say that the Objectivist axiom "existence exists" was absent from his philosophical system. In response to Marin Mersenne – who, after reading Descartes' *Meditations*, had suggested that he "set out [his] entire argument in geometrical fashion, starting from a number of definitions, postulates, and axioms" (Mersenne 1641: 92) – Descartes defended his decision to proceed, as it were, philosophically rather than geometrically; however, he obliged Mersenne and listed ten definitions, seven postulates, and ten "axioms or common notions" (Descartes 1641b: 116). Significantly included is the "common notion" that "existence is contained in the idea or concept of every single thing" (Descartes 1641b: 117). Though attempting to bring Cartesian philosophy in line with Objectivism is beyond the scope of this thesis, I think that it is safe to say that Descartes simply found the notion that "existence exists" *so* common that to have made it the first principle would have seemed to him redundant. As he remarked in a letter to Claude Clerselier, the axiomatic status of existence "appears so evident to the understanding that we cannot but believe it, even though this may be the first time in our life that we have thought of it" (Descartes 1646: 271).

[9] To clarify, rather than framing the philosophical critiques that comprise this thesis as critiques of the Platonic philosophical tradition, I am framing them as critiques of the Kantian philosophical tradition. My reasoning is twofold. First, as I mentioned, the Kantian tradition is the secularization of Platonic mysticism, so, essentially, to critique the Kantian tradition *is* to critique the Platonic tradition (Peikoff 1967). Second, I share with Yaron Brook the sense that, given how early in the attempts of human beings to come to terms with the world and our place in it Plato initiated his philosophical enterprise, it is more sensible and more pressing to critique the modern philosophy of Kant than the ancient philosophy of Plato (Brook in Rubin and Brook 2017). Thus, while there is a certain amount of truth to the claim that the history of philosophy is a battle between Plato and Aristotle, for the purposes of this thesis, I am framing the battle as one between Kant and Rand.

of human reason" (Kant 1781: 99). In other words, Kant is not only starting in midstream and elevating the primacy of consciousness to first principle, he is alleging that it is our fate as human beings (the only species forced, apparently by some variant of Descartes' evil demon, to toil away in a Sisyphean quest for understanding) to drown in the waters of knowledge, with reason serving not as an *instrument of survival* but rather as an *agent of death*.[10]

Kant's fatalism corroborates the claim stated in no uncertain terms by D.N. Rodowick that skepticism is "death dealing" (Rodowick 2015: 201). In fact, by the time he published the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant's skepticism had only intensified. Based on his postulation in the preface to the second edition – that "if, after many preliminaries and preparations are made, a science gets stuck as soon as it approaches its end, or if, in order to reach this end, it must often go back and set out on a new path; or likewise if it proves impossible for the different co-workers to achieve unanimity as to the way in which they should pursue their common aim; then we may be sure that such a study is merely groping about" (Kant 1787: 106) – Kant's "Copernican Revolution" can be understood as an attempt on his part to alleviate his fear that metaphysics was not just such a "groping about" but, worse yet, "a groping among *mere* concepts" (Kant 1787: 110, my emphasis).

In order to avoid the difficulties of (and the potential for failure in) human cognition, Kant's "solution" to metaphysics is stated in the following famous passage, which, for my purposes in elucidating Objectivism, may serve as the exemplary instance of starting in midstream with the primacy of consciousness:

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[10] The fatalism evident in Kant's picture of the human experience is an example of what Rand describes as the *malevolent universe premise* (Rand 1948a: 199). As I indicated, the roots of the malevolent universe premise can be found in Descartes' evil demon argument. However, Kant clearly missed the part where Descartes rejected this entire line of thinking: "Here is the objection of objections and the epitome of the entire doctrine held by those 'people of great intelligence' [among the ranks of whom Kant was soon to join]. All the things that we can understand and conceive are [allegedly] only imaginings and fictions of our mind which cannot have any subsistence. And it follows from this that nothing that we can in any way understand, conceive, or imagine should be accepted as true; in other words, we must entirely close the door to reason and content ourselves with being monkeys or parrots rather than men if we are to deserve a place among these great minds. For, if the things we can conceive must be regarded as false merely because we can conceive them, all that is left is for us to be obliged to accept as true only things which we do not conceive. We shall have to construct our doctrines out of these things, imitating others without knowing why, like monkeys, and uttering words whose sense we do not in any way understand, like parrots" (Descartes 1646: 275).

Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence, let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us (Kant 1787: 110).[11]

The *truth* of skepticism, then, as Stanley Cavell has persuasively argued, is that, inasmuch as "*what* skepticism questions or denies my knowledge of *is* the world of objects I inhabit, is the *world*" (Cavell 1979: 448), the desire of skeptics to know with certainty the existence of the world paradoxically gives ground to "a sense of powerlessness" in the face of "the precariousness and arbitrariness of existence, the utter contingency in the fact that things are as they are" (Cavell 1979: 236). On this picture, a more accurate name for skepticism presents itself: *Fear*. Through the act, motivated by fear, of sealing off from human knowledge *the* world in its awe-inspiring immediacy and intractability, skeptics create in its place *a* world that they fancy as subject to their whims. The skeptic's experience of trying to *prove* that existence exists, moreover, is "one of trying to establish an absolutely firm connection with that world-object from that sealed position," a self-defeating task undertaken "as though, deprived of the ordinary forms of life in which that connection is, and is alone, secured, [the skeptic] is trying to establish it in his immediate consciousness, then and there" (Cavell 1979: 238). Rand adds color to the picture painted by Cavell of the fear that drives skepticism in the following manner:

Every form of causeless self-doubt, every feeling of inferiority and secret unworthiness, is, in fact, man's hidden dread of his inability to deal with existence. But the greater his terror, the more fiercely he clings to the murderous doctrines that choke him … He will fake, evade, blank out; he will cheat himself of reality, of existence, of happiness, of mind; and he will ultimately cheat himself of self-esteem by struggling to preserve its illusion rather than to risk discovering its lack

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[11] Influential in promulgating this pernicious philosophical tradition in post-Kantian philosophy was Friedrich Nietzsche. Consider the following (profoundly Kantian) retort from *Beyond Good and Evil* with respect to what Nietzsche disdainfully regards as "the superstitions of the logicians" (Nietzsche [1886] 2003: 47): "Whoever feels able to answer [any] metaphysical questions … will find a philosopher today ready with a smile and two question marks: 'My dear sir,' the philosopher will perhaps give him to understand, 'it is improbable you are not mistaken, but why do you want the truth at all?'" (Nietzsche [1886] 2003: 45-46; see also Nietzsche [1883-1888] 1967, esp. 268-269).

… A [skeptic] is a man who surrendered his mind at its first encounter with the minds of others. Somewhere in the distant reaches of his childhood, when his own understanding of reality clashed with the assertions of others, with their arbitrary orders and contradictory demands, he gave in to so craven a fear of independence that he renounced his rational faculty … [That is why,] when you listen to a [skeptic's] harangue on the impotence of the human mind and begin to doubt *your* consciousness, not his, when you permit your precariously semi-rational state to be shaken by any assertion and decide it is safer to trust his superior certainty and knowledge, the joke is on both of you. Your sanction is the only source of certainty he has. The supernatural power that a [skeptic] dreads, the unknowable spirit he worships, the consciousness he considers omnipotent, is *yours* (Rand 1957: 1044, 1057).

(2) Epistemology

At this point, it might be objected that Rand's "refutation" of skepticism merely begs the question, for the question at which all such refutations hit bedrock is: "How do I *know*?"[12] This is precisely an *epistemological* issue, and it is the issue to which Rand devoted the bulk of her energy in formulating Objectivism. The task facing human beings, Rand observes, is to bring existence and existents "into the realm of the humanly knowable," a task which she notes requires "the most rigorous compliance with *objective* rules and facts if the end product is to be *knowledge*" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 8). The basis of the Objectivist epistemology is the metaphysical axiom "existence exists," and for anything to qualify as knowledge, it must proceed from the axiomatic concepts existence, identity, and consciousness. The job of philosophy is not, Rand clarifies, to determine *what* exists; that, she maintains, is the province of the various branches of science. The job of philosophy, rather, is to determine what has to be true of everything that *does* exist; that, she maintains, is the starting point from which all inquiries must proceed if the end result is to qualify as knowledge.[13] And what has to be true of everything that exists is that it must have an

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[12] Rand takes most (but significantly not all) of her cues in response to this question from Aristotle (350 BCEa, 350 BCEd). For her own thoughts on her Aristotelian influence, see Rand (1948b: 393-394; 1961a: 17-19; 1963a). For her thoughts on her deviations from Aristotle, see Rand ([1966-1967] 1990: 52-54, [1958] 2000: 21-22). For insightful subsequent examinations of Rand's Aristotelianism, see Peikoff (1982, 1991), Kelley ([1990] 2000), Gotthelf (2000), Roderick T. Long (2000), Darrin Walsh (2002), Bissell (2007, 2008, 2014, 2015), Rheins (2016), and Gregory Salmieri (2016b).

[13] To note another congeniality with Wittgenstein, consider Rand's perspective on philosophical investigations in light of Wittgenstein's famous formulation: "[Philosophy] takes its rise not from an interest in the facts of nature … but

identity, that A must be *A*.[14] The form that this realization takes in consciousness is outlined by Rand as follows: "Something *exists* of which I am *conscious*; I must discover its *identity*" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 59).[15] From this realization, one proceeds on the basis of the activities of *differentiation* and *integration* (in accordance with the Law of Identity) which are the cognitive processes by which human beings bring existence and existents into the realm of the knowable. This is the practice of *concept formation*, a practice the cultivation of which is the essence of epistemology:

> Since man's knowledge is gained and held in conceptual form, the validity of man's knowledge depends on the validity of concepts … [However,] since consciousness is a specific faculty … its range is limited. It cannot perceive everything at once; since awareness, on all levels, requires an active process, it cannot do everything at once. Whether the units with which one deals are percepts or concepts, the range of what man can hold in the focus of his conscious awareness at any given moment is limited. The essence, therefore, of man's incomparable cognitive power is the ability to reduce a vast amount of information to a minimal number of units – which is the task performed by his conceptual faculty (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 1, 63).

If conceptualization, on Rand's terms, is "a method of expanding man's consciousness by reducing the number of its content's units – a systematic means to an unlimited integration of cognitive data" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 64), then there must be a discernible logic according to which the method functions. For Rand, the "epistemological razor" according to which the method of conceptualization functions is as follows: "*Concepts are not to be multiplied beyond necessity –* the corollary of which is: *Nor are they to be integrated in disregard of necessity*" (Rand [1966-

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from an urge to understand the basis, or essence, of everything empirical. Not, however, as if to this end we had to hunt out new facts; it is, rather, of the essence of [philosophical investigation] that we do not seek to learn anything *new* by it. We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view … We feel as if we had to penetrate phenomena. Our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the '*possibilities*' of phenomena … [towards that which] we know when no one asks us but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it … [towards that which] we need to *remind* ourselves of (Wittgenstein [1949] 1967: 42 [§89-§90]).

[14] Since denying that A must be *A* implies that A is something *else* (i.e. *something* else), it constitutes a logical fallacy which Rand designates *the fallacy of the stolen concept*, or, less formally, *concept stealing* (Rand [1966-1967] 1990), on which I will elaborate presently.

[15] The Objectivist model of conceptualization explicated here by Rand takes as its point of departure Aristotle's contention, presaging the Law of Identity, that "we cannot grasp what it is to be something without grasping the fact *that it is*; for it is impossible to know *what* a thing is if we are ignorant of *whether* it is" (Aristotle 350 BCEa: 348).

1967] 1990: 72). To elucidate the specifics of her understanding of concepts and their function in cognition, Rand considers two potential obstacles to conceptualization as a means of underscoring the usefulness of the aforementioned razor in overcoming such obstacles: First, the existence of a black swan and the "problem" it poses to the classification of existents as "swans," and, second, the existence of a Martian with a rational mind but a spider body and the "problem" it poses to the classification of existents as "humans":

> In the case of black swans, it is objectively mandatory to classify them as "swans" because virtually all of their characteristics are similar to the characteristics of white swans, the difference of color [being] of no cognitive significance (concepts are not to be multiplied beyond necessity). In the case of the rational spider from Mars (if such a creature were possible), the differences between him and man would be so great that the study of one would scarcely apply to the other and, therefore, the formation of a new concept to designate the Martians would be objectively mandatory (concepts are not to be integrated in disregard of necessity) (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 73).

Much like Rand's common-sense metaphysics, this common-sense epistemology – predicated as it is on the Law of Identity and affirming as it does the efficacy of human consciousness in perceiving the objective, external world – also flies in the face of much of modern philosophy, which is distinct for the profundity of its conceptual nihilism justified with reference to an extreme and untenable linguistic relativism. Conceptual nihilists, insofar as they deny the possibility of *acquiring knowledge of* the objective, external world (if they do not also deny the *existence of* an objective, external world), provide further proof of the truth of skepticism, for they produce the situation they seek to overcome and thus condemn themselves to perpetual disappointment.[16] As Rand frames this self-defeating "logic":

> Do you cry that you find no answers? By what means did you hope to find them? You reject your tool of perception – your mind – then complain that the universe is a mystery. You discard your key, then wail that all doors are locked against you. You start out in pursuit of the irrational, then damn existence for making no sense (Rand 1957: 1054).

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[16] Beyond his general notion of the truth of skepticism, Cavell clarifies the ubiquity of disappointment in the life of the skeptic with reference to the state he describes under the heading of "living one's skepticism" (Cavell 1979: 437-458; see also Wittgenstein [1949] 1967: 38-43 [§81-§90] and Rodowick 2015: 198-203). I will return to the notion of living one's skepticism in Chapter 1 in relation to Jacques Derrida and the practice of deconstruction.

To make matters worse, the "solution" flaunted by conceptual nihilists to this (il)logical loop is a logical fallacy designated by Rand as *the fallacy of the stolen concept*, or, less formally, *concept stealing*. This fallacy consists of denying the primacy of a putatively invalid concept and then asserting the primacy of a derivative concept. She elaborates on the "logic" of concept stealing as follows:

> [Concept stealers] proclaim that there are no entities, that nothing exists but motion, and blank out the fact that *motion* presupposes the thing which moves, that without the concept of entity there can be no such concept as motion … they proclaim that there is no Law of Identity, that nothing exists but change, and blank out the fact that *change* presupposes the concept of what changes, from what and to what, that without the Law of Identity no such concept as change is possible … they seek to seize power over all of existence while denying that existence exists. "We know that we know nothing," they chatter, blanking out the fact that they are claiming knowledge. "There are no absolutes," they chatter, blanking out the fact that they are uttering an absolute. "You cannot *prove* that you exist or that you're conscious," they chatter, blanking out the fact that *proof* presupposes existence, consciousness, and a complex chain of knowledge: The existence of something to know, of a consciousness able to know it, and of a knowledge that has learned to distinguish between such concepts as the proved and the unproven (Rand 1957: 1039-1040).

The "crucially important" fact that one must grasp with respect to concepts is the fact that concepts are *open-ended classifications* – that is to say, they include *the discovered and the yet-to-be-discovered characteristics of existence/existents* (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 66). Ironically, it is precisely in grasping this fact that conceptual nihilists err:

> "*When* can we claim that we know what a concept stands for?" they clamor … [a question which] implies the unadmitted presupposition that concepts are not a cognitive device of man's type of consciousness, but a repository of closed, out-of-context omniscience – and that concepts refer, not to the existence of the external world, but to the frozen, arrested state of knowledge inside any given consciousness at any given moment. On such a premise, every advance of knowledge is a setback, a demonstration of man's ignorance … Like a spoiled, disillusioned child who had expected predigested capsules of automatic knowledge, [a conceptual nihilist] stamps his foot at reality and cries that context, integration, mental effort, and first-hand inquiry are too much to

expect of him, that he rejects so demanding a method of cognition, and that he will manufacture his own "constructs" from now on (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 67-68).

The ubiquity and the deleteriousness of skepticism lend credence to Rodowick's contention that "to restore belief in *this* world, to turn us away from the interiority, anonymity, and even solipsism of skepticism toward a shared existence with the world," is the most pressing challenge currently facing philosophy (Rodowick 2015: 227). Cavell, for his part, saw this challenge as consisting of releasing the world – or, as he refers to it in his more Thoreauvian moments, "nature" – from "private holds":

> [Philosophy] reasserts that, however we may choose to parcel or not to parcel nature among ourselves, nature is held – we are held by it – only in common. Its declaration of my absence and of nature's survival of me puts me in mind of origins, and shows me that I am astray. It faces me, draws my limits, and discovers my scale; it fronts me, with whatever wall at my back, and gives me horizon and gravity. It reasserts that, in whatever locale I find myself, I am to locate myself. It speaks of terror but suggests elation … [and] the [gambit] of this romanticism … is that we can still be moved to move, that we are free, if we will, to step upon our transport, that nature's absence – or its presence merely to sentiment or mood – is only the history of our turnings from it, in distraction or denial (Cavell [1971] 1979: 114).[17]

This challenge of releasing the world from our private holds is what galvanizes Rand's appeal to *objectivity* in the practice of concept formation. To explain why mysticism in general and skepticism in particular are such powerful forces in philosophical thinking, she emphasizes the destructive consequences of the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy.[18] According to intrinsicism, the referents of concepts are held to be *intrinsic*, i.e. as universals inherent in existents and entirely unrelated to consciousness, "to be perceived by man directly, like any other kind of concrete existents, but perceived by some non-sensory or extra-sensory means" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 53). According to subjectivism, meanwhile, the referents of concepts are held to be *subjective*, i.e.

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[17] Cavell's rejection in this passage of the pathological insistence on the privacy/solipsism of subjectivity has its roots in the "private language argument" as rehearsed by Wittgenstein ([1949] 1967: 88-105 [§242-§322]; Cavell 1979: 329-496).

[18] For a lucid and compelling extension of Rand's rejection of the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy for the purpose of rejecting on related grounds the correlative analytic/synthetic dichotomy, see Peikoff (1967).

as products of consciousness and entirely unrelated to existence, "mere 'names' or notions arbitrarily assigned to arbitrary groupings of concretes on the ground of vague, inexplicable resemblances" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 53). The former attempts, in effect, *to establish the primacy of existence by dispensing with consciousness* – that is to say, "by converting concepts into concrete existents and reducing consciousness to the perceptual level, to the automatic function of grasping percepts," while the latter attempts, in effect, *to establish the primacy of consciousness by dispensing with existence* – that is to say, "by denying the status of existents even to concretes and converting concepts into conglomerates of fantasy, constructed out of the debris of other, lesser fantasies, such as words without referents or incantations of sounds corresponding to nothing in an unknowable reality" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 53).[19]

Neither intrinsicism nor subjectivism, Rand laments, regards concepts as *objective*, as neither revealed nor invented, but rather, *produced objectively by consciousness in acknowledgement of the external world* – or, as Rand further clarifies, "as the products of a cognitive method of classification whose processes must be performed by man but whose content is dictated by reality" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 54). It is as if, Rand goes on to observe, conceptual nihilists are "still in the stage of transition which characterizes a child in the process of learning to speak – a child who is using his conceptual faculty but has not developed it sufficiently to be able to examine it self-consciously and discover that what he is using is reason" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 54). Conceptual nihilists of either persuasion, intrinsicism or subjectivism, seek to replace the *objective* with the *arbitrary*; yet, as Rand unequivocally avers, "there is no room for the arbitrary in any activity of man, least of all in his method of cognition" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 82).[20]

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[19] Centuries before the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the regrettable widespread acceptance of such relativistic (and allegedly "progressive") thinking in philosophical circles (cf. Chomsky [1988] and Pinker [1995] among many others), Descartes confessed that he was confounded by such thinking: "[The process of concept formation] is not a linking of names but of the things that are signified by the names, and I am surprised that the opposite view should occur to anyone. Who doubts that a Frenchman and a German can reason about the same things despite the fact that the words that they think of are completely different? And surely the philosopher refutes his own position when he talks of the arbitrary conventions that we have laid down concerning the meaning of words. For, if he admits that the words signify something, why will he not allow that our reasoning deals with this something which is signified rather than merely with the words?" (Descartes 1641c: 126).

[20] For more extensive considerations of Objectivist epistemology, see Peikoff (1967, 1991), Kelley ([1990] 2000), Sciabarra ([1995] 2013), Long (2000), Neil K. Goodell (2007), Bissell (2007, 2008, 2014, 2015, 2018), Binswanger (2014), Rheins (2016), Salmieri (2016b), and Arnold Baise (2017).

(3) Ethics

As a consequence of a metaphysics acknowledging objective reality and an epistemology affirming the efficacious rational faculty of human beings in possession of a volitional consciousness, the Objectivist ethics is centered on the concept of *value*. However, Rand notes that the concept of value is not a primary. On the contrary, as she elaborates:

> [Value] presupposes an answer to the question: Of value *to whom* and *for what*? It presupposes an entity capable of acting to achieve a goal in the face of an alternative. Where no alternative exists, no goals and no values are possible (Rand 1961a: 10).

Thus, inasmuch as ethics presupposes epistemology, so value presupposes volition. All human beings possess a volitional consciousness – indeed, this is precisely what distinguishes human beings from all other living beings – but Rand emphasizes the fact that the exercise of one's consciousness is significantly a *choice*, and a *moral* choice, at that:

> Man's consciousness shares with animals the first two stages of its development: Sensations and perceptions. But it is the third state, conceptions, that makes him man. Sensations are integrated into perceptions automatically, by the brain of a man or of an animal. But to integrate perceptions into conceptions by a process of abstraction is a feat that man alone has the power to perform – and he has to perform it by choice. The process [of concept formation] … is a process of reason, of thought; it is not automatic nor instinctive nor involuntary nor infallible. Man has to initiate it, to sustain it, and to bear responsibility for its results (Rand 1961a: 11).

Noticeable in this passage is the premium Rand places on *thinking*. Morality, on Rand's terms, is defined not by actions, but rather, with respect to the *rule of fundamentality* (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 45-46), by the thinking that determines what action is taken and for what purpose. Since thinking "is not a mechanical process" and since "connections of logic are not made by instinct," the question "to be or not to be" is, more pointedly, the question "to think or not to think" (Rand 1957: 1012).[21] Hence, to the extent to which humans value their lives, they must reverse Descartes'

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[21] For an assiduous and challenging critique of several presuppositions of the Objectivist conception of volition, see Goodell (2007). In what follows, I am proceeding with this critique firmly in mind so as to avoid the pitfalls astutely

"costly historical error" and declare *I am, therefore I'll think* (Rand 1957: 1058). It is only after this declaration that a living being may embrace its status as a *human* being:

> The day when [Man] grasps that matter has no volition is the day when he grasps that *he* has – and this is his birth as a *human* being … The day when he grasps that he is not a passive recipient of the sensations of any given moment, that his senses do not provide him with automatic knowledge in separate snatches independent of context but only with the material of knowledge which his mind must learn to integrate – the day when he grasps that his senses cannot deceive him … [and] that the evidence they give him is an absolute but [that] his mind must learn to understand it, his mind must discover the nature, the causes, the full context of his sensory material, his mind must identify the things he perceives – *that* is the day of his birth as a thinker (Rand 1957: 1041).[22]

Rand's conception of morality, premised on a volitional consciousness able and willing to acknowledge and think its way through objective reality, logically supersedes what have historically been the most frequently promulgated moralities – that of the *supernatural* and that of the *social* – and institutes a new morality of the *individual*:

> For centuries, the battle of morality was fought between those who claimed your life belongs to God and those who claimed that it belongs to your neighbors – between those who preached that the good is self-sacrifice for the sake of ghosts in Heaven and those who preached that the good is self-sacrifice for the sake of incompetents on Earth. And no one came to say that your life belongs to you and that the good is to live it … You have been taught that morality is a code of behavior imposed on you by whim, the whim of a supernatural power or the whim of society, to serve God's purpose or your neighbor's welfare, to please an authority beyond the grave or else next door – but not to serve *your* life or pleasure. Your pleasure, you have been taught, is to be found in immorality;

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brought to light therein. Additionally, I am proceeding on the basis of the more recent work of Bissell (2007, 2015), Binswanger (2014), and Rheins (2016), all three of whom go a long way in clarifying/correcting some of the aspects of Objectivism challenged by Goodell.

[22] This Randian shift from the subjective/internal to the objective/external is likewise emphasized by Cavell: "Instead of '*Cogito ergo sum*,' [Descartes] should simply have said '*Sum*' and gone from there" (Cavell 1979: 101). Furthermore, with respect to volition (and presaging the ethical dimension of rationality similar to Rand), Cavell adds that, *metaphysically*, existence precedes consciousness, but *epistemologically*, humans must acknowledge existence: "I am a being who to exist [as a *human* being] must say I exist, or must acknowledge my existence – claim it, stake it, enact it … [however,] the proof only works in the moment of its giving, for what I prove is the existence only of a creature who *can* enact its existence … not one who at all times does in fact enact it" (Cavell 1984: 109).

your interests would be best served by evil; and any moral code must be designed not *for* you, but *against* you (Rand 1957: 1011-1012).

Against what she terms the "Morality of Death," which she demonstrates is predicated on the denunciation of the rational faculty of human consciousness, Rand posits a "Morality of Life" the source of which is "the independent mind that recognizes no authority higher than its own" (Rand 1957: 1030). This independent mind, however, is not prescribed an arbitrary list of rules it must follow nor is its moral functioning automatically guaranteed. Rather, a Morality of Life is determined by each individual's values – and, as the designation indicates, the supreme value in a Morality of Life is *life itself*:

> Man's mind is his basic tool of survival. Life is given to him, survival is not. His body is given to him, its sustenance is not. His mind is given to him, its content is not. To remain alive, he must act, and, before he can act, he must know the nature and purpose of his action. He cannot obtain his food without a knowledge of food and of the way to obtain it. He cannot dig a ditch – or build a cyclotron – without a knowledge of his aim and of the means to achieve it. To remain alive, he must think. But to think is an act of choice … Man has been called a rational being, but rationality is a matter of choice – and the alternative nature offers him is: Rational being or suicidal animal. Man has to be man – by choice; he has to hold his life as a value – by choice; [and] he has to learn to sustain it – by choice … A being of volitional consciousness has no automatic course of behavior. He needs a code of values to guide his actions (Rand 1957: 1012-1013).

Of note here is where Rand places the emphasis on her declarations of *musts*: On the *ifs* that precede them. Human beings *must* exercise their volition, they *must* hold rationality as the ultimate standard for all thought and action, they *must* obey nature and acknowledge objective reality…*if*, that is, they value their lives, *if* they aspire to happiness or, in Aristotelian terminology, *Eudaimonia*.[23] In Objectivism, there are no commandments in morality for the simple reason that "a 'moral commandment' is a contradiction in terms"; the moral is "the chosen, not the forced; the understood, not the obeyed" (Rand 1957: 1018). By the same token, Objectivism is not a club with

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[23] For more extensive treatments of the Aristotelian pursuit of happiness, particularly if/how it relates to the Objectivist ethics, see Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen (1984, 1991), Jack Wheeler (1984), Sciabarra ([1995] 2013: 240-243), Gotthelf (2000), Walsh (2002), Tara Smith (2006), and Peter Saint-Andre (2009).

which to beat people over the head. The purpose of the Objectivist ethics is not to provide a basis for punishing those who choose not to pursue happiness towards the end of beating them into submission; rather, the purpose is to provide a guide for those who do choose to pursue happiness:

> We do not tell – we *show*. We do not claim – we *prove*. It is not your obedience that we seek to win, but your rational conviction. You have seen all the elements of our secret. The conclusion is now yours to draw – we can help you to name it, but not to accept it – the sight, the knowledge, and the acceptance must be yours (Rand 1957: 735).

On this premise, there remain in the absence of commandments only choices, and insofar as a choice, as Rand outlined, can only stem from competing alternatives, then, again with respect to the rule of fundamentality:

> There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe – existence or nonexistence – and it pertains to a single class of entities – to living organisms. The existence of matter is unconditional, the existence of life is not … [The] particular distinction [of human beings] from all other living species is the necessity to act in the face of alternatives by the means of volitional choice … Man must obtain his knowledge and choose his actions by a process of thinking, which nature will not force him to perform (Rand 1957: 1012-1013).

The basis of the Objectivist ethics, then, is one's value of one's life. Defining the concept of *value* as that which one acts to gain and/or keep, Rand defines the concept of *virtue* as the action by which one gains and/or keeps what one values (Rand 1957: 1012). On the terms established by the Objectivist ethics, an ethical life is thus one which places a premium on *the virtue of selfishness* (Rand 1964). The concept of selfishness, in Objectivist terms, pertains to the principle that each individual, to the extent to which he values his life and is devoted to the pursuit of happiness, "must act for his own *rational* self-interest," which is to say he "must always be the beneficiary of his action." Rand's emphasis on rationality here is to indicate that the Objectivist ethics is *not*, as she states in no uncertain terms, a justification for hedonism: Against those to whom she disparagingly refers as "Nietzschean egoists" for whom "any action, regardless of its nature, is good if it is intended for one's own benefit," Rand underscores the fact that, according to the Objectivist ethics, "just as the satisfaction of the irrational desires of *others* is not a criterion of

moral value, neither is the satisfaction of *one's own* irrational desires." Morality, she concludes, "is not a contest of whims" (Rand 1961b: 10).[24]

At this point, having asserted the virtue of selfishness as a key component of the Objectivist ethics, Rand seems to have reached an impasse, for how can *selfishness* be defined *objectively*? The source of confusion on this point, in Rand's estimation, is twofold: First, the conception of happiness according to which the satisfaction of one's irrational whims and desires is all that is required for its achievement is, in Objectivist terms, a short-range view of happiness that corrupts the concept inasmuch as it is predicated on a devaluation of humans and the value of human life (Rand 1957: 1062); second, this already-compromised conception of happiness is erroneously elevated from being the *purpose* of morality to the *standard* of morality (Rand 1962b: 48).[25]

The standard of morality, according to Objectivism, is life as the supreme human value. In order to qualify as a human being, one must value one's life and take the necessary (rational) steps in order to preserve it. However, while a baseline value for continued existence is a prerequisite for humanity, it is not the height to which a human can aspire. On the contrary, Rand is concerned not *merely* with continued existence, but, more pointedly, with what she describes as "the highest potentiality of [one's] own existence" (Rand 1957: 768); she considers a life lived to the fullest as being "a straight line of motion from goal to farther goal, each leading to the next and to a single growing sum" (Rand 1957: 609), as being more than merely fleeting, short-range satisfactions of greed, hunger, lust, etc., on the premise that the ends justify the means. The value of survival is that which constitutes the *human*; the value of *perfection*, meanwhile, is that which constitutes the *hero*.[26]

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[24] For more extensive considerations of Rand *avec* Nietzsche, see John B. Ridpath (1986a, 1986b), Stephen R.C. Hicks (2000), and the "Symposium on Friedrich Nietzsche & Ayn Rand" in *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* Volume 10 Number 2 (2009).

[25] For a more scientifically-minded polemic against the erroneous elevation of happiness in the field of psychology, as well as the moral implications thereof, see Jordan Peterson (2011).

[26] As Gotthelf and Salmieri explain, the two "hallmarks of Objectivism" are the *benevolent universe premise* – i.e. "the idea that the universe is hospitable to human achievement such that a person who lives morally can expect to live happily" (Salmieri 2016a: 15) – and the *heroic view of man* – i.e. "not just the belief that human beings have the potential to achieve a heroic stature ... [but] regarding this potential as what is *important* about oneself" (Gotthelf and Salmieri 2016: 460). For her own elucidation of these hallmarks, see Rand ([1943] 2007, 1957, [1969] 1975, 1973a, 1973d, 1981).

The concept of *moral perfectionism* will be a signal concept in this thesis.[27] On Rand's terms, the absence of a rational morality in the life of a human being leads, as I mentioned, to the degeneration of the very concept of the "human":

> "It's only human," you cry in defense of any depravity, reaching the stage of self-abasement where you seek to make the concept "human" mean the weakling, the fool, the rotter, the liar, the failure, the coward, the fraud, and to exile from the human race the hero, the thinker, the producer, the inventor, the strong, the purposeful, the pure – as if "to feel" were human, but to think were not, as if to fail were human, but to succeed were not, as if corruption were human, but virtue were not – as if the premise of *death* were proper to man, but the premise of *life* were not (Rand 1957: 1050).

A rational morality, contrary to the above conception of the human, is predicated on a conception of the human as heroic rather than depraved and with life as the standard of morality rather than death:

> Existence is not a negation of negatives. Evil, not value, is an absence and a negation, evil is impotent and has no power but that which we let it extort from us … Joy is not "the absence of pain," intelligence is not "the absence of stupidity," light is not "the absence of darkness," an entity is not "the absence of a nonentity." Building is not done by abstaining from demolition … It is not death that we wish to avoid, but life that we wish to live (Rand 1957: 1024).

The ability to put this morality into practice is attained by virtue of rational action. Indeed, as Rand makes clear, a rational process *is* a moral process:[28]

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[27] Indeed, I will argue in Chapter 2 for an aesthetic orientation which I term *aesthetic perfectionism*. I will leave a full explication of perfectionism until then. For the moment, I would simply like to clarify that my conception of moral perfectionism is derived principally from Rand's formulations. However, since Rand's philosophical writings were limited and since, in what she did write, she did not explicitly develop the concept of moral perfectionism, I will supplement her formulations with the more recent work of Cavell ([1972] 1981, 1979, 1989, 1990, 2003, 2004).

[28] Along very similar lines, Cavell has argued that morality "is not a separate realm or a separate branch" of reason, that, on the contrary, "*each* assertion is a moral act (intrusive or not, magnanimous or not, heartfelt or not, kind or cutting, faithful or treacherous, promising cheer or chagrin, acknowledging or denying)" (Cavell 1990: xxix, my emphasis).

You may make an error at any step of it, with nothing to protect you but your own severity, or you may try to cheat, to fake the evidence and evade the effort of the quest – but if devotion to truth is the hallmark of morality, then there is no greater, nobler, more heroic form of devotion than the act of a man who assumes the responsibility of thinking … In the name of the values that keep you alive, do not let your vision of man be distorted by the ugly, the cowardly, the mindless in those who have never achieved his title. Do not lose your knowledge that man's proper estate is an upright posture, an intransigent mind, and a step that travels unlimited roads. Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark, in the hopeless swamps of the approximate, the not-quite, the not-yet, the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration for the life you deserved, but have never been able to reach. Check your road and the nature of your battle. The world you desired can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it's yours (Rand 1957: 1017, 1069).

This heroic human being is not, as Rand herself acknowledges, a statistical majority (which is precisely why the concept "hero" is applicable); nevertheless, this heroic human being is, she maintains, "applicable to and achievable by all men" (Rand [1969] 1975: 119), it represents "the best within us."[29] This is the perspective from which Rand makes the argument that moral perfection is "an *unbreached rationality* – not the degree of your intelligence, but the full and relentless use of your mind, not the extent of your knowledge, but the acceptance of reason as an absolute" (Rand 1957: 1059).[30]

(4) Politics

Recalling Rand's earlier informal designation of her philosophy of Objectivism as "a philosophy for living on Earth," what has been conspicuously omitted in my remarks up to this point regarding the individual human being in relation to objective reality and his pursuit of perfection on the basis

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[29] The phrase "the best within us" is a motif that runs through (or, more accurately, *fuels*) *Atlas Shrugged* (1957: 6, 483, 1069, 1166), a motif so important to Rand that she even chose to title the last chapter of *Atlas Shrugged* "In the Name of the Best Within Us" (Rand 1957: 1147-1168). In addition to representing the core of the Objectivist ethics, this motif also serves as a bridge between Rand's Aristotelian perfectionism and Cavell's Emersonian perfectionism, for "the best within us" can be likened to Emerson's formulation (which runs through/fuels Cavell's philosophy) of the "unattained but attainable self" (Emerson 1841a: 125).

[30] In a similar vein, Descartes once remarked that "the most absurd and grotesque" impulse people have "is to want to make judgments which do not correspond to [their] perception of things" (Descartes 1646: 273).

of a rational morality is the presence in reality of *other* human beings.[31] I hope it is clear from my (admittedly abridged) explication of Objectivism up to this point that there is a logical progression from metaphysics to epistemology to ethics. These three branches, taken together, provide the foundation for the remaining two derivative branches of politics and aesthetics. As Rand writes of politics (and this is equally applicable to aesthetics):

> [Objectivism] does not regard politics as a separate or primary goal, that is, as a goal that can be achieved without a wider ideological context. Politics is based on three other philosophical disciplines: Metaphysics, epistemology and ethics – on a theory of man's nature and of man's relationship to existence. It is only on such a base that one can formulate a consistent political theory and achieve it in practice … [Thus,] Objectivism advocates certain political principles … as the consequence and the ultimate practical application of its fundamental philosophical principles (Rand 1962a: 1).

Even though Objectivism has, on the whole, been neglected by scholars across the humanities, Rand's views on politics have received more attention than any other aspect of her thinking (although, without an accompanying consideration of the metaphysical-epistemological-ethical foundation from which her political ideas derived, it is no surprise that the grounds for/implications of her ideas are still virtually unknown to commentators).[32] Given this fact – and the fact that it is the formulation of an Objectivist *aesthetics* to which I am building and not an Objectivist *politics* – I will keep my remarks on Rand's political theory comparatively brief, focusing only on the fundamental philosophical premises emanating from metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics as

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[31] In the extant Objectivist literature, Sciabarra ([1995] 2013: 215-358) has done the most conscientious and nuanced work vis-à-vis articulating and elaborating on a politics of the individual in line with the Objectivist ethics. Beyond the specifically Objectivist (and specifically secular) terms of this thesis, for a provocative discussion of the relationship between the individual and the collective that significantly bears on any efforts, Objectivist or otherwise, to promulgate a philosophy (and, by extension, a politics) of individualism, see the exchange between Jordan Peterson and Ben Shapiro (Rubin, Peterson, and Shapiro 2018).

[32] Rand's political commentaries are vast and varied. For her most sustained considerations of capitalism in particular, see Rand (1957, 1961a, 1964, [1966] 1970). Very little varies, however, in the hysterical *ad hominem* attacks on Rand's political philosophy. See, for examples of the low level at which discussions of the Objectivist politics are often pitched, Whittaker Chambers (1957), Gore Vidal (1961), Joel Rosenbloom (1961), Honor Tracy (1966), Lance Klafta (1993), Jonathan Chait (2009), Sam Anderson (2009), Andrew Corsello (2009), Geoffrey James (2011), David Sirota (2013), Joseph Breslin (2014), Slavoj Žižek (2014), and Denise Cummins (2016a, 2016b). For the rare examples that indicate the potential for discussion at higher levels, see Roy A. Childs, Jr. (1969), Norman P. Barry (1987), and Mark Skousen (2007).

they pertain to aesthetics – in particular, on her championing of capitalism as opposed to Marxism/communism.

Capitalism, for Rand, represents the ideal system because it "demands the best of every man – his rationality – and rewards him accordingly," and insofar as it is premised on freedom, it "leaves every man free to choose the work he likes, to specialize in it, to trade his product for the products of others, and to go as far on the road of achievement as his ability and ambition will carry him" (Rand 1961b: 20). Rand's position on capitalism, then, is not an arbitrary choice, but rather, a logical consequence of: (1) Metaphysics, insofar as the terms of objective reality are such that the value of a human being's work is likewise to be determined objectively rather than decided arbitrarily (be it by the whims of another individual, such as a dictator, or of a collective, such as society); (2) Epistemology, insofar as the objective determinations of a human being's work are made by rational individuals in possession of a volitional consciousness; and (3) Ethics, insofar as the objective determinations of a human being's work made by rational individuals in possession of a volitional consciousness are made for the sake of each individual's rational self-interest and with each individual benefiting in some measure in relation to his pursuit of happiness and moral perfection.

The problem, to her mind, is that these consequences have never been explicitly embraced. She ardently defends capitalism insofar as it is premised on a rational morality in acknowledgement of objective reality and the freedom of human beings to pursue their own happiness, but she considers it an *unknown* ideal precisely to the extent to which human beings remain ignorant or insolent regarding its sociopolitical (and thus its metaphysical-epistemological-ethical) ideality. If a social system is truly to represent the rational interests of individuals, then it must, Rand argues, be built on a solid ethical foundation. To exemplify the ethical foundation of capitalism, Rand identifies the *trader* as "the moral symbol of respect for human beings":

> [Those] who live by values, not by loot, are traders, both in matter and in spirit. A trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take the undeserved. A trader does not ask to be paid for his failures, nor does he ask to be loved for his flaws. A trader does not squander his body as fodder or his soul as alms. Just as he does not give his work except in trade for material values, so he does not give the values of his spirit – his love, his friendship, his esteem – except in payment

and in trade for human virtues, in payment for his own selfish pleasure, which he receives from [those] he can respect (Rand 1957: 1022).

The emphasis on respect in relation to the freedom of trade prefigures the *non-initiation of physical force* (NIPF principle), which goes together with capitalism and which maintains that "force and mind are opposites" and that "morality ends where a gun begins":

> To force a man to drop his own mind and to accept your will as a substitute – with a gun in place of a syllogism, with terror in place of proof, and death as the final argument – is to attempt to exist in defiance of reality. Reality demands of man that he act for his own rational interest; your gun demands of him that he act against it. Reality threatens man with death if he does not act on his rational judgment; you threaten him with death if he does (Rand 1957: 1023).

Observe that *objectivity* here in the NIPF principle is a means of dissolving contradictions. The answer to the question of why the use of force is *wrong* is because it deprives a human being of his *right* to think and act according to his own judgment, with *right* being determined *objectively*:

> *Rights* are conditions of existence required by man's nature for his proper survival. If man is to live on Earth, it is *right* for him to use his mind, it is *right* to act on his own free judgment, it is *right* to work for his values and to keep the product of his work … [and] any group, any gang, any nation that attempts to negate man's rights is *wrong* (Rand 1957: 1061).

It is on the basis of these logical connections between metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics that Rand is able to demonstrate the fact that "a country's political system is based on its code of morality" (Rand 1957: 1061), and it is precisely this connection that impels Rand to demolish, in the name of capitalism, the false dichotomy of sacrifice according to which one must either sacrifice oneself to others or sacrifice others to oneself, adherence to either of which can only logically result in – and *actually has* only resulted in – destruction and, ultimately, death.

Perhaps the most famous of Rand's crusades is her crusade against *altruism*, which her ethical conception of the virtue of selfishness – and its political corollary of the virtue of capitalism – was meant to oppose. Altruism, on Rand's terms, is defined as "the placing of others above self, of

their interests above one's own" (Rand 1961a: 30). Rand's rejection of sacrifice in favor of selfishness and of altruism in favor of capitalism constitutes the ethical/political nexus of Objectivism – and this is precisely the most frequently misunderstood aspect of Objectivism (and thus the most frequently targeted aspect for criticism) despite the lengths to which she went to clarify the exact terms of her position:

> There are only two fundamental questions (or two aspects of the same question) that determine the nature of any social system: "Does a social system recognize individual rights?" and "Does a social system ban physical force from human relationships?" The answer to the second question is the practical implementation of the answer to the first. Is man a sovereign individual who owns his person, his mind, his life, his work and its products – or is he the property of the tribe (the state, the society, the collective) that may dispose of him in any way it pleases, that may dictate his convictions, prescribe the course of his life, control his work and expropriate his products? Does man have the right to exist for his own sake – or is he born in bondage, as an indentured servant who must keep buying his life by serving the tribe but can never acquire it free and clear? … The basic issue is only: Is man free? In mankind's history, capitalism is the only system that answers: Yes (Rand [1966] 1970: 18).

This emphasis on capitalism places Rand firmly on the opposite side – metaphysically, epistemologically, ethically, and politically – of Marxism.[33] Indeed, she identifies Karl Marx as "the most consistent translator of the altruist morality into practical action and political theory," advocating a society "where all would be sacrificed to all, starting with the immediate immolation of the able, the intelligent, the successful, and the wealthy" (Rand 1961a: 31). Capitalism, by contrast, *rejects* – and on *moral* grounds – any form of sacrifice insofar as the philosophical premise subtending the altruist morality is that a human being does not have a right to exist for his own sake. The dangerous consequence of altruism is thus the erosion of both rationality and morality, while the dangerous consequence of building a political system on the basis of such an irrational philosophical premise is the erosion of freedom:

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[33] Though not framed as a battle between Rand and Marx, for an illuminating discussion of the extremes of Marxist economics on the one hand and what has been referred to as "anarcho-capitalism" on the other – and the strikingly similar pitfalls of both vis-à-vis their failures to understand human nature – see Jordan Peterson and Bret Weinstein (2017).

You decided that you had a right to your wages, but we had no right to our profits; that you did not want us to deal with your mind, but to deal, instead, with your gun … You did not care to compete in terms of intelligence – you are now competing in terms of brutality. You did not care to allow rewards to be won by successful production – you are now running a race in which rewards are won by successful plunder. You called it selfish and cruel that men should trade value for value – you have now established an unselfish society where they trade extortion for extortion. Your system is a legal civil war, where men gang up on one another and struggle for possession of the law, which they use as a club over rivals [until] another gang wrests it from their clutch and clubs them with it in their turn, all of them clamoring protestations of service to an unnamed public's unspecified good (Rand 1957: 1065).[34]

As I will demonstrate in Chapter 1, the consequences of this type of altruistic/collectivist thinking have devastated not only the realms of ethics and politics, but aesthetics, as well.

(5) Aesthetics

This brings me, at last, to aesthetics, the final philosophical realm in Objectivism. If politics is the realm of Rand's thinking that has received the most consideration from contemporary scholars, aesthetics is the realm that has received the least.[35] There is perhaps a correlation between the sparseness of scholarship on Rand's aesthetic writings and the sparseness of Rand's writings themselves. Stephen Cox characterizes Rand's philosophical musings on aesthetics as less than a true aesthetic system and more on the level of gathering the conceptual building materials necessary for sustained aesthetic inquiry; in *The Art of Fiction* ([1958] 2000), a collection of lectures transcribed, collated, and published posthumously, and *The Romantic Manifesto* ([1969]

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[34] For the horrifying consequences of such altruistic/collectivist thinking, see Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn ([1973] 2002) and Christopher R. Browning ([1992] 2013). Though it seems to have been forgotten, it is important to remember that, as Cavell once put it, "high philosophy can be used to cover low practice" (Cavell 1995: 195; see also Rey Chow [1995a] and Peterson [1999, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2017e]).

[35] Not only has Rand's work on aesthetics received very little scholarly consideration even from Objectivists, what little it has received has been limited almost exclusively to the pages of *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*. Beyond the work of Peikoff (1991), Sciabarra ([1995] 2013), and Gotthelf (2000), all of whom seem to discuss aesthetics solely for the sake of comprehensiveness, the only substantial writing on Rand's aesthetics has been the work of Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi (2000a). This lacuna has only recently been addressed, first in the "Aesthetics Symposium" in *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* Volume 2 Number 2 (2001), which essentially served as a series of responses to Torres and Kamhi's work, and subsequently in the promising work of Kirsti Minsaas (2000, 2004, 2005), Stephen Cox (2000, 2004), and Bissell (2002, 2004).

1975), a collection of essays edited together and published by Rand herself, Rand is concerned with inventorying the conceptual material she considers vital in aesthetic inquiry, some of which she "organized and began to shape" but most of which she "simply checked off on her inventory list" (Cox 2004: 67). In a similar vein, Leonard Peikoff views Rand's aesthetic inventory as providing "merely a lead to some broad aesthetic principles [that] would have to be applied specifically to the major arts" (Peikoff 1991: 447).

This thesis can therefore be characterized as an attempt on my part to apply some of Rand's broad aesthetic principles to the art of film. To this end, I will perlustrate both Rand's aesthetic corpus as well as the work of subsequent Objectivist scholars in an effort to identify the conceptual building materials most conducive to an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema. Additionally, where the sparseness of Rand's aesthetic inquiries was matched only by the scope, exploring as she did subjects as varied as the ontology of art, the mechanics of literature, and the vicissitudes of aesthetic experience, for my purposes, I will focus primarily on issues of aesthetic experience, and, even more specifically, on issues of aesthetic *judgment*. At various points throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter 2, I will have occasion to consider in greater detail Rand's aesthetic arguments. In what remains of this Introduction, I will limit myself to merely staking out the main philosophical problem areas propaedeutic to the construction of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema.

As a first step towards an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema, it is instructive to consider the first step Rand took when she turned to the philosophical realm of aesthetics. For Rand, the question "What is art?" follows from the question "What does art do?" That is to say, for Rand, art is understood *functionally*.[36] What art does, in Rand's estimation, is bring human concepts to the perceptual level of consciousness in order that they may be grasped directly. Thus, on Rand's functional account,

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[36] Curiously, Rand exegetes cannot seem to agree on this issue. Torres and Kamhi, for example, maintain not only that Rand's definition of art is not a functional definition (2000a), but, moreover, that a functional definition is not a definition *simpliciter* (2000b). Lester Hunt, for his part, perpetuates this misunderstanding by stating in no uncertain terms that "Rand does not define art in terms of its function" (Hunt 2001: 261). By contrast, John Enright (2001) and Bissell (2004) both argue not only that a functional definition of art is exactly what Rand provides, but, moreover, that a functional definition of art (combined with accounts of the ways the various arts function) is a *necessary* component of any philosophy of art. In this thesis, I am operating from the latter perspective.

art is a *concretization of metaphysics*; an artist, as conceived by Rand, *selectively recreates reality* according to his values:

> By a selective recreation, 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 (Rand [1969] 1975: 8).

On Rand's account, art is a concretization of metaphysics achieved by a selective recreation of reality for the purpose of bringing human concepts to the perceptual level for direct apprehension and sustained contemplation. Since "man lives by reshaping his physical background to serve his purpose," and since "he must first define and then create his values," he needs "a concretized projection of these values, an image in whose likeness he will reshape the world and himself. Art gives him that image; it gives him the experience of seeing the full, immediate, concrete reality of his distant goals" (Rand [1969] 1975: 28). This, Rand believed, should be the "crux" of an Objectivist aesthetics, and, in this thesis, it will likewise serve as the crux of my proposed Objectivist aesthetics of cinema.

Contemporary Objectivists have gone in a number of different directions in their efforts to apply various Objectivist tenets to the major arts (Torres and Kamhi 2000a; Minsaas 2000, 2005; Riggenbach 2001; Bissell 2004; Kamhi 2014), but, while their work has been of crucial importance in elaborating the Objectivist aesthetics, a number of longstanding, fundamental aesthetic issues remain unresolved. For instance, given the centrality in Objectivism of the concept of objectivity, in what sense, if any, can aesthetic judgment be characterized as objective? As I will discuss in Chapter 2, that aesthetic judgments are subjective is and has been an article of faith throughout the philosophy of art for centuries. Rand was never comfortable accepting the dogma of aesthetic subjectivism; however, she was never able to formulate a coherent alternative, and it is my contention that the source of the problem was Rand's own uncertainty and conceptual opacity.

One of the most significant "aesthetic principles" put forth by Rand (derived, as I will argue, from a dubious epistemological surmise) is that "emotions are not tools of cognition" (Rand [1969]

1975: 32).[37] This aesthetic principle is epistemologically justified via the distinction Rand makes between a *sense of life* and a *philosophy of life*:

> Long before he is old enough to grasp such a concept as metaphysics, man makes choices, forms value-judgments, experiences emotions, and acquires a certain *implicit* view of life. Every choice and value-judgment implies some estimate of himself and of the world around him – most particularly, of his capacity to deal with the world. He may draw conscious conclusions, which may be true or false; or he may remain mentally passive and merely react to events (i.e. merely feel). Whatever the case may be, his subconscious mechanism sums up his psychological activities, integrating his conclusions, reactions, or evasions into an emotional sum that establishes a habitual pattern and becomes his automatic response to the world around him. What began as a series of single, discrete conclusions (or evasions) about his own particular problems becomes a generalized feeling about existence, an implicit *metaphysics* with the compelling motivational power of a constant, basic emotion – an emotion which is part of all his other emotions and underlies all his experiences. *This* is a sense of life (Rand [1969] 1975: 15).

> A sense of life represents a man's early value-integrations, which remain in a fluid, plastic, easily amendable state, while he gathers knowledge to reach full conceptual control and thus to *drive* his inner mechanism. A full conceptual control means a consciously directed process of cognitive integration, which means: a conscious *philosophy* of life … The transition from guidance by a sense of life to guidance by a conscious philosophy takes many forms. For the rare exception, the fully rational child, it is a natural, absorbing, if difficult, process – the process of validating and, if necessary, correcting in conceptual terms what he had merely sensed about the nature of man's existence, thus transforming a wordless feeling into clearly verbalized knowledge, and laying a firm foundation, an intellectual roadbed, for the course of his life. The result is a fully integrated personality, a man whose mind and emotions are in harmony, whose sense of life matches his conscious convictions (Rand [1969] 1975: 18-19).

This is a powerful and subtle distinction, yet, as far as I can see, nowhere in this distinction is the conclusion that "emotions are not tools of cognition" warranted. If anything, insofar as this is a developmental path that culminates in the "harmonizing" of reason and emotion, Rand seems to be proving the opposite of what she is trying to prove, that emotions not only *are* tools of cognition,

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[37] For additional examples of this fallacy in operation, see Rand (1961a: 46; 1961b: 20; 1974a: 6).

but *valuable* tools, at that. However, due to a latent (and, given her vehement Aristotelianism, surprising) Platonism, Rand seems to harbor an unwarranted suspicion of emotions.[38] In the Platonic account, emotions *oppose* cognition, they *hinder* reason; and, in relation to art, this is disconcerting since humans create and respond to art emotionally. If emotions are inherently irrational and in opposition to reason, and if art is created and experienced emotionally, then the production and reception of art necessarily begins – and, disconcertingly, can potentially remain – on irrational ground. According to this premise, the task facing the artist/critic is the Herculean task of wresting art from the irrational.[39]

The Platonic account rehearsed above precludes the acknowledgment of the fact noted by Noël Carroll that "reason is an ineliminable constituent of the emotions" (Carroll 1997: 219).[40] On this account, *contra* Plato, emotions are made-up of at least two component parts: First, "a *cognitive* component, such as a belief or a thought about some person, place, or thing, real or imagined," and, second, "a *feeling* component (a bodily change and/or a phenomenological experience), where, additionally, the feeling state has been caused by the relevant cognitive state, such as a belief or a belief-like state" (Carroll 1997: 221). According to this cognitive theory of the emotions, emotions are not irrational, *ex nihilo* occurrences, but rather, are *directed*; as Jenefer Robinson puts it (explicitly linking emotions to cognition and, moreover, linking them in a hierarchical relationship where cognition precedes emotion), "if I respond emotionally … then my body alerts me to my conception of the situation and registers it as personally significant to me" (Robinson 1995: 65).

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[38] Sciabarra usefully contextualizes Rand's tendency to perhaps protest too much vis-à-vis emotions with respect to the Russian backdrop against which she initially set out to transcend the false reason/emotion dichotomy. As he notes: "[Rand's] first reflections on the nature of emotion [took] place within the context of [her] condemnation … [of] Russian religious philosophy, [which,] like much of Russian culture, had rejected the 'Western' emphasis on reason as an absolute … Rand's insistence on the centrality of reason is [thus] in many ways an outgrowth of her antipathy toward such mysticism … For Rand, anything that even hinted at a devaluation of the rational faculty was to be rejected and criticized" (Sciabarra [1995] 2013: 170).

[39] This account is inspired by the discussion and refutation of the Platonic picture of emotions in Carroll (1997: 218-225).

[40] A fact, incidentally, that is supported by research in the fields of neuroscience and psychology. See, for corroboration, Antonio Damasio ([1994] 2006, 1995, 1996), Peterson (1999: 48-61), and Jonathan Haidt (2006: 11-13).

On the basis of this hierarchical relationship, Carroll appropriately foregrounds the "attention-guiding function" of emotions (Carroll 1997: 224), the relevance of which for Objectivism has often been missed by contemporary exegetes, even when prominent Objectivists like Nathaniel Branden (or, more astonishingly, Rand herself) offered formulations to the contrary. Branden, for example, a psychologist closely associated with Rand in the 1950s and 1960s, came to a similar conclusion as the one arrived at by Robinson decades earlier when he described an emotion as "the psychosomatic form in which man experiences his estimate of the beneficial or harmful relationship of some aspect of reality to him" (Branden 1969: 67). Rand, meanwhile, underneath her anti-emotion bluster, strived to articulate a coherent view of the positive relationship between the emotions and cognition expressed in the following formulation:

> The basic process of a man's life goes like this: His thinking determines his desires; his desires determine his actions. (Thinking, of course, is present all along the line, at every step and stage.) … This is the basic pattern, or "circle," of man's life on Earth: From the spirit (thought) through the material activity (production) to the satisfaction of his spiritual desires (emotions). (He must eat in order to think *but* he must think in order to eat. And he must think first) (Rand [1946] 1992: 3).

For as infrequently as remarks such as those quoted above have been integrated into contemporary Objectivist scholarship, they have not gone completely unnoticed. Marsha Familaro Enright, for instance, astutely avers that it is an epistemological task of Objectivism "to learn how to [most effectively] use the access to our subconscious through our emotions" (Enright 2002: 61). Roger E. Bissell, meanwhile, acknowledges, in a spirit similar to Enright's, that:

> Reason and emotion, while distinguishable, are not mutually exclusive from one another. They are concomitant, necessarily connected aspects of a cognitive-evaluative experience. One has a thought, one evaluates the object of that thought, and one experiences an emotion about that thing as a response to the evaluation (Bissell 2009: 346).

Thus, it is clear that, for all of her protestations, Rand never sought to establish a *dichotomy* between (rational) cognition and (irrational) emotions, but rather, a *relation* between (rational)

cognition and (rational) emotions (Rand [1969] 1975: 142; Sciabarra [1995] 2013: 167-188).[41] From this perspective, then, rather than viewing emotions and cognition as perpetual enemies engaged in an eternal struggle for control over the constitutively divided subject, it is possible to view them as inextricably linked in a manner essential to human survival and flourishing. Moreover, the complexity of the relationship between emotions and cognition, rather than invariably suffering reduction, can here be acknowledged: On the one hand, it is possible under certain conditions for reason to direct the emotions in a relation where the former is not only an *ineliminable force in* but the *driving force of* the emotions; on the other hand, it is possible under certain circumstances for emotions to serve as a check on reason in a relation where the former impels the recalibration of the latter.[42]

The consequences on aesthetics of Rand's tendency to equivocate on the relationship between the emotions and cognition are discernible across her considerations of the processes of artistic production and reception. Stemming from her distinction between a sense of life (i.e. an emotional response to the world) and a philosophy of life (i.e. a cognitive response to the world), Rand argues that "it is the artist's sense of life that controls and integrates his work, directing the innumerable choices he has to make, from the choice of subject to the subtlest details of style," while it is similarly the critic's sense of life that controls and integrates the response to an artist's work "by a complex yet automatic reaction of acceptance and approval, or rejection and condemnation" (Rand [1969] 1975: 25). By arguing that it is an artist's sense of life that directs his creative actions, Rand could be interpreted as arguing that the emotions are what guide the artist in the act of

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[41] As Sciabarra elaborates: [People] may unwittingly adopt defense techniques that numb their awareness of unacceptable or painful impulses, feelings, [and] ideas … As they mature, they may genuinely seek to dissolve their unarticulated guilt, fear, anger, and internal conflicts. But such [psychological] repression cannot be merely commanded out of existence … In such cases, [people] must first practice the art of 'owning' [their] emotions, of bringing the aspects of [their] inner experience into full awareness. Whereas lifelong evasion and repression engender cognitive *dis*integration, the removal of obstacles to the experience of one's emotions reignites the mind's integrative processes" (Sciabarra [1995] 2013: 185; see also Branden [1971] 1978).

[42] As framed by Peterson, emotion "provides us with an initial guide when we don't know what we are doing" while reason "allows us to construct and maintain our ordered environments and keep chaos – and affect – in check" (Peterson 1999: 48-49). This is what Haidt refers to as the "two-way street" between reason and emotion (Haidt 2006: 31). The previously cited passage from Rand exemplifies the process by which reason can be said in certain circumstances to direct the emotions. For an exemplification of the process by which emotions can be said in certain circumstances to serve as a check on reason, consider another motif from *Atlas Shrugged*: The maxim "check your premises" (Rand 1957: 199, 331, 378, 489, 618, 737). I note also the congeniality of the Objectivist notion of checking one's premises with respect to the Wittgensteinian notion of "assembling reminders" (Wittgenstein [1949] 1967: 42 [§89], 50 [§127]; see also Cavell 1979: 460-463 and Rodowick 2015: 60-61, 203).

production (and which, at the same time, guide the critic in the act of reception), which is to say that artists (and critics) are "always-already" in the grip of irrationality. This, again, would lead to Platonism. However, if her remarks are interpreted against the backdrop of the revised picture of the emotions previously proffered, then her pictures of the processes of artistic production and reception gain in complexity and acuity. In one of her lectures on fiction writing, Rand articulated a concept she referred to as a "screen of vision" which speaks to a far more complex picture of the process of artistic production:

> Your conscious mind is a very limited "screen of vision"; at any one moment, it can hold only so much. For instance, if you are now concentrating on my words, then you are not thinking about your values, family, or past experiences. Yet the knowledge of these is stored in your mind somewhere. That which you do not hold in your conscious mind at any one moment is your *subconscious*. Why can a baby not understand this discussion? He does not have the necessary stored knowledge. The full understanding of any object of consciousness depends on what is already known and stored in the subconscious. What is colloquially called "inspiration" – namely, that you write without full knowledge of why you write as you do, yet it comes out well – is actually the subconscious summing-up of the premises and intentions you have set yourself … [As an artist,] you have to train yourself to grasp your premises clearly … [for] every premise that you store in your subconscious in this manner – namely, thoroughly understood, thoroughly integrated to the concretes it represents – becomes part of your writing capital. When you then sit down to write, you do not need to calculate everything in a slow, conscious way. Your inspiration comes to the exact extent of the knowledge you have stored (Rand [1958] 2000: 2-3).

In this description of the process of artistic production, Rand seems to hold an implicit view of the emotions as potential tools capable of being put to use by the best artists.[43] This quite obviously results in an intentionalist view of artistic practice the defense and elaboration of which for my conception of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema will be the purpose of Chapters 1 and 2. Before concerning myself with intentionality, though, the worry registered earlier about the consequences of Rand's Platonism on aesthetic judgment still remains.

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[43] My emphasis on the *best* artists rather than on artists *tout court* is an extension of what Minsaas observes is, following from Rand's ethical distinction between the human and the hero, the "honorific sense" in which Rand tends to discuss art (Minsaas 2005: 24-26).

After arguing that it is the artist's sense of life that directs the process of artistic production, an argument which I hope to have usefully clarified, Rand argues that it is similarly the critic's sense of life that directs the process of artistic reception. On this premise, Rand puts forth one of her most contentious aesthetic propositions:

> A sense of life is the source of art, but it is *not* the sole qualification of an artist or of an aesthetician, and it is *not* a criterion of aesthetic judgment … Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy, and just as a philosopher does not approach any other branch of his science with his feelings or emotions as his criterion of judgment, so he cannot do it in the field of aesthetics. A sense of life is not sufficient professional equipment. An aesthetician – as well as any man who attempts to evaluate art works – must be guided by more than an emotion. The fact that one agrees or disagrees with an artist's philosophy is irrelevant to an *aesthetic* appraisal of his work *qua* art. One does not have to agree with an artist (nor even to enjoy him) in order to evaluate his work. In essence, an objective evaluation requires that one identify the artist's theme, the abstract meaning of his work (exclusively by identifying the evidence contained in the work and allowing no other, outside considerations), then evaluate the means by which he conveys it – i.e. taking *his* theme as criterion, evaluate the purely aesthetic elements of the work, the technical mastery (or lack of it) with which he projects (or fails to project) *his* view of life (Rand [1969] 1975: 32-33).

As an initial step into the hermeneutic minefield Rand is traversing in this complex passage, consider the first line where Rand argues that a sense of life "is *not* the sole qualification of an artist or of an aesthetician, and it is *not* a criterion of aesthetic judgment." The emphasis in the first part is on "not" but "sole" is at least present; in the second part, however, the emphasis is once again on "not" but "sole" has now been removed. This would seem to differentiate the processes of artistic production and reception in significant fashion. As if sensing the implications of her formulation, Rand mollifies her position when she writes that an aesthetician "must be guided by more than an emotion." The claim that an aesthetician must be guided by *more than* an emotion does not invalidate the emotions *in toto* and instead implies that the emotions are valid as a cognitive tool in aesthetics. Recalling Rand's model of conceptualization – "something *exists* of which I am *conscious*; I must discover its *identity*" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 59) – it seems that a comparable model of aesthetic judgment can be formulated as follows: I *like* (or *dislike*) an artwork; I must discover the *reason(s)*. On this model, emotion precedes and directs cognition in

an attention-guiding fashion. Hence, aesthetic judgment may be posited as rational without necessitating the elimination of the emotions from the judgment process.

Crucial to this model of aesthetic judgment is the practice of *introspection*. Rand once lamented the fact that "the field of introspection" is "an untouched jungle in which no conceptual paths have yet been cut" and in which most people are "unable [or unwilling] to identify the meaning of any inner state," hence they "spend their lives as cowed prisoners inside their own skulls, afraid to look out at reality, paralyzed by the mystery of their own consciousness" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 76-77); in her estimation, "if men identified introspectively their inner states one tenth as correctly as they identify objective reality, we would be a race of ideal giants" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 227). After reaffirming that it is each individual's epistemological task "to set into motion a process in which emotions and reason are brought into harmony," Chris Matthew Sciabarra takes the baton from Rand and emphasizes the centrality of introspection in the lives of rational individuals as they "seek to articulate the cognitive basis of [their] emotions"; as he explains, "though we experience emotions as immediate primaries in our awareness, the introspective person does not accept them as axiomatic" (Sciabarra [1995] 2013: 171). The model of aesthetic judgment that I am proposing here is thus the introspective process by which, in the aesthetic realm, each individual may articulate the cognitive basis of their aesthetic judgments rather than merely accepting their initial emotional reactions to artworks as axiomatic.[44]

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[44] The influential film theorist Christian Metz famously psychoanalyzed the type of film scholar who feels compelled upon finding that he likes a given film to then set about "rationalizing this liking after the fact" (Metz [1975] 1982: 10). Intriguingly – and in a manner perfectly in step with the Objectivist model of aesthetic judgment that I am proffering – Metz distinguishes between what I would call *rationalizing* critical discourses on the one hand – which he argues are philosophically invalid – and *introspective* critical discourses on the other hand – which he argues are philosophically valid. Rationalizing critical discourses operate on the basis of what Metz calls the "cocoon principle" according to which "the real object (here the film *which has pleased*) and the [philosophically valid critical] discourse by which it might have been [analyzed] have been more or less confused with the imaginary object (= the film *such as it has pleased*, i.e. something which owes a great deal to its spectator's own phantasy) and the virtues of the latter have been conferred on the former by projection" (Metz [1975] 1982: 11). Metz goes on to argue that such rationalization betrays "a kind of advanced structure of the phobic (and also counter-phobic) type, a proleptic reparation of any harm which might come to [the film in question], a depressive procedure occasionally breached by persecutory returns, an unconscious protection against a possible change in the taste of the lover himself, a defense more or less intermingled with pre-emptive counter-attack. To adopt the outward marks of [valid philosophical criticism] is to occupy a strip of territory *around* the adored film, all that really counts, in order to bar all the roads by which it might be attacked. The cinematic rationalizer, locking himself up in his system, is gripped by a kind of siege psychosis … [and] the question never posed is precisely the one which would overthrow [his attempts at rationalization]: 'Why did I like this film (I rather than another, this film rather than another)?'" (Metz [1975] 1982: 11-12). In other words, rationalization is a technique of "deproblematization" and "to that extent the exact opposite of the procedures of knowledge" (Metz [1975] 1982: 12; see also Rand [1974b]), whereas introspection is a technique

Furthermore, consider the second half of the previously quoted passage. The confusion emanating from this part of the passage is rooted, in my estimation, in Rand's ill-advised amalgamation of different cognitive activities under the heading of "evaluation."[45] The initial claim animating this part of the passage, that "one does not have to agree with an artist (nor even to enjoy him) in order to evaluate his work," is reasonable as far as it goes. One obviously does not have to agree with or like an artist prior to evaluating his work. Yet, I confess to having difficulty countenancing the idea that one may disagree with and dislike an artist's work and yet judge his work to be *good* (much less *great*). This strikes me as a cheap variant of the mind/body split[46] – to which, it bears mentioning, Rand was vehemently opposed:

> [Those who promulgate the mind/body split] have cut man in two, setting one half against the other. They have taught him that his body and his consciousness are two enemies engaged in deadly conflict, two antagonists of opposite natures, contradictory claims, incompatible needs, that to benefit one is to injure the other, that his soul belongs to a supernatural realm but his body is an evil prison holding it in bondage to this earth … They have taught man that he is a hopeless misfit made of two elements, both symbols of death. A body without a soul is a corpse, a soul without a body is a ghost, yet such is their image of man's nature: The battleground of a struggle between a corpse and a ghost … [On the contrary,] you are an indivisible entity … Renounce your consciousness and you become a brute. Renounce your body and you become a fake (Rand 1957: 1026, 1029-1030).

> The New Intellectual … will discard [the mind/body split and] its irrational conflicts and contradictions, such as mind *versus* heart, thought *versus* action, reality *versus* desire, the practical

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of problematization and therefore can help to ensure not only the philosophical validity of one's critical approach but also the objectivity of one's criticism. Thus, for as easy (or as deproblematizing) as it may be to marshal Metz in arguments against the possibility of objective criticism – which is what Fredric Jameson tried to do in his critique of William Rothman's work on Alfred Hitchcock (Jameson [1982] 2007; cf. Rothman [1982] 2012) – it is clear that Metz's argument actually helps to clarify the means by which a scholar may hope to achieve at least a measure of objectivity in criticism. These are issues to which I will have plenty of occasions to return in subsequent chapters, and I will do so against this Metzian/Randian backdrop.

[45] For an astute interrogation of the hermeneutical tendency to amalgamate different cognitive activities and the consequences stemming therefrom, see Ruth Lorand (2000).

[46] Although he makes this connection in a different argumentative context (viz. the utilitarian function of architecture and its bearing on its art status), the ensuing discussion of the mind/body split in relation to Rand's conception of aesthetic judgment takes its cues from Enright (2001).

versus the moral. He will be an *integrated man* … [who knows] that ideas divorced from consequent action are fraudulent and that action divorced from ideas is suicidal (Rand 1961a: 43).

Recalling Rand's epistemological razor – "*concepts are not to be multiplied beyond necessity –* the corollary of which is: *nor are they to be integrated in disregard of necessity*" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 72) – I think that, in the interest of conceptual clarity, an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema will benefit from a distinction between the two related but distinct cognitive activities of *interpretation* and *evaluation*. Proceeding from the previously articulated model of aesthetic judgment – I *like* (or *dislike*) an artwork; I must discover the *reason(s)* – the steps that a critic takes in coming to terms with the initial emotional response provoked by a given artwork are as follows: First, the critic *interprets* the artwork towards the goal of understanding what it is, how it works, and whether or not it succeeds on the terms established by the artist; second, the critic *evaluates* the artwork towards the goal of articulating why he likes it (or does not like it), i.e. articulating what it is about the artwork (if anything) that he *values* and why.[47]

To *interpret* an artwork, then, a critic must accept the terms established by the artist; to *evaluate* an artwork, however, a critic must consider the terms established by the artist *in relation to his own terms*. Through these principles of aesthetic judgment, a link may be – and, as I will argue throughout the rest of this thesis, *should be* – established between the Objectivist aesthetics and the Objectivist ethics. As I outlined in the section on the Objectivist ethics, Rand argues that her conception of the Morality of Life is premised on an "independent mind that recognizes no authority higher than its own" (Rand 1957: 1030). In a similar fashion, the moral vigilance for which Rand argues in relation to the Morality of Life must, I submit, be conterminally asserted in the realm of Objectivist aesthetics, thereby elevating the Objectivist aesthetics to an Aesthetics of Life. Indeed, as I will argue at length in this thesis, this is the only path to objective and, ultimately, *moral* criticism:

> To pronounce moral judgment is an enormous responsibility ... A judge puts himself on trial every
> time he pronounces a verdict. It is only in today's reign of amoral cynicism, subjectivism, and

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[47] For a more elaborate metacritical exploration of this activity and how it functions, see Barrowman (2018c). See also the recent investigations of critical protocols in film studies undertaken by such scholars as Alex Clayton (2011), Andrew Klevan (2011a, 2011b), and James Zborowski (2013), to which my own work is very much indebted.

hooliganism, [however,] that men may imagine themselves free to utter any sort of irrational judgment and suffer no consequences. But, in fact, a man is to be judged by the judgments he pronounces ... [and] it is their fear of *this* responsibility that prompts most people to adopt an attitude of indiscriminate moral neutrality. It is the fear best expressed in the precept: "Judge not, that ye be judged." But that precept, in fact, is an abdication of moral responsibility ... There is no escape from the fact that men have to make choices; so long as men have to make choices, there is no escape from moral values; so long as moral values are at stake, no moral neutrality is possible ... The moral principle to adopt [from this perspective] is: "*Judge, and be prepared to be judged*" (Rand 1962d: 50-51).

As a first pass over the Objectivist terrain, I have attempted in this Introduction merely to stake out the relevant philosophical problem areas that will be explored in greater detail over the course of this thesis and to outline the philosophical foundation on which I will endeavor to build an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema. I will leave it to the ensuing chapters to prove its viability and validity. The first task that I set for myself is refuting poststructuralist philosophies of art, first in the general context of the philosophy of art with reference to the writings of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida and then in the specific context of the philosophy of film with reference to the writings of Peter Wollen. It is my contention that poststructuralism has served, either implicitly or explicitly, as the dominant philosophical reference point for film studies and has since the inception of the discipline provided the default aesthetic foundation. Therefore, it is necessary before arguing for an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema to first argue against poststructuralist aesthetics. This is the purpose of Chapter 1, in which I mobilize a number of the Objectivist ideas and arguments that I have gone over in this Introduction in order to demonstrate the intellectual and moral shortcomings of poststructuralist philosophies of art. In the case of Roland Barthes, I highlight the myriad logical fallacies on which Barthes relies over the course of his immoral attempt to construct what he described himself as a "hedonistic aesthetics" (Barthes 1971), while, in the case of Jacques Derrida, I highlight the persistent threats to his work of skepticism and nihilism and demonstrate their deleterious effects on the coherence of his philosophy of art. I then close the chapter with a consideration of Peter Wollen's integration of poststructuralist philosophy with the study of film, a project which was plagued by a number of the same issues that plagued Barthes and Derrida.

After demonstrating the cons of poststructuralism in Chapter 1, I take the lead of David Bordwell – who noted that "it is exhilarating but not very enlightening to criticize a position without proposing one of your own" (Bordwell 1985: xiii) – and demonstrate in Chapter 2 the pros of Objectivism. Though I emphasize the same concepts in Chapter 2 as those in Chapter 1 – most notably the concepts of objectivity, authorship, meaning, and value – I shift from critiquing the misguided postulations of poststructuralists to outlining the probative value of the Objectivist perspective. First, I work through a number of problems in the philosophy of art with respect to the notion of objective interpretation and I attempt to justify on metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical grounds an intentionalist philosophy of film. Second, I work through a number of problems with respect to the notion of objective evaluation and I expound on a conception of "artful conversation" indebted to D.N. Rodowick's readings of Cavell's philosophical writings on the basis of which I clarify the sense in which aesthetic judgments may be deemed objective.

In the end, I hope that I will have established the insight in and the value of Ayn Rand's philosophical writings as well as the many possibilities of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema. It is on this note that I conclude this thesis, as I summarize the preceding ideas and arguments and then look ahead to the future of the discipline. With respect to the possibilities of Objectivism vis-à-vis film studies, I discuss what I characterize as the (re)turn to value, which I discuss in reference to the work of contemporary scholars who are showing a renewed interest in questions of aesthetic value in light of a *quality* component on the one hand and a *function* component on the other. Ultimately, I hope to make with this thesis a compelling case for a mode of engagement with the cinema facilitated by Objectivism, one that exemplifies a personal and emotional, as well as a rational and objective, model of film criticism, for, as I will argue at length in this thesis, it is only on the basis of such a mode of engagement that scholars may hope to do justice to all that the cinema has to offer.

1

Poststructuralism and the History of Film Studies

In any given period of history, a culture is to be judged by its dominant philosophy, by the prevalent trend of its intellectual life as expressed in morality, in politics, in economics, in art. Professional intellectuals are the voice of a culture and are, therefore, its leaders, its integrators, and its bodyguards. [Our] intellectual leadership has collapsed … If we look at modern intellectuals, we are confronted with the grotesque spectacle of such characteristics as militant uncertainty, crusading cynicism, dogmatic agnosticism, boastful self-abasement, and self-righteous depravity – in an atmosphere of guilt, of panic, of despair, of boredom, and of all-pervasive evasion.

– Ayn Rand (1961a: 7-8)

As I stated in the Introduction, an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema logically entails an intentionalist philosophy of art. Authorship, in any rational philosophy of art, must be the conceptual alpha and omega. And yet, if the history of 20th Century aesthetics is any indication, no concept has been the target of more, or more violent, attacks than the concept of authorship. The aesthetic principles on which my conception of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema is based – principles which follow from what I have designated elsewhere *the axiom of authorship* (Barrowman 2017) – are the following:

1) The Objectivity Principle – An artwork *exists* independent of the act of reading/listening/viewing (for, without the artwork, there would be nothing to read/listen to/view) and an artwork *is what it is* independent of the act of interpretation (for, without the artwork, there would be nothing to interpret).

2) The Identity Principle – An interpretation of an artwork can be considered valid only if it adequately explains *what* the artwork *is* and *why* the artwork is the *way* it is.

3) The Causality Principle – An artwork is a *made* object; thus, explanations as to *what* an artwork *is* and *why* an artwork is the *way* it is must consider the intentions of the person who *created* the artwork, i.e. its *author*.

These three aesthetic principles seem eminently straightforward if not self-evident. Indeed, these were the principles according to which film critics and scholars first formulated *la politique des auteurs*, which is often referred to as the *auteur theory* but which in this thesis I will refer to as the *author policy*.[48] Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, the author policy was the order of the day. Critics and scholars writing for the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the British journal *Movie*, and the American magazine *Film Culture*, among many others, produced writings that still stand as some of the most insightful ever produced on the cinema.[49] The insightfulness of the criticism of such eminent critics as André Bazin, Robin Wood, and Andrew Sarris is due largely to the scrupulousness with which they explored the construction of the films that most affected them in relation to the artistry of the authors that most inspired them. Despite the considerable boon to the analysis of the cinema represented by the author policy, it did not take long for there to appear a series of misguided "radicals" keen to challenge the "authority" of the author and to institute a new model of criticism.[50]

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[48] The story of authorship in the history of film studies is a familiar one which has been told since the beginning of the discipline. Thus, I will not go over this familiar territory in this thesis. However, for the influential writings that heralded the author policy, see André Bazin (1946, [1948] 1997, [1950] 1978, 1951, 1952, 1955, [1957] 1966, [1958] 1974), Alexandre Astruc (1948), François Truffaut ([1954] 1966), Ian Cameron (1962), and Andrew Sarris ([1962] 1979, 1963, 1977, 1996). For additional important writings around the concept of authorship, as well as for added historical and philosophical context, see John Caughie (1981) and Jim Hillier (1985, 1986). I do want to mention, however, that, contrary to Sarris' interpretation of *la politique des auteurs* as a *theory* of authorship, in this thesis, I will refer to it as a *policy* so as to remain closer to what the French critics and scholars writing in *Cahiers du Cinéma* intended – logically and morally – with the formulation. The significance of this ostensibly slight terminological issue will receive more elaborate treatment in the final section of this chapter.

[49] In addition to the critics and criticism cited in the previous note, see also the work of Robin Wood (1965, [1968] 1981, [1969] 2013, [1986] 2003, 2006) and V.F. Perkins (1962, 1963a, 1963b, 1972).

[50] From this point forward, I will be focusing exclusively on the consequences of these irrational and immoral ideas in the aesthetic realm. However, for lucid denunciations of these ideas in the realms of ethics and politics, see the work of Jordan Peterson (1999, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2017f, 2017g, 2017h, 2017i, 2017j, 2017k, 2017l, 2017m, 2017n, 2017o, 2017p, 2017q), Gad Saad (2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2017f), Jonathan Haidt (2012, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017), and, in an Objectivist register, Stephen R.C. Hicks (1998a, 1998b, 2004). See also Peterson and Hicks (2017), Peterson and Haidt (2017), Peterson and Camille Paglia (2017), and Peterson, David Haskell, and William McNally (2017); Saad and Peterson (2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) and Saad and Haidt (2017); and Rubin and Haidt (2016), Rubin and Peterson (2016, 2017a, 2017b), and Rubin and Saad (2016a, 2016b, 2017).

A prescient voice amidst this shifting philosophical terrain, E.D. Hirsch maintained that it was essential for philosophers of art to not only understand the epistemological conditions of possibility for the "heavy and largely victorious assault on the sensible belief that a text means what its author meant" that is the sad legacy of 20th Century aesthetics, but, even more importantly, "to determine how far the theory of [textual] autonomy deserves acceptance" (Hirsch 1967: 1-2). The same is true today. However, in the interest of conceptual clarity, I would argue, *pace* Hirsch, that what is essential is to understand that the very notion of "textual autonomy" is nonsense. Although challenges to author-based criticism and to the concept of authorship in the broader sphere of the philosophy of art came from diverse individuals from a variety of academic and non-academic backgrounds, I will direct my attention here in Chapter 1 to what I will be calling *the poststructuralist objection*.

In the influential work of poststructuralist avatars Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, author-based criticism is alleged to be a house of cards built on a philosophical foundation that is rotted to its core. Due to the troubling combination of the contemporaneity, the extremism, and the continued influence of poststructuralist ideas in the realm of film studies – discernible, among other places, in the foundational work of Peter Wollen, which I will consider at length in the final section of this chapter – it will be my task in what follows to prove initially that both Barthes and Derrida fail to make a prima facie case against authorship. Furthermore, I intend to prove that Barthes and Derrida fail to construct a coherent philosophy (of art or of anything else) capable of providing the foundation for the discipline of film studies (or any other discipline) and to demonstrate why the attempt to build the discipline of film studies on a poststructuralist foundation ultimately failed. After proving in this chapter that the philosophy of poststructuralism is without merit, I will proceed in the following chapter to build an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema anchored by the axiom of authorship and in accordance with the aesthetic principles of objectivity, identity, and causality.

Elsewhere, I have made the case that the greatest threat to the philosophy of art (and, by extension, to film studies) is, perversely enough, philosophy itself. But not philosophy *as such*. It is my contention that the threat is a very particular – and particularly pernicious – form of philosophizing, one that produces scholarship that is, in Rand's terminology, *unreadable* (Barrowman 2017). An

unreadable book or essay, as explicated by Rand, "does not count on men's intelligence, but on their weaknesses, pretensions, and fears"; it "is not a tool of enlightenment, but of intellectual intimidation"; and it "is not aimed at the reader's understanding, but at his inferiority complex" (Rand 1973c: 117). For all of her optimism, Rand was surprisingly – and, in my estimation, unhelpfully – pessimistic with respect to her prognosis for academia vis-à-vis the unreadable.[51] As she related:

> Within a few years [of the publication of an unreadable book or essay], commentators will begin to fill libraries with works analyzing, "clarifying," and interpreting its mysteries. Their notions will spread all over the academic map, ranging from the appeasers, who will try to soften [its] meaning – to the glamorizers, who will ascribe to it nothing worse than their own pet inanities – to the compromisers, who will try to reconcile its theory with its exact opposite – to the avant-garde, who will spell out and demand the acceptance of its logical consequences. The contradictory, antithetical nature of such interpretations will be ascribed to [its] profundity – particularly by those who function on the motto: "If I don't understand it, it's deep." The students will believe that the professors know the proof of [its] theory, the professors will believe that the commentators know it, the commentators will believe that the author knows it – and the author will be alone to know that no proof exists and that none was offered. Within a generation, the number of commentaries will have grown to such proportions that the original [unreadable book or essay] will be accepted as a subject of philosophical specialization, requiring a lifetime of study – and any refutation of [its] theory will be ignored or rejected if unaccompanied by a full discussion of the theories of all the commentators, a task which no one will be able to undertake (Rand 1973c: 117-118).

Against the appeasers, the glamorizers, the compromisers, and the avant-garde stands the "intelligent man." Far from valiantly defending reason, though, the intelligent man, on Rand's account, will simply reject the unreadable, "refusing to waste his time on untangling what he perceives to be gibberish" (Rand 1973c: 117). Despite being an eminently understandable and even sympathetic response, important questions nevertheless remain. If "the man able to refute its

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[51] Perhaps Rand would have countered by accusing me of being naïve for thinking that convincing academics that the emperor has no clothes is anything but an exercise in futility. After all, over the course of their own famous attempt to convince their academic peers that the emperor has no clothes, Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont felt compelled, despite not wanting to sound "unduly pessimistic," to acknowledge that "the story of the emperor's new clothes ends as follows: 'And the chamberlains went on carrying the train that wasn't there'" (Sokal and Bricmont [1997] 1999: 177).

arguments will not (unless he has the endurance of an elephant and the patience of a martyr)" (Rand 1973c: 117), then what hope is there? Is such intellectual withdrawal not a form of moral treason? Worse yet, is such silence in the face of the unreadable not sanction?

Poststructuralism has been critiqued by countless scholars from diverse backgrounds across a wide range of academic disciplines,[52] but it is a curious feature of film studies that it does not have a comparable disciplinary history of such critiques.[53] Even with the recent emergence of "film-philosophy," no film scholars have bothered to critically engage poststructuralism.[54] It is therefore not surprising to find Robert Sinnerbrink arguing the following with reference to the work of Richard Allen and Murray Smith, two intelligent men who had previously rejected the unreadable:

> [Allen and Smith] assert that [poststructuralists have] attempted to demonstrate "the impossibility of knowledge" and have apparently "embraced this contradiction as the defining feature of philosophy and the only legitimate path that philosophy can take in response to modernity" [but,] apart from a derisory and mocking tone, little argumentative or textual evidence is provided to support such hyperbolic claims (Sinnerbrink 2011a: 198).

Against this backdrop, the critique of poststructuralism that will comprise this chapter is meant to serve as an elaborate answering of the bell vis-à-vis Sinnerbrink's implicit challenge to provide the "argumentative [and] textual evidence" necessary to prove that poststructuralism is, in fact, unreadable nonsense that intelligent scholars ought to reject. As a final word (of warning) before I set out on my critique, I should emphasize that my engagements with the poststructuralist writings

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[52] In addition to the broad ethical and political critiques that I have cited previously, see also, among many others, Cary Nelson (1985) and Donald G. Ellis (1991) in the context of communication theory; Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels (1987), Seán Burke ([1992] 2008), and Noël Carroll (1992) in the context of the philosophy of art; Alex Callinicos (1990), Barbara Epstein (1995, 1997), Terry Eagleton (1996), and Rey Chow (2006) in the context of political philosophy; and Sokal and Bricmont ([1997] 1999) and David Detmar (2003) in the context of the philosophy of science.

[53] For the few anomalies, see Andrew Britton (1979), Robin Wood (1989), David Bordwell (1989b), and Richard Allen and Murray Smith (1997).

[54] In fact, quite the contrary: There is a particularly strong effort at present to solidify the connection between film studies and Continental philosophy generally and poststructuralism specifically. Beyond the continued influence/prestige of such contemporary Continental philosophers as Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rancière, this is evidenced by the release of such titles as *Roland Barthes' Cinema* (Watts 2016), *Cinema without Reflection: Jacques Derrida's Echopoiesis and Narcissism Adrift* (Lippit 2016), *Acinemas: Lyotard's Philosophy of Film* (Jones and Woodward 2017), and *Foucault at the Movies* (Maniglier and Zabunyan 2018).

of Barthes, Derrida, and Wollen will not merely be critical engagements; more to the point, they will be polemical engagements. Since I do not believe in pulling my punches, this chapter will proceed according to what Simon Critchley has referred to as an "economy of viciousness" (Critchley 2007: xiv). To Critchley's mind, polemics are an "intellectually healthy" activity with "sharp philosophical edges" (Critchley 2007: xiv). In a similar vein, Stephen Prince has encouraged "spirited opposition" not only because it can serve as a "measure of vitality" with respect to a given field but because "the flash and fire of [polemics] can illuminate [a] field's basic and often unexamined assumptions and methods, its very history and traditions" (Prince 1992: 49). This is what Rodowick calls "the value of being disagreeable" (Rodowick 2013): Since an argument is "a public and social event open to conversation and debate, agreements and disagreements," there is the potential, through polemical engagements, of "transform[ing] the terms of debate, the language in which it is expressed, and the nature of the epistemological and axiological commitments that have been entered into" (Rodowick 2015: 79).

Given the "sedimented dogma" (Bordwell and Carroll 1996: xiv) that has accrued in film studies over the last half century – to say nothing of the "crushing weight of the philosophical wreckage under which generations [of scholars] have been brought up" (Rand [1969] 1975: 94) – transforming the terms of debates in film studies and encouraging film scholars to transform their epistemological and axiological commitments are precisely the outcomes that I hope will result from current efforts in film-philosophy. In the hopes of being able to contribute to such efforts, what follows is my "elephantine" endeavor to refute the philosophy of poststructuralism propaedeutic to the construction of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema.

I

Roland Barthes and the Attempted Murder of the Author

In the following two sections focusing on the work of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, I will not provide comprehensive exegeses of either man's respective corpus. Rather, with respect to the *rule of fundamentality* (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 45-46), I will look to interrogate the fundamentals of each man's philosophy of art, a process Rand liked to refer to as *philosophical detection*:

A detective seeks to discover the truth about a crime. A philosophical detective must seek to determine the truth or falsehood of an abstract system and thus discover whether he is dealing with a great achievement or an intellectual crime. A detective knows what to look for, or what clues to regard as significant. A philosophical detective must remember that all human knowledge has a hierarchical structure; he must learn to distinguish the *fundamental* from the derivative, and, in judging a given philosopher's system, he must look – first and above all else – at its fundamentals. If the foundation does not hold, neither will anything else (Rand 1974b: 12).

In the case of Roland Barthes, the trail obviously leads first and foremost to the 1967 publication of his landmark essay "The Death of the Author." Despite the fact that Barthes' call-to-arms is made up of conspicuous logical fallacies, contradictions, and equivocations – to say nothing of its toxic Nietzschean "morality" – "The Death of the Author" still holds sway in a number of academic circles half a century later. In fact, in the years since the publication of this extraordinarily influential essay, the author has been disavowed in virtually every critical and theoretical context across the humanities.[55] In film studies, following the era of the author policy and the politicization of film criticism in the 1960s, the author was subjected to innumerable critiques and denunciations; as Laurence Knapp recalls, the author "became less and less of an architect and more and more of

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[55] In literary theory, Barthes' essay disturbed the semblance of peace that had been achieved following the publication of Monroe C. Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt Jr.'s controversial essay on "the intentional fallacy" (Beardsley and Wimsatt Jr. 1946). In a sense, Barthes' position represents a radicalization of New Criticism, which, to his mind, failed in its attempts to invalidate the concept of authorship and instead did "no more than consolidate it" (Barthes 1967: 143). Barthes' radicalism was embraced, with varying degrees of extremism, by countless literary theorists, notably those associated with the French publications *Communications* and *Tel Quel* and with what eventually came to be known as the "Yale School" of literary criticism. It inspired Jean-Louis Baudry to attempt to explode the temporal logic of writing and reading and reconceive them as "merely simultaneous moments in a single process of production" (Baudry quoted in Rodowick [1988] 1994: 28); it inspired Terence Hawkes to reject as "dishonest" all criticism "based on the supposition that the [artwork] exists in some objective, concrete way *before* the critical act" (Hawkes 1977: 155) and to imperiously affirm in place of such criticism a mode of reading that "tears away the veil" of authorship based on the supposition that the artwork "remains genuinely ours to make and to remake as we please" (Hawkes 1977: 73); and it inspired J. Hillis Miller to proclaim that authorial intention can never be "wholly explained, after the fact, by however exhaustive a retrospective repertory of [artworks], including the psychobiographies of the authors in question" and to encourage instead an emphasis on "the residue of the unexplained" (Miller 1998: 85). Film scholars, too, were swept up by the radical spirit of Barthes' essay, particularly those associated with *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the late 1960s/early 1970s and with the British journal *Screen* in the 1970s and into the 1980s. It inspired critic-filmmaker Jacques Rivette to urge filmmakers and filmgoers alike to renounce "all the bourgeois aesthetic clichés, like the idea that there is an auteur of the film, expressing himself" (Rivette 1968: 319); it inspired Jean Narboni to champion a criticism that deprives films of "the author, the Creator, the 'temperament' through which Nature must be seen" (Narboni 1970: 151); and it inspired Stephen Heath to denounce the notion of an "englobing consciousness" capable of intending/being responsible for the particular "articulation of the film text" (Heath 1973: 89). I will return to these arguments and the long-lasting effects they have had on the development of film studies in the final section of this chapter.

an unwitting bricklayer" (Knapp 1996: 2). Fortunately, despite the frequency and severity of attacks, the author has endured. Towards the goal of articulating an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema, I intend to subject Barthes' influential essay to a sustained interrogation in an effort to identify and condemn the logical and moral shortcomings of what I will hereafter refer to as Barthes' attempted murder of the author. Ultimately, I will argue that Barthes' failure in "The Death of the Author" is not, strictly speaking, a failure of *knowledge*, but rather, in Cavell's terminology, a failure of *acknowledgment*:

> Acknowledging is not an alternative to knowing … In incorporating, or inflecting, the concept of knowledge, the concept of acknowledgment is meant, in my use, to declare that what there is to be known philosophically remains unknown not through ignorance … but through a refusal of knowledge, a denial or a repression of knowledge, say even a killing of it (Cavell 1986a: 51).

In one sense, then, "The Death of the Author," inasmuch as it represents a failure of logic and morality, may seem irrelevant (or anathema) to my endeavor to construct an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema. In another sense, however, its logical and moral shortcomings may be considered instructive and, as such, indispensable. This latter sense aligns with the philosophical practice of J.L. Austin, who maintained that identifying and mastering techniques for "dissolving philosophical worries" is a crucial skill in the realm of philosophical argumentation; as he observed, "there is nothing so plain boring as the constant repetition of assertions that are not true, and sometimes not even faintly sensible," and if the cultivation of philosophical habits conducive to rational thought allows for nonsensical assertions (such as those of which "The Death of the Author" is composed) to be dissolved, then "it will be all to the good" (Austin 1962a: 5).[56]

Unfortunately, due to the schizophrenic sloppiness with which Barthes presents his argument in "The Death of the Author," discerning what exactly he is arguing at any given moment and how

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[56] It is interesting to note that Austin's philosophical practice aligns perfectly with the philosophical method prescribed by Wittgenstein: "Most of the [questions] to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently, we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical … [Thus,] the correct method in philosophy would really be the following: To say nothing except what can be [sensibly] said … and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something [nonsensical], to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a [sensible] meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person – he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy – *this* method would be the only strictly correct one" (Wittgenstein [1921] 2001: 22-23 [4.003], 89 [6.53]).

the entire argument hangs together is no easy feat (never mind dissolving the philosophical worries therein).[57] In fact, even at this preliminary stage of my critique, there has already been a misstep, for to speak of *the* argument in "The Death of the Author" implies that it consists of *one* argument. To be more precise, "The Death of the Author" consists of *two* arguments. And, as if this is not confusing enough, within each of these arguments, Barthes vacillates between an extreme version and a moderate version.

On the one hand, in what I will refer to as *the production argument*, Barthes calls for a paradigm shift in artistic production. In the extreme version, writing *calls for* a "prerequisite impersonality" (*how* writing "calls for" this "impersonality," Barthes does not say). In the moderate version, writing does not "call for" a prerequisite impersonality, but the author is nevertheless *supposed* to approach art impersonally and to intentionally suppress his "authority" so as to allow language to work its magic (*why* and *by whom* the author is "supposed" to approach art impersonally, Barthes does not say). Even though the terms of the extreme version and the moderate version are different, they are both designed to bring art to the Barthesian "utopia" in which "it is language which speaks, not the author" (Barthes 1967: 143). On the other hand, in what I will refer to as *the reception argument*, Barthes also calls for a paradigm shift in artistic reception. Ironically, the very existence of the reception argument proves that the extreme version of the production argument is nonsense. After all, if language were the only volitional entity in production (i.e. if the author did not have a role to play in the first place), then there would be no need to make an *argument* for reception based on the premise that language is the only volitional entity in production. It would be self-evident. Thus, both the extreme version and the moderate version of the reception argument are related to the moderate version of the production argument.

The moderate version of the reception argument follows from the implementation of the moderate version of the production argument. Once art has been transformed into an arena wherein authors willingly submit to language, readers may thus dispense with the notion of *deciphering* art and

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[57] Though my repeated ascriptions to poststructuralists of schizophrenic tendencies will no doubt strike some as hyperbolic at best and malicious at worst, I maintain that, more than mere rhetorical bluster, it is diagnostically accurate; I do not consider it an exaggeration to say, as Richard Harland has said, that "meaning on the schizophrenic's level is in precisely that state to which all poststructuralists aspire" (Harland 1987: 174). Needless to say, I do not aspire to schizophrenia, nor do I think that any sane person would/should, hence my pejorative tone.

may concern themselves solely with *disentangling* it.[58] However, in the event that there are authors who refuse to submit to language, then the extreme version of the reception argument is deployed. In the extreme version, the "revolutionary" reader is *supposed* to "refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law" and forcibly *remove* the author (*why* and *by whom* the reader is "supposed" to "remove" the author, Barthes does not say) (Barthes 1967: 147).

Fueling these two arguments is a putative quest to "liberate" art from the "tyranny" of the author, after which "the people" may rejoice in the *jouissance* of the "infinitely polysemous" text. Barthes puts on the airs of Robin Hood, but the key point to be made is that this is merely misdirection.[59] Operating beneath his alleged quest for liberation is a far more sinister project (which he would later refer to as the construction of a "hedonistic aesthetics"[60]) the end result of which is out-and-out murder. Of course, Barthes does not explicitly endorse (at least not initially) the murder of the author. Instead, he proceeds as if his arguments are strictly, even peaceably, logical. Thus, the first

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[58] Even though Barthes is content to leave his distinction between deciphering and disentangling poetically vague, the implication, if not convincing, is at least clear: Since, without an author to "authorize" its meaning, a text can no longer be said to "have" (a) meaning, it is less like a "message" and more like, as Barthes claims, "the thread of a stocking," which can be "followed" or "run" – in a word, *disentangled* – but "beneath" which "there is nothing" to *decipher* (Barthes 1967: 147). That this formulation entails a significant reconceptualization of what art is and what an artwork does is an issue that I will discuss in greater detail in the final section of this chapter as well as in Chapter 2.

[59] George Orwell famously reported a similar suspicion of altruism: "Sometimes I look at a socialist – the intellectual, tract-writing type of socialist, with his pullover, his fuzzy hair, and his Marxian quotation – and wonder what the devil his motive really *is*" (Orwell [1937] 1981: 156). In his sustained (and astonishingly perspicacious if not prescient) rumination on precisely this issue of motivation, Carl Jung asked: "*Who* is making the [argument in question]? Is it, perchance, someone who jumps over his own shadow in order to hurl himself avidly on an idealistic program that promises him a welcome alibi? How much respectability and apparent morality is there cloaking with deceptive colors a very different inner world of darkness?" (Jung [1957] 2002: 73).

[60] The two most relevant writings regarding Barthes' conception of a hedonistic aesthetics (an outcropping of what Andrew Britton astutely identified as Barthes' juvenile "metaphysics of transgression" [Britton 1979: 419]) are "From Work to Text" (1971) and *The Pleasure of the Text* ([1973] 1975). For a brief description of the Nietzschean "ideal" manifest in Barthes' hedonistic aesthetics, consider the following passage: "There exists a pleasure of the work … but this pleasure, no matter how keen … [remains] a pleasure of consumption; for if I can read [certain] authors, I also know that I cannot *re-write* them … As for the Text, it is bound to *jouissance,* that is to a pleasure without separation" (Barthes 1971: 164). As for the stakes of pursuing this "pleasure without separation," Barthes is admirably clear with respect to how thoroughly it separates him from reality: "Imagine someone (a kind of Monsieur Teste in reverse) who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old specter: logical contradiction; who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity … Such a man would be the mockery of our society: court, school, asylum, polite conversation would cast him out: who endures contradiction without shame? Now this anti-hero exists: he is the reader of the text at the moment he takes his pleasure" (Barthes [1973] 1975: 3). In line with the Cavellian notion that one cannot just *not know* that which is known philosophically, I am reminded of a similar sentiment once expressed by Wittgenstein: "In certain circumstances a man cannot make a *mistake* … [which means] we should not just not share his opinion: We should regard him as demented" (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 23e).

problems to arise in "The Death of the Author" are relatively straightforward problems of logic; in both the production argument and the reception argument, and in both the extreme versions and the moderate versions of each, Barthes relies at every turn on two logical fallacies. The first fallacy is the previously discussed fallacy of concept stealing, whereby one denies the primacy of a putatively invalid concept (e.g. authorship) and then asserts the primacy of a derivative concept (e.g. art). The second fallacy is a fallacy Rand terms *package dealing*, whereby one attempts to integrate into a unified conceptual whole, or package, a series of contradictory concepts/premises (e.g. conflating the author and God). She elaborates on the "logic" of package dealing as follows:

> [Package dealing] runs as follows: To prove the assertion that there is no such thing as "necessity" in the universe, [a package dealer] declares that, just as [the United States] did not *have* to have fifty states – there could have been forty-eight or fifty-two – so the solar system did not *have* to have nine planets – there could have been seven or eleven. It is not sufficient, he declares, to prove that something *is*, one must also prove that it *had to be* – and, since nothing had to be, nothing is certain and anything goes … From the assertion, "Man is unpredictable, therefore nature is unpredictable," the argument goes to, "Nature possesses volition, man does not – nature is free, man is ruled by unknowable forces – nature is not to be conquered, man is" (Rand 1973a: 28-29).

These two fallacies are at work in both of the arguments running throughout "The Death of the Author." According to the production argument, Barthes claims that artistic production is not (in the extreme version) or should not be (in the moderate version) a matter of people "expressing themselves," but rather, a matter of allowing language to "express itself" *through* them. Theoretically, Barthes formulates the extreme version of the production argument in the following manner:

> Enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors … Language knows a "subject," not a "person," and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language "hold together" (Barthes 1967: 145).

Applying this theoretical model to actual artistic practice, Barthes outlines the process as follows:

The modern scriptor can thus no longer believe, as according to the pathetic view of his predecessors, that this hand is too slow for his thought or passion … On the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself (Barthes 1967: 146).

These formulations lead to the major contradiction that contributes to the collapse of the production argument. In the moderate version of the production argument, Barthes tries to preserve the concept of *intention* without the concepts of *identity* or *consciousness*. This is a straightforward case of concept stealing, for intention presupposes an entity capable of intending, which in turn presupposes the concepts of identity and consciousness. In the extreme version of the production argument, however, Barthes shifts from concept stealing to package dealing, anthropomorphizing capital-L "Language" and then proceeding to deny that either consciousness or intention are attributable to human beings, thus leaving Language as the only "conscious" entity possessing volition and thus capable, by some unexplained supernatural means, of intending.[61]

Interestingly, Barthes opts for a positive conception of the "pure" functionality of Language akin to the popular (mis)reading of the Hegelian "Cunning of Reason" as opposed to the negative conception of the insidiousness of language often attributed to Jacques Lacan.[62] In either case, it

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[61] The "logic" of Barthes' arguments here in "The Death of the Author" indicates a significant deviation from his earlier work in which authors were acknowledged as individuals possessing and capable of acting on conscious intentions. For example, in *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes claims that the author "shows himself clearly as an individual" in his "choice of" and "responsibility for" a "mode of writing." Indeed, Barthes conceives writing as "the morality of form" and he acknowledges, in a curiously Objectivist gesture, that a morality of form presupposes volition on the part of the author (Barthes [1953] 2012: 14-16). I will elaborate on the moral consequences of Barthes' arguments in "The Death of the Author," which deny the eminently rational claims for authorship made in *Writing Degree Zero*, later in this section.

[62] With reference to the Hegelian Cunning of Reason, Slavoj Žižek seeks to clarify that the correct reading "in no way involves a faith in a secret guiding hand" (Žižek 2012: 510). As for the insidiousness of language often attributed to Lacan (and endorsed, as I will discuss in the next section, by Derrida), Bruce Fink provides a diagrammatically clear explication when he alleges that "language 'lives' and 'breathes' independently of any human subject. Speaking beings, far from simply using language as a tool … are the playthings of language, and are duped by language" (Fink 1995: 14). Incidentally, I say "attributed to" Lacan rather than "proposed by" or "promulgated by" Lacan because, *contra* Fink, Lacan argues that language *is* a tool for making meaning – or, to use Lacan's own word, an "instrument" (Lacan 1953: 227). The caveat is that, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, it is the unconscious that is responsible for using language to make meaning. That psychoanalytic invocations of the unconscious are often no less mystical than capital-L Language is a battle for another day. The fact remains that, for Lacan, language and the unconscious are distinct and it is the latter that uses the former as a meaning-making instrument. For more on Lacan's conception of language, see, among his many seminars and publications, Lacan (1953, [1954-1955] 1991, 1957, 1958, 1966, [1972-1973] 1998).

is Language that is posited as possessing volition and thus capable of intending, though it should be noted that, regardless of whether it is Language that possesses volition while human beings do not, as in the extreme version, or whether both Language and human beings possess volition but human beings are to cede their volition to Language, as in the moderate version, both pictures of language are nonsense.[63] Undeterred, Barthes astonishingly tries to bolster the extreme version of the production argument with reference to ordinary language philosophy as if it confirms his thesis when, in point of fact, ordinary language philosophy is its antithesis (Barthes 1967: 145-146). Cavell provides a clear description of the perspective of ordinary language philosophy on language and communication, a description which illuminates how fundamentally it contradicts Barthes' antihumanist model:

> There must, [in language], be reasons for what you say … if what you say is to be comprehensible. We can understand what the *words* mean apart from understanding why you say them, but apart from understanding the point of your saying them, we cannot understand what *you* mean … The emphasis is [thus] on the fact that [expressions] are *said* (or, of course, *written*) by human beings, to human beings, in definite contexts, in a language they share, *hence* the obsession with the *use* of expressions (Cavell 1979: 206).

The final piece of corroborating evidence against the extreme version of the production argument is, ironically, Barthes' own critical practice. When he has occasion to lament the "sway of the author" and how powerful it has proven to be, he claims that "certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it" (Barthes 1967: 143). To Barthes' mind, writers such as Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Valéry, and Marcel Proust intended in their work – and, as far as Barthes was concerned, followed through successfully on their intentions – to problematize in various ways and to varying degrees the concept of authorship. Counter-intuitive and self-destructive though this intention may

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[63] Oddly enough, despite his allegiance to the semiological principles explicated by Ferdinand de Saussure, Barthes is here blatantly contradicting Saussure, who, for his part, maintained (sensibly) that "language is not an entity" (Saussure [1916] 2011: 5). In an effort not to misrepresent Saussure, I should mention that he does go on to say that, even if formulations such as "language does this or that" or "life of language" contradict the facts of reality, one "must not go too far" and "require that only words that correspond to the facts" be permitted (Saussure [1916] 2011: 5). I would, indeed, go so far as to say – in line with the Wittgensteinian notion of philosophy being "a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (Wittgenstein [1949] 1967: 47e) – that only words that correspond to the facts ought to be used, and if an example is necessary to prove the disastrous consequences of countenancing language that contradicts the facts of reality, I shudder to think that there exists a better example than "The Death of the Author."

be, the fact remains that Barthes' assessment of these men's respective work as attempts to challenge the sway of the author relies for its persuasiveness on intentions imputed to Mallarmé-as-author, Valéry-as-author, and Proust-as-author.[64]

Having invalidated the extreme version of the production argument, the moderate version, where the author accedes to the "will" of Language, may still seem viable. The reason Barthes believes Mallarmé stands out is because, as Barthes puts it, he recognized "the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner" (Barthes 1967: 143).[65] There are a number of questions that seem worth asking here: How did Mallarmé recognize this "necessity"? How does one "substitute language itself" for the "person"? Why is it *necessary* to do so? Beyond these obvious questions, a less obvious question is also hovering in the background: Who benefits from such a substitution? These questions are meant to underscore the fact that "The Death of the Author" does not merely exemplify a corruption of logic. Even more important to recognize, "The Death of the Author" exemplifies a corruption of morality.

Early in "The Death of the Author," Barthes observes that the value of the author (and thus of logic and reality) is related to "capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author" (Barthes 1967: 143). He is absolutely correct in this observation, which implies that the moral foundation of capitalism is the individual and his rights. Where he is wrong is in thinking that this is a knock against either authorship or capitalism (or logic, or reality). On the basis of this observation and the implication that it indicates an error, it becomes clear that the link between the moderate version of the production argument and the moderate version of the

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[64] For an even more explicit reliance on authorial intention in Barthes' critical practice, see his classically auteurist essay – which, strangely, was written three years after "The Death of the Author" and one year before "From Work to Text" and originally published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* at the height of its militant Marxism – entitled "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills," in which Barthes claims that the films of Sergei Eisenstein bear his "imperishable signature" (Barthes 1970: 64).

[65] Once again, Barthes is significantly deviating from his earlier work. In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes chronicles "the multiplication of modes of writing" (Barthes [1953] 2012: 84) and assesses Mallarmé's artistic practice as merely one mode among many. In "The Death of the Author," however, Mallarmé's artistic practice is no longer merely *one possible mode*; it has now become *the only acceptable mode*. I will explain the reason for this shift presently.

reception argument is the morality of altruism. In the moral register, altruism is marshaled to oppose individualism, while, in the political register, Marxism is marshaled to oppose capitalism.[66] According to Barthes' altruistic aesthetic model, the author must sacrifice his individuality for the "good" of "the people." Barthes states that "as soon as a fact is *narrated* … outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself … the author enters into his own death" (Barthes 1967: 142). If, in Barthes' altruistic aesthetics, it is *necessary* for the author to "substitute language itself" for his "person" – the moral/political implication of which is that the individual does not have the *right*, is not *free*, to exist for himself – and if, in doing so, he "enters into his own death" – the moral/political implication of which is that the individual must *sacrifice* himself for the sake of others – then what is *necessary* in Barthes' aesthetics on the part of the author is *suicide*.[67] Worse yet: What happens if Barthes comes across an author who rejects the morality of altruism and who refuses to commit suicide? What happens if he comes across an author who instead lives according to a morality of individualism and who insists on the right to and the freedom of self-expression?

In the event that the extreme version of the production argument, in which language is a volitional entity that uses helpless and mindless human beings to produce texts by ineffable means, is invalid – which, as I hope to have convincingly demonstrated, it is – and if the conjunction of the moderate versions of the production argument and the reception argument, in which the author is required to sacrifice his individuality and commit suicide for the good of the people who may then do with the remaining text *qua* alms whatever they wish, is also invalid – which, as I hope to have convincingly demonstrated, it is – Barthes still needs a way to ensure that he is able to indulge in the *jouissance* of the infinitely polysemous text. In these circumstances, if the author refuses to commit suicide on Barthes' command, then Barthes is left with only one option: Murder.

Rand once observed that there are only two means by which people can deal with one another, logic or force, and that irrational and immoral people who cannot win by means of logic invariably

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[66] The conjunction of authorship and capitalism here reminds me of the famous remark made by Walter Benjamin that "capitalism will not die a natural death" (Benjamin [1927-1940] 1999: 667).

[67] This is confirmed by Barthes, who proudly proclaims that the "poignant self-destruction" of such nonsensical artistic endeavors "has the very structure of suicide" (Barthes [1953] 2012: 75).

resort to the use of force (Rand [1966] 1970: 66). Even though Rand made this observation before Barthes wrote "The Death of the Author," it nevertheless serves as a perfect description of the path taken by Barthes over the course of his essay. Initially, Barthes attempts to disguise the murderous nature of his essay. To prove that he is not committing murder, he attempts to show, on logical grounds, that there simply is no author to be murdered:

> Did [the author] wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner "thing" he thinks to "translate" is itself only a ready-formed dictionary … Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humors, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt (Barthes 1967: 146-147).

Barthes' substitution of a "ready-formed dictionary" for the "self" allegedly "expressed" by the author signals the radicalization of a more modest argument of his from *Writing Degree Zero*. In this early text, Barthes begins from the premise that art has its roots "in the depths of the author's personal and secret mythology" (Barthes [1953] 2012: 10). Unfortunately, Barthes' explication of authorial intention is steeped in mysticism; he alternatively conceives authorial intention as "the writer's 'thing'" (Barthes [1953] 2012: 11), an "occult aspect" of his "carnal structure" that is "locked within [his] body" (Barthes [1953] 2012: 12), and a "miracle" of "transmutation" indicating a "supra-literary operation which carries man to the threshold of power and magic" (Barthes [1953] 2012: 12). Given the mercuriality of Barthes' conception of authorship and how little time he invests in articulating its logic, it is hardly surprising that he proceeds to vitiate the concept by claiming that Language, insofar as it "remains full of the recollection of previous usage" and consists of signs with "a second-order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings," invariably "drowns the sound" of the author's self-expression (Barthes [1953] 2012: 16-17).

While Barthes' conception of Language in "The Death of the Author" is clearly carried over from *Writing Degree Zero*, his conception of authorship is demonstrably different. In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes grants the author a (limited) degree of autonomy. In "The Death of the Author," however, Barthes begins from the premise that art "is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (Barthes 1967: 143). Of course, recalling my point about the reception argument invalidating simply by virtue of its existence the extreme version of the production argument, if it

were true that art is now/always was as destructive as Barthes claims, then insisting that authors sacrifice themselves in the spirit of altruism would be useless if not inconceivable.[68] As if sensing the insufficiency of his precarious yoking together of the extreme and moderate versions of the production argument with the moderate version of the reception argument, Barthes resorts in the end to the extreme version of the reception argument. This entails a shift on Barthes' part from speaking of the author being (naturally) *succeeded* (by the scriptor) to being (forcibly) *removed* (by the reader):

> To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the author … [and] when the author has been found, the text is "explained" – victory to the critic … It is [therefore] derisory to condemn the new writing in the name of a humanism hypocritically turned champion of the reader's rights … We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favor of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that, to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author (Barthes 1967: 147-148).

This argument is the logical endpoint for "The Death of the Author," its toxic "morality" culminating in unadulterated murder. There are so many things wrong with this passage that I will enumerate them in list form:

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[68] The fact that it is unclear whether Barthes believes art always was and always will be constitutively destructive to authors or whether he believes art is now and should forever be approached by authors as a self-destructive practice is a significant and telling equivocation. It is on this point that the utility for Barthes of the criticism playbook of Ellsworth Toohey, the villain in Rand's novel *The Fountainhead* and an exemplar of the altruist (corruption of) morality, becomes clear. As Toohey explains at one point: "Every system of ethics that preached sacrifice grew into a world power and ruled millions of men. Of course, you must dress it up. You must tell people that they'll achieve a superior kind of happiness … You don't have to be too clear about it. Use big vague words. 'Universal Harmony' – 'Eternal Spirit' – 'Divine Purpose' – 'Nirvana' – 'Paradise' – 'Racial Supremacy' – 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat.' The farce has been going on for centuries and men still fall for it. Yet, the test should be so simple. Just listen to any prophet and if you hear him speak of sacrifice – Run. Run faster than from a plague. It stands to reason that, where there's sacrifice, there's someone collecting sacrificial offerings. Where there's service, there's someone being served. The man who speaks to you of sacrifice speaks of slaves and masters. And intends to be the master" (Rand [1943] 2007: 666-667).

1) The notion of *giving* a text an author is a package deal predicated on the author/God conflation.[69] Authors are not *given*, they are *acknowledged*. Moreover, Barthes goes so far in this passage as to actually *assume the role of* God. At various points in "The Death of the Author," Barthes makes references to *refusing* God and to *anti-theological* reading practices which reject the "theological" meaning of the Author-God (Barthes 1967: 146-148). By virtue of this passage, however, it is clear that what draws Barthes' wrath is not *the concept of* God, but rather, the fact that *he is not* God. It is hubris, pure and simple, and following the "logic" of "the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," Barthes-as-God assumes the position of being able to give to or take away from a text the author. The lunacy has here reached its apogee.[70]

2) Readers cannot *impose* limits on texts. The only choice readers have is to (a) read *within* the (author's) limits or to (b) read *beyond* the (author's) limits. In short: Writers write, readers read.[71]

3) By putting "explained" in quotes, Barthes is implying that, once the author is discovered, there is no more work to be done by criticism. This is a reductive conception of criticism and, quite simply, another straw man.

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[69] Cavell provides a succinct refutation of this ubiquitous package deal: "What is discredited [in "The Death of the Author"] is [a straw man], a picture of human creation as a literalized anthropomorphism of God's creation – as if to create [an artwork] I were required to begin with the dust of the ground and magic breath" (Cavell 1984: 111).

[70] It warrants mentioning that even poststructuralists who claim to reject the "extreme" terms of Barthes' arguments against authorship still ultimately promulgate the exact terms of and conclusions reached in his arguments. Consider, as exemplary of this (foolish at best and disingenuous at worst) position, Samuel Weber's dealings with Barthes in his well-known *Institution and Interpretation*. In his Introduction, Weber acknowledges that "Barthes' obituary has proven premature" (Weber [1987] 2001: xv), yet this does not stop him from repeating exactly and on more than one occasion Barthes' arguments against authorship (presumably because he either feels Barthes' obituary was *not* premature or because he feels it is his responsibility to finish what Barthes started). In a critique of Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading* (1978), Weber asks the metaphysical nonquestion "Who – or what – controls the text?" (Weber [1987] 2001: 184) and then tries to answer it via package dealing, arguing that "the author" is a "secular emanation" of the "Divine Creator" and to that extent "never speaks for itself" (Weber [1987] 2001: 196). This despite the facts that (a) authors very often speak for themselves and (b) the Author-God is a straw man.

[71] Gone in this passage from "The Death of the Author" is the subtlety of Barthes' prior conceptualizations of the activity of reading. Consider, as an example of Barthes' transient lucidity, the following postulation (in a section significantly titled "Objectivity") from *Criticism and Truth*: "Nobody has ever denied or will ever deny that the language of the text has a literal meaning ... What we need to know is whether or not one has the right to read in this literal language other meanings which do not contradict it" (Barthes [1966] 2007: 5-6). Leaving aside the irony in the fact that Barthes, in "The Death of the Author," is doing precisely what he, in *Criticism and Truth*, assured no one will ever do, Barthes' consideration in *Criticism and Truth* of the ethics of reading is as elegant and rational as it is nuanced and provocative. It is unfortunate that the more irrational and megalomaniacal formulations of "The Death of the Author" have sedimented into critical dogma, thereby occluding the far more stringent efforts discernible in Barthes' earlier work.

4) To imply that respecting the role of the author in art (which is to say, respecting the role of the human in the world) is *not* a humanist position while committing violence against the author and, by extension, art (which is to say, lashing out against humanity and the world) *is* a humanist position is an egregious reversal of the facts of reality and the only authentic display of hypocrisy and antiphrasis.[72]

That Barthes' aesthetic "utopia" ultimately reaches this point of out-and-out murder and mayhem should not be a surprise given its indebtedness to the political philosophy of Josef Stalin, who proclaimed that "the dictatorship of the proletariat is the rule – unrestricted by law and based on force" (Stalin [1924] 2015: 45-46). Shockingly, Barthes' reprehensible Stalinist turn has never given poststructuralists pause. This despite the fact noted by Charles Sanders Peirce (and confirmed in horrific detail a century later by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn [{1973} 2002]) that "cruelties always accompany this system, and when it is consistently carried out, they become atrocities of the most horrible kind in the eyes of any rational man" (Peirce 1877: 1014). For her part, Rand delineated the contours of this Stalinist aesthetic philosophy:

> [The author] contributes the most to [the artistic community] but gets nothing except his material payment, receiving no intellectual bonus from others to add to the value of his time. [The reader] who, left to himself, would [be without art,] contributes nothing … Such is the nature of the "competition" between [author and reader]. Such is the pattern of "exploitation" for which you have damned [the author]. Such was the service [authors] were glad and willing to give. What did [they] ask in return? Nothing but freedom … Such was the price [they] asked, which you chose to reject as too high … You decided that you had a right to your [experience] but [they] had no right to [their expression] … You did not care to [live] in terms of intelligence – you are now [living] in terms of brutality (Rand 1957: 1065).

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[72] This reversal is even more explicit in "From Work to Text," in which Barthes decrees that "no vital 'respect' is due to the Text: It can be *broken*" (Barthes 1971: 161). Ironically, in a consideration of theories of textual analysis in relation to Freudian psychoanalysis, Weber notes that "to disfigure a text and to commit a murder" are "similar" acts (Weber [1987] 2001: 76) insofar as, in Freudian terms, "the difficulty lies not in the execution of the deed but in the doing away with the traces" (Freud [1937] 1939: 70). It would appear that Freud's perspicuous observation did not prevent Barthes (any more than it prevented Weber) from going ahead with his attempted murder, perhaps because he was confident that he would be able to do away with the traces.

As Barthes' hedonistic aesthetics reduces art to a pile of ash and critics to violent, mindless savages, there is an obvious question that remains: Is there a moral alternative? Is there a conception of art that does not lead to death and destruction? Fortunately, there is. The moral alternative to Barthes' hedonistic aesthetics is a conception of art which is not predicated on *looting*, on demanding and taking the unearned, but on *trading*. In line with the discussion in the Introduction of Rand's emphasis on trade as "the moral symbol of respect for human beings" (Rand 1057: 1022), she provides a practical demonstration of art as trade and author and critic as traders in the following passage:

> I do not care to be admired causelessly, emotionally, intuitively, instinctively – or blindly. I do not care for blindness in any form, I have too much to show – or for deafness, I have too much to say. I do not care to be admired by anyone's *heart* – only by someone's *head*. And when I find a customer with that invaluable capacity, then [art] is a mutual trade to mutual profit … [Hence,] the payment I demand … [is not merely] your enjoyment … [but, more importantly,] your *understanding* and the fact that your enjoyment was of the same nature as mine, that it came from the same source: From your intelligence, from the conscious judgment of a mind able to judge my work by the standard of the same values that went to [create] it – I mean, not the fact that you *felt*, but that you felt what *I* wished you to feel, not the fact that you admire my work, but that you admire it for the things *I* wished to be admired (Rand 1957: 782).

The problem in "The Death of the Author" is that the ideas of art as trade and author and critic as traders are anathema to Barthes. Art, according to Barthes' moral code, is a matter of *conquest*, and he will be damned if he will allow himself to be conquered by any author. As Rand makes clear, though, art and its criticism come from the same source, which is not a source of victory or defeat, but rather, "from an inviolate capacity to see through one's own eyes – which means, the capacity to perform a rational identification – which means, the capacity to see, to connect, and to make what had not been seen, connected, and made before" (Rand 1957: 783). A truly moral criticism does not encourage critics to commit violence against the authors who have demonstrated their capacity to see through their own eyes and communicate their philosophies of life in their art; rather, a moral criticism encourages the mutuality, the connection, the harmony, the

acknowledgment between critic and author whereby a critic is moved to respond to an author whose philosophy of life resonates (for better or worse) with his own.[73]

The critic who "believes in" (i.e. who values) the author is, in Barthes' estimation, a pathetic fraud; yet, the critic he envisions – the pirate who pillages and plunders art indifferent to (or, worse yet, gleeful at the prospect of) its destruction – is to be considered a moral ideal? This inversion of morality is the logical result of an irrational moral code that values the murder of the author as the height of critical nobility, the destruction of art as a demonstration of critical brilliance, and death as the standard of life. This inversion of morality is equally the logical proof of Barthes' guilt, for if a moral crime is, as Rand defines it, the attempt to create, through words or actions, an impression of the irrational – and thereby shake the concept of rationality in others (Rand 1957: 488) – then Roland Barthes is a moral criminal whom scholars have been aiding and abetting for half a century.

II

Jacques Derrida and the Failure to Communicate

Over the course of a historical survey of philosophy, Rand identifies two figures – the man of *faith* and the man of *force* – that stand out as "philosophical archetypes, psychological symbols, and historical reality":

> As philosophical archetypes, they embody two variants [of mysticism]. As psychological symbols, they represent the basic motivation of a great many men who exist in any era, culture, or society. As historical reality, they are the actual rulers of most of mankind's societies, who rise to power whenever men abandon reason. The essential characteristics of these two remain the same in all ages: *Attila*, the man who rules by brute force, acts on the range of the moment, is concerned with nothing but the physical reality immediately before him, respects nothing but man's muscles, and regards a fist, a club, or a gun as the only answer to any problem – and the *Witch Doctor*, the man who dreads physical reality, dreads the necessity of practical action, and escapes into his emotions,

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[73] The variety and validity of such critical responses will be taken up more explicitly in Chapter 2.

into visions of some mystic realm where his wishes enjoy a supernatural power unlimited by the absolute of nature (Rand 1961a: 10).

To shift from the writings of Roland Barthes to those of Jacques Derrida is, on Rand's terms, to shift from an Attila to a Witch Doctor, from a thinker who traffics primarily in brute force to a thinker who traffics primarily in mystic faith. Of course, faith and force are not mutually exclusive. There is an Attila in every Witch Doctor and a Witch Doctor in every Attila. Indeed, Rand points out that "both feel secretly inadequate to the task of dealing with existence" and hence "come to need each other" (Rand 1961a: 14). Nevertheless, the distinction between an Attila and a Witch Doctor is worth preserving, for it speaks to the vicissitudes of philosophical failure beyond sheer evil.

In an insightful consideration of the role of ethics in philosophy, David Kelley stresses that moral judgments in philosophy are only valid if they are supported "by observing *how* a person thinks, by attending to his reasoning rather than his conclusions in isolation":

> In judging rationality, we are concerned with the process by which a person arrived at his ideas. We cannot observe this process directly; we cannot literally see an act of thought or evasion in someone else's mind. But the process is revealed in numerous ways – by the kinds of connections a person makes, by his openness to evidence, by his general demeanor. One may observe how a person deals with the objections one raises, how willing he is to examine the issues in depth, to lay out his reasons for his position. One may observe whether a person gets angry when his position is challenged, or relies on the cruder sorts of fallacies such as *ad hominem* or appeal to emotion, or dodges from one issue to another in response to objections. These are all signs of non-objectivity. They tell one that *some* motive is at work other than a desire to grasp the facts (Kelley [1990] 2000: 56).

In line with Rand's acknowledgment that "truly and deliberately evil men are a very small minority" (Rand 1966a: 39), Kelley considers it irresponsible to condemn all who err in philosophy as irredeemably evil. Because, as I discussed at length in the Introduction, the activity of thinking is volitional rather than automatic and subject to error rather than infallible, "it is perfectly possible to commit errors of thinking because one has not fully mastered the relevant skills, or because

some complexity in the subject matter makes it difficult to apply the methods properly" (Kelley [1990] 2000: 51-52). After all, the philosophical problems with which this thesis is concerned are problems that have occupied thinkers for millennia. To assume that they will be easy to solve for all-time, or that mistakes made along the way invariably indicate immorality, would be downright silly.

This difference between evil and error is important to stress here because this is precisely the difference that I maintain separates Barthes and Derrida. In the previous section, I argued that Barthes was a moral *criminal*. In this section, I will argue that Derrida is a moral *coward*. Unlike Barthes, who was driven by a Nietzschean "will to power," that which drives Derrida is what Cavell calls a fantasy of *necessary inexpressiveness*, a fantasy "in which I am not merely unknown but in which I am powerless to make myself known" (Cavell 1979: 351). It was *against* powerlessness that Barthes was fighting in "The Death of the Author," it was the very idea of being powerless that frightened Barthes and fueled his irrational and immoral quest for omnipotence. Derrida, by contrast, finds solace in the idea of powerlessness as a (paradoxically powerful) force capable of annulling his responsibility and accountability as a human being alive in and to the world. Discernible in the fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness is what I discussed in the Introduction as the fear that drives skepticism. It is also, as I will endeavor to prove in this section, the fear that drives Derrida's practice of deconstruction.

The "origin" of deconstruction can be traced back to Derrida's early engagements with the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Indeed, it is not overstating the case to equate the Derridean practice of deconstruction with the Husserlian practice of conducting "sense-investigations." In his introduction to his translation of Husserl's "The Origin of Geometry," Derrida identifies as the "main find" of his translation the presence of a "spiraling movement" in Husserlian sense-investigations which he argues points the way towards the "new form of radicality" he would eventually call deconstruction:

> Concerning the intentional history of a particular eidetic science, a sense-investigation of its conditions of possibility will reveal to us exemplarily the conditions and sense of the historicity of science in general, then of universal historicity … This would demonstrate, if it were still necessary,

at what point the juridical order of implications is not so linear and how difficult it is to recognize the starting point (Derrida [1962] 1989: 33-34).[74]

Deconstruction, then, emerges from the fecundity indicated by Husserl of inquiring into the "conditions of possibility" for a particular discourse, "continually calling us back to the unnoticed presuppositions of ever recurring problems" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 52).[75] Added to which, deconstruction is more than merely an available *option* for philosophers; it is, according to Derrida, a philosophical *necessity* insofar as "every critical enterprise" allegedly suffers from a "natural naiveté of its language" and thus requires "rigorous philological or 'etymological'" investigation (Derrida [1962] 1989: 69-70).[76] In Husserl's case, his "naiveté" is discernible in his "dogmatic" commitment to what Derrida famously termed the *metaphysics of presence*, a philosophical orientation according to which the "privilege" of presence was not only never put into question by Husserl (nor by any other like-minded philosophers going all the way back to Aristotle) – "*it could not have been*" (Derrida 1968b: 34, my emphasis).[77]

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[74] Husserl himself stated plainly, inviting someone like Derrida to take the baton, that his own sense-investigations were not the only paths available to philosophers: "*Other paths* are possible for sense-investigations with a radical aim" (Husserl [1929] 1969: 7).

[75] Derrida is again taking the baton from Husserl: "For a rational practice, theory *a priori* can be only a delimiting form; it can only plant fences, the crossing of which indicates absurdity or aberration. What problems arise in this connection for self-education and the education of mankind is a separate question; and, by the way, in its universal form, it is itself a question to be dealt with by an all-embracing science, which considers all possibilities and truths" (Husserl [1929] 1969: 6).

[76] The appearance here of the word "natural" is very strange considering Derrida's career-long rejection of all such notions as the "natural" or the "given." For example: "To account for a certain stability (by essence always provisional and finite) is precisely not to speak of eternity or of absolute solidity; it is to take into account a historicity, a *nonnaturalness*, of ethics, of politics, of institutionality, etc. … I say that there is no stability that is absolute, eternal, intangible, *natural*, etc." (Derrida 1988: 151, my emphases). According to Derrida's own claim that "coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire" (Derrida 1966: 352), this contradiction expresses the force of Derrida's desire for necessary inexpressiveness and constitutive communicative failure (about which I will have more to say in what follows). Additionally, while Derrida's conception of philological/etymological investigation has a distinct Wittgensteinian ring to it, deconstruction, rather than a mere *species* of grammatical investigation, is, if anything, a *perversion*. For corroboration of this claim, see Cavell (1983, 1984, 1985, 1986b, 1989) and Toril Moi (2009).

[77] The "logic" of Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence is most clearly articulated in *Of Grammatology* ([1967] 1997), in which Derrida explores the work of Saussure and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and in the process asserts the (paradoxically foundational) importance of such concepts as the supplement and the trace, and "Ousia and Grarnmë: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*" (1968b), in which Derrida explores the work of Aristotle and Martin Heidegger and in the process asserts the (paradoxically foundational) importance of such concepts as absence and *différance*. Its affront to logic, meanwhile, is discernible in Derrida's reliance (inherited from Heidegger) on a "vulgar variant" of concept stealing Rand refers to as *the reification of the zero*: "Observe the fact that in the writings of every school of mysticism and irrationalism, amidst all the ponderously unintelligible verbiage of obfuscations, rationalizations, and equivocations (which include protestations of fidelity to reason and claims to some 'higher' form

Derrida's entire line of argument here corroborates the presence in deconstruction of a fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness. At practically every turn, whether in his rare acts of introspection or his more frequent acts of extrospection, Derrida adamantly affirms to his readers (and thereby reaffirms to himself) that self-consciousness is an illusion, intentionality belongs only to that which is *not* human, and concepts such as responsibility and culpability are utterly superfluous in the realm of human existence. How strange it is, then, for poststructuralists to speak of "the ethics of deconstruction" (Critchley [1992] 2014) and proclaim that deconstruction "*always* has ethical and political stakes and consequences" (Bowman 2013: 19). If (a) there is no such thing as self-consciousness insofar as consciousness is inaccessible to the (non)self that is the human subject, and if (b) the consciousness of other human subjects is unknowable insofar as the necessary inexpressiveness inherent in language assures either silence or misunderstanding, then how is it possible for (a) and (b) to produce a (c) in which ethics is even conceivable? The *idea* of ethical responsibility often affirmed by poststructuralists is valid and noble (and consistent with Objectivism), but far from being deconstructionist, does it not fundamentally contradict Derrida's purpose with deconstruction?

But I am not there yet. Before considering the logical and moral consequences of Derrida's inability to resolve the contradictions at the heart of deconstruction, I want to consider in greater detail his critiques of Husserl, and, in particular, his attempts to remove the self from consciousness. The ineffectuality of his critiques is attributable to his twin Kantian/Nietzschean bias and his consequent inability to apprehend the significance of the primacy of existence in Husserlian phenomenology. Interestingly, the axiom "existence exists" and the axiomatic concepts of existence, identity, and consciousness anchor phenomenology just as they anchor Objectivism (even if not in these precise Objectivist terms). Husserl also devoted a great deal of his energy, just as Rand did after him, to epistemological considerations, i.e. to considerations of the means by which human beings use their conceptual faculty to bring the objective, external world into the

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of rationality), one finds, sooner or later, a clear, simple, explicit denial of the validity (of the metaphysical or ontological status) of axiomatic concepts, most frequently of 'identity' … You do not have to guess, infer, or interpret. They tell you. But what you do have to know is the full meaning, implications, and consequences of such denials … One of the consequences (a vulgar variant of concept stealing, prevalent among avowed mystics and irrationalists) is a fallacy I call *the reification of the zero*. It consists of regarding 'nothing' as a thing, as a special, different kind of *existent*. (For example, see Existentialism.) This fallacy breeds such symptoms as the notion that presence and absence, or being and non-being, are metaphysical forces of equal power" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 60).

realm of the knowable.[78] Unfortunately, due to his allegiance to Kant, Derrida invariably occludes in his critiques of Husserl the important fact that, for Husserl, *both* "inner" existence *and* "outer" existence are "immediately present" in consciousness (Derrida [1967] 1973: 43).[79] As Vivian Sobchak affirms, according to Husserl, "the condition of being conscious *of* the world is being a consciousness *in* it" (Sobchak 1992: 59).[80] Husserl, for his part, formulated his sense of the primacy of existence as follows:

> When, through memories, starting from a perception, I am led back into my own past, this past is precisely *my* own, the past of this same subject who is present and living. And the past environing world [*Umgebungswelt*] which is now remembered belongs to the same world as the world in which I now live … To introduce the matter of intersubjectivity, what we have said also holds true if another person tells me about his past experiences, communicates his memories … The remembered environing world of the other, about which he tells us, may certainly be another world than that in which we find ourselves at present, and likewise the environing world which I myself remember may be another world; I can have changed my place of residence, have come to another country, with other men and other customs, etc., or this same geographical neighborhood with its inhabitants may have so changed in the course of a human life that it has simply become another;

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[78] In his introduction to "The Origin of Geometry," Derrida incoherently refers to Husserlian epistemology as a "*secondary* grounding" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 54). I say "incoherently refers" because grounding is epistemologically irreducible. Grounding is an action performed in and by a human consciousness in response to the objective, external world. Derrida seems to think that the (allegedly *illusory* notion of an) objective, external world is *itself* some sort of mystical "grounding" rather than *the ground* on which a human being grounds himself.

[79] Recall the penultimate sentence in *Speech and Phenomena*: "Contrary to what phenomenology – which is always phenomenology of perception – has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing itself always escapes" (Derrida [1967] 1973: 104). The only actual attention Derrida gives to the significance in Husserl's work of the primacy of existence comes in the form of two footnotes in his introduction to "The Origin of Geometry" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 83-85) wherein he casually dismisses (from a conspicuously Kantian position) the primacy of existence as an allegedly untenable reduction of the ontologically constitutive "relativity" promulgated by his nonsensical metaphysics of *différance* (Derrida [1962] 1989: 84; see also Derrida 1968a).

[80] Allan Casebier adds that "it is characteristic of the Husserlian system that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something" (Casebier 1991: 15). Compare this to the Objectivist position discussed in the Introduction according to which "you can become aware of the fact that you are conscious" only "*after* you have become conscious *of* something," that only after this point of cultivation can a person then "identify the fact that it is some function in [his or her] mind that is performing this process of awareness" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 246). For Derrida, on the contrary, the very idea of an ontological "ground" – let alone an *intelligible* ontological ground accessible to consciousness – is anathema to his Kantian sensibility. He thus rejects the Husserlian notion of "original self-evidence" (Husserl [1939] 1970: 365) and, indeed, rejects axiomatic concepts *tout court*. As he puts it in his introduction to "The Origin of Geometry": "Axiomatics in general (from which alone every ideal of exhaustive and exact deductivity can take its sense, from which alone every problem of decidability can then spring) already supposes" a "primordial evidence, a radical ground which is already past" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 55).

but, despite all this, all these different remembered environing worlds are *pieces of one and the same objective world*. This world is, in the most comprehensive sense, as the *life-world* for a human community capable of mutual understanding, *our Earth* (Husserl [1948] 1973: 162-163).

Objectivity is clearly an important concept for Husserl. As Derrida puts it in his introduction to "The Origin of Geometry," Husserl "repeatedly and obstinately" returns to the question of objectivity (Derrida [1962] 1989: 63). Despite his ability to register the importance of objectivity in Husserlian phenomenology, Derrida's reliance on the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy leads to a grotesque distortion of the concept. In one of his earliest engagements with Husserlian phenomenology, Derrida characterizes the phenomenologist in search of objectivity as "the 'true positivist' who returns to the things themselves and who is self-effacing before the originality and primordiality of meanings" (Derrida 1959: 194). The point to be made in response to this nonsensical characterization is that the notion of effacing oneself is phenomenologically *unthinkable* inasmuch as it contradicts, in favor of the mystical "logic" that underpins intrinsicism, what Husserl calls the "necessary regress to the ego" in all sense-investigations (Husserl [1931] 1960: 6).

Now, to be fair to Derrida, his ill-advised recourse to the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy may have seemed the only option available to him given Husserl's own occasional confusion as to the means by which objectivity is epistemologically assured. For example, in his *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Husserl asserts the following pertaining to his method of sense-investigation:

> We must place ourselves above this whole life and all this cultural tradition and, by radical sense-investigations, seek for ourselves singly and in common the ultimate possibilities and necessities on the basis of which we can take our position toward actualities in judging, valuing, and acting. True, in that manner we gain nothing but *universalities* for which we can give an ultimate accounting … whereas life, after all, consists in decisions of the "moment," which never has time to establish anything with scientific rationality (Husserl [1929] 1969: 5-6).

Even though Husserl was inspired in his phenomenological enterprise by Descartes and meant to proceed in his efforts along Cartesian lines, in this passage he could not be further from

Descartes.[81] Husserl is here attempting to reify the familiar split between "theoretical" knowledge and "practical" knowledge. For Husserl, theoretical knowledge is rational, measured, and objective; it yields "universalities." Practical knowledge, on the other hand, is…what? Irrational? Unmeasured? Subjective? Husserl's incoherence in speaking of "decisions of the 'moment'" as somehow unreachable by rationality – thereby implying that rationality and practicality are mutually exclusive – is a holdover not from Cartesianism but, on Rand's account, from Platonism:

> [Platonists] profess a devotion to some sort of "pure knowledge" – the purity consisting of their claim that such knowledge has no practical purpose … [and they] reserve their logic for inanimate matter [since they] believe that the subject of dealing with men requires and deserves no rationality … [But,] since there is no such thing as "non-practical knowledge" or any sort of "disinterested" action, since they scorn the use of their science for the purpose and profit of life, they deliver their science to the service of death (Rand 1957: 1066).[82]

Considering, moreover, Husserl's confusion vis-à-vis the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy, Derrida was absolutely right to apply pressure to the contradictions that undermine Husserlian objectivity. Derrida formulates Husserl's quest for objectivity as the attempt to "give rise" to an object that

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[81] Husserl framed his ostensibly Cartesian project in the following manner: "In recent times, the longing for a fully alive philosophy has led to many a renaissance. Must not the only fruitful renaissance be the one that reawakens the impulse of the Cartesian *Meditations* … to renew with greater intensity the radicalness of their spirit, the radicalness of self-responsibility … Must not the demand for a philosophy aiming at the ultimate conceivable freedom from prejudice, shaping itself with actual autonomy according to ultimate evidences it has itself produced, and therefore absolutely self-responsible – must not this demand, instead of being excessive, be part of the fundamental sense of genuine philosophy?" (Husserl [1931] 1960: 6).

[82] In Husserl's defense, he was likely inspired to this ill-advised split by comments made by Descartes to the effect that "the pressure of things to be done does not always allow us to stop and make such a meticulous check" (Descartes 1641a: 62) – this despite the fact that such meticulous checking is, according to Descartes himself, the only way to "unquestionably reach the truth" (Descartes 1641a: 43). This apparent aporia was noted upon the initial publication of the *Meditations* by Marin Mersenne (Mersenne 1641: 90-91). In response, Descartes not only pragmatically acknowledged that "from time to time we will have to choose one of many alternatives about which we have no knowledge, [and that], once we have made our choice, so long as no reasons against it can be produced, we must stick to it as firmly as if it had been chosen for transparently clear reasons" (Descartes 1641b: 106), he also referred his readers to his earlier *Discourse on Method*, in which is epitomized that "self-responsibility" for which Husserl so respected Descartes (and of which Derrida was so frightened): "Since often enough in the actions of life no delay is permissible, it is very certain that, when it is beyond our power to discern the opinions which carry [the] most truth … we at least should make up our minds to follow a particular one and afterwards consider it as no longer doubtful in its relationship to practice but as very true and very certain inasmuch as the reason which caused us to determine upon it is known to be so. And henceforward this principle [should be] sufficient to deliver [philosophers] from all the penitence and remorse which usually affect the mind and agitate the conscience of those weak and vacillating creatures who allow themselves to keep changing their procedure" (Descartes [1637] 2003: 18).

satisfies the criteria of "omnitemporal validity, universal normativity, intelligibility for '*everyone*,' uprootedness out of all '*here and now*' factuality, and so forth," and this quest, as Derrida understands it, hinges on the answer provided to the question of how consciousness can "go out of itself in order to encounter or constitute the object" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 63). While Derrida is right to maintain Husserl's confusion vis-à-vis consciousness going "out of itself," he inadvertently introduces even more confusion with two additional philosophical errors. The first error is Kantian in nature and is discernible in his equivocation between *encountering* an object and *constituting* an object, the two of which indicate precisely the difference between *objectivity* and *subjectivity*. The second error, meanwhile, is Cartesian in nature, and it is discernible in the following crucial part of Derrida's critique:

> No doubt geometrical truth is beyond every particular and factual linguistic hold as such, one for which every subject speaking a determined language and belonging to a determined cultural community is in fact responsible. But the objectivity of this truth could not be constituted without the pure possibility of an inquiry into a pure language in general. Without this pure and essential possibility, the geometrical formation would remain ineffable and solitary. Then it would be absolutely bound to the psychological life of a factual individual, to that of a factual community, indeed to a particular moment of that life. It would become neither omnitemporal nor intelligible for all. It would not be what it is. Whether geometry can be spoken about is not, then, the extrinsic and accidental possibility of a fall into the body of speech or of a slip into a historical movement. Speech is no longer simply the expression of what, without it, would already be an object: Caught again in its primordial purity, speech constitutes the object and is a concrete juridical condition of truth. The paradox is that, without the apparent fall back into language and thereby into history, a fall which would alienate the ideal purity of sense, sense would remain an empirical formation imprisoned as fact in a psychological subjectivity – *in the inventor's head* (Derrida [1962] 1989: 76-77).

Beyond his Kantian confusion and the persistence of the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy, evident in this passage is an additional Cartesian confusion vis-à-vis Derrida's bizarre conception of language as an all-powerful causal agent that makes meaning and "always-already" thwarts human autonomy after the fashion of Descartes' evil demon. There is the presumption in Derrida's conception of language that, as Carroll puts it, if human thought and action have "structural

conditions," then these conditions are *constraints*, they are *inimical* to human autonomy. But Carroll observes how strange it is to think of these conditions of *possibility* as conditions of *impossibility*, for without these conditions, "nothing could be said, which would in fact be a real blow to the possibility of human autonomy" (Carroll 1988b: 78-79). More radical than Barthes' conception of the "pure" functionality of language, the conception that Derrida seems to hold is not just of language as autonomous and omnipotent but *malevolent* to boot. The problem, then, is Derrida's conception of freedom, which, as Carroll argues, is "too extravagant":

> This argument seems to presuppose that no speaking subject is free unless it creates the language it speaks. But this is absurd. If I have a hammer and I *can* use it to build a house, or a hobby horse, or simply use it to pound the ground, then it seems to me that I am free in what I hammer. And if I hammered someone who annoyed me – while certifiably sane – I would be responsible for my act since it was free. But [Derrida's] argument, by logical analogy, would have it that I am not free because I did not invent hammers. This idea of freedom, however, is unacceptably exorbitant, and any argument that uses it as a standard of what freedom is is unsound (Carroll 1988b: 78).

If Derrida simply held the mistaken belief that language is not a "tool" that we "use" to "communicate" but an all-powerful force that *uses us*, then dissolving such a silly philosophical worry would be simple enough. The difficulty in dissolving Derrida's philosophical worry is due to his motivation in clinging to such a silly belief – which, as I mentioned at the start of this section, is his fear of the responsibility and accountability that comes with being human.[83] Responsibility,

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[83] Interestingly, for as much as Derrida was influenced by Nietzsche's critique of the self, his nihilistic tendencies are fundamentally opposed to Nietzsche's hedonism and place him closer to the nihilistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. The relationship between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer is complex to say the least (for useful overviews of the complexities of their relationship, see, among many others, Grace Neal Dolson [1901] and Steven Bond [2006]). Initially devoted to Schopenhauer's teachings (Nietzsche [1874] 1997: 125-194), Nietzsche ultimately repudiated Schopenhauer for his inability to conquer nihilism (Nietzsche [1883-1888] 1968: 7-82). Even though, as I discussed in the Introduction, Nietzsche's solution to nihilism in the form of hedonism is merely the other side of the same problematic coin, his critique of nihilism is a well-intentioned plea to embrace not just a will to power but a will to *life*. For Schopenhauer, meanwhile, consider as exemplary of his nihilism the following sentiments as expressed in *The World as Will and Representation*: "Whatever one may say, the happiest moment of the happy man is the moment of his falling asleep, and the unhappiest moment of the unhappy that of his awaking … [Consciousness] would rather have soon made the calculation that the business did not cover the cost, for such a mighty effort and struggle with the straining of all the powers, under constant care, anxiety, and want, and with the inevitable destruction of every individual life, finds no compensation in the ephemeral existence itself, which is so obtained, and which passes into nothing in our hands … Accordingly, existence is certainly to be regarded as an error or mistake, to return from which is salvation" (Schopenhauer [1819] 1966: 578-579, 605). While I believe that this connection between Derrida and Schopenhauer is valid and salient, it is to Derrida's credit that, for all of his nihilistic tendencies, he never truly acquiesced to nihilism and instead retained throughout his career a certain Nietzschean will to life.

to Derrida, means "shouldering a word one hears spoken, as well as taking on oneself the transfer of sense, in order to look after its advance" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 143). This responsibility is what Derrida has in mind when he confesses that "speaking frightens me" (Derrida 1963: 9); it is what motivates him to mobilize a nonsensical conception of language that, in his fantasy, "restricts meaning – *and our responsibility for it*" (Derrida 1963: 9, my emphasis). And Derrida's "solution," in the form of his quasi-Cartesian conception of language, is meant to ensure that "no intention can ever be fully conscious, or actually present to itself" (Derrida 1977: 73), which would mean, fulfilling Derrida's fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness, that language "leaves us no choice but to mean (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than what we mean (to say), to say something other than what we say and would have wanted to say" (Derrida 1977: 62).[84]

This fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness would, I admit, be a neat solution to the problems of consciousness and the issue of responsibility, and for many scholars who have followed in Derrida's wake, it has proven to be a satisfactory solution. Paul de Man, for instance, rejects on Derridean grounds the postulation of a "happy relationship" between consciousness and the external world since "the very fact that the relationship has to be established within the medium of language indicates that it does not exist in actuality" (de Man [1970] 1984: 8). John Mowitt, meanwhile, rejects in the realm of art the concept of value since it presupposes not only that there are objective attributes identifiable in artworks, but, even more affrontingly, that artworks have, "presumably by virtue of their 'natures,' clear and distinct insides" immune to the "tenacious heterogeneity" of textual discursivity (Mowitt 1992: 215). And Paul Bowman rejects the concept of objective meaning since the invocation of objectivity "is enabled by something like a second 'structure,' one that is never fully knowable" (Bowman 2007: 64). Yet, despite the neatness of this solution, it is ultimately untenable. To prove this, it will be instructive to consider in detail the ubiquitous contradictions that prevent Derrida from ever actually indulging in his fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness. And, intriguingly enough, these contradictions are the clearest and

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[84] Jordan Peterson has gone so far as to posit as the "cardinal issue" regarding people's motivation in clinging to such self-destructive ideas – ideas which he convincingly argues appeal "to the most hypocritical, deceitful, and responsibility-shedding element[s]" of human nature (Peterson in Rubin and Peterson 2016) – the "avoidance of responsibility" (Peterson 2017i; see also Peterson and Anderson 2018). As framed by Peterson, the tragedy of human being is not, *contra* Schopenhauer, existence itself; rather, it is that "we have been granted the capacity to voluntarily bear" the "terrible weight" of existence, and yet, "because we are afraid of responsibility … we turn from that capacity and degrade ourselves" (Peterson 1999: 466-467).

most persistent in Derrida's attempts to move from his general philosophy of deconstruction to a deconstructive aesthetics.

After completing a dissertation on Husserlian phenomenology in 1954, Derrida set out, in 1957, to write a thesis on "the ideality of the literary object."[85] That thesis was never written, but, as J. Hillis Miller convincingly argues, the ideas that motivated Derrida in his consideration of such a project underwrite his deconstructive aesthetics; they are *everywhere*, "from one end to the other of his work" (Miller 2001: 58). One of the earliest places where they emerge is in his 1963 essay "Force and Signification." In this essay, Derrida explores such issues in the philosophy of art as artistic inspiration and creation, the ontology of literature, the vicissitudes of interpretation, and problems of evaluation, and he does so on the basis, primarily, of a critique of the literary criticism of Jean Rousset. According to Derrida, Rousset exemplifies in the philosophy of art the tendency to uncritically and dogmatically adhere to the metaphysics of presence and idealize the artistic object. Indicating the centrality of his critiques of Husserl to his deconstructive aesthetics, Derrida has in mind when speaking of the idealization of the artistic object the Husserlian idealization of mathematics. In his introduction to "The Origin of Geometry," Derrida identifies "the mathematical object" as "the privileged example and most permanent thread guiding Husserl's reflection." The privilege and permanence of the mathematical object in Husserlian phenomenology is, according to Derrida, attributable to its *ideality*, to its being "thoroughly transparent and exhausted by its phenomenality"; as an "absolutely objective" object, it is, at its most ideal, "totally rid of empirical subjectivity" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 27).

It is this form of Husserlian ideality that Derrida detects in Rousset's "ultrastructuralism," which he argues has the dangerous effect of cutting off from criticism the necessary "attentiveness to the internal historicity of the work itself," including its relationship to a "subjective origin" (Derrida 1963: 15). By deploying the concept of "origin," Derrida appears to be contradicting his stated aim in his introduction to "The Origin of Geometry" to dispense with what he refers to as the "mythology of the *absolute beginning*" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 69). To avoid erroneous claims of contradiction, it must be clarified that Derrida is here invoking a modified conception of "origin"

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[85] For background on and analysis of this early point in Derrida's career, see Derrida ([1980] 1983) and Miller (2001).

based on the following explanation provided by Husserl as to the trajectory of his sense-investigation into the origins of geometry:

> The question of the origin of geometry (under which title here, for the sake of brevity, we include all disciplines that deal with shapes existing mathematically in pure space-time) shall not be considered here as the philological-historical question, i.e. as the search for the first geometers who actually uttered pure geometrical propositions, proofs, theories, or for the particular propositions they discovered, or the like. Rather than this, our interest shall be the inquiry back into the most original sense in which geometry once arose, was present as the tradition of millennia, is still present for us, and is still being worked on in a lively forward development; we inquire into that sense in which it appeared in history for the first time – in which it had to appear, even though we know nothing of the first creators *and are not even asking after them* (Husserl [1939] 1970: 354, my emphasis).

Following Husserl, Derrida further clarifies his conception of "origin" in the following manner:

> It is not at all a question of determining what *in fact* were the first acts, the first experiences, the first geometers who were *in fact* responsible for the advent of geometry. Such a determination, even if possible, would flatter our historical curiosity … [and] a certain 'romanticism' … but even if, at its limit, this determination would embrace all the historical facts that have constituted the empirical milieu for truth's founding, it would still leave us blind about the very sense of such a founding, a sense that is necessary and compared to which these facts have at best only an exemplary signification (Derrida [1962] 1989: 37-38).

If this explains what Derrida means by "origin," it remains to be explained what he means by *subjective* origin. If the "subjective origin" of geometry is not traceable to the "primally instituting geometer" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 100), then the "subjective origin" of an artwork should not be traceable to its "author."[86] Indeed, according to the terms of Derrida's critique of Rousset's

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[86] The following is arguably Derrida's most explicit rehearsal of the "question" of the author conceived of as the "origin" of meaning: "The play [of the chain of signification] seems systematic. But the system here is not, simply, that of the intentions of an author ... the system is not primarily that of what someone *meant-to-say* ... These communications or corridors of meaning can sometimes be declared or clarified [by the author] ... Then again, in other cases, [the author] can *not* see the links, can leave them in the shadow or break them up. And yet these links go on working of themselves. In spite of him? Thanks to him? In *his* text? *Outside* his text? But then where? Between his text and the language? For what reader? At what moment? To answer such questions in principle and in general will

"ultrastructuralism," the very notion of a "center" or "ground" for the meaning of an artwork is anathema to his deconstructive aesthetics. This may be corroborated by considering Derrida's critique of Rousset in light of his subsequent critique of the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, in which Derrida focuses on the problematic concept of the "center" that is presupposed in the concept of structure:

> The function of [the] center [is] not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure – one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure – but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure … The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. And, on the basis of this certitude, anxiety can be mastered (Derrida 1966: 352).[87]

Against the (metaphysical) concept of "structure" and its presupposition of a (Lévi-Straussian) "center" or (Husserlian) "ground," the result of which is, in the "geometrism" of Rousset's criticism, an "ideal" artistic object, Derrida argues for *unstructured*, *ungrounded*, *decentered* "play." Yet, at the beginning of his critique of Rousset, Derrida acknowledges that meaning in art "is the author's responsibility before being the critic's" (Derrida 1963: 4). This ambivalence regarding the artwork – on the one hand, understood as possessing an "internal historicity" and a "subjective origin," and, on the other hand, understood as "a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin" (Derrida 1966: 369) – highlights the fundamental contradiction of Derrida's deconstructive aesthetics, one that he never successfully resolves.

In "Force and Signification," Derrida acknowledges the logical priority of authorship in criticism. However, in a reading of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925), he contradicts this sensible position and

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seem impossible; and that will give us the suspicion that there is some malformation in the question itself" (Derrida [1972] 1981: 95-96).

[87] The fact that the antipathy to the concept of structure exemplified by Derrida's critique of Lévi-Strauss has structured poststructuralism ever since is one of the many instances where such anti-foundationalist thinking proves self-defeating. As Wittgenstein averred: "The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 18e) inasmuch as "the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn" (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 44e). For a more elaborate consideration of this paradox in relation to poststructuralism in particular, see Britton (1988).

derides the "law" of authorship and the equally silly belief in objective, discoverable meaning.[88] Reversing course again, in his critique of Lacan's reading of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844), Derrida takes Lacan to task for failing to consider Poe's authorship over the course of his analysis and, for his part, engages in detailed, author-based criticism.[89] Finally, within the space of a single interview, Derrida discusses the authorship of James Joyce as an "*absolutely* singular event," an *absolutely* singular "autobiographical inscription" in which "historical, theoretical, linguistic, [and] philosophical culture" are condensed (Derrida 1989: 43), yet at the same time maintains that there is an irreducible "literary intentionality" that "suspend[s] 'thetic' and naive belief in meaning" (Derrida 1989: 45).

Throughout his entire career, Derrida remained tragically torn between two warring conceptions of life and art, one according to which "the category of intention will not disappear" (Derrida 1972b: 18) and another according to which intention will disappear in the act of "Logos retaking possession of *itself*" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 146). The significance of the concept of intention (and the concept of meaning necessarily implied) is made explicit in Derrida's defense, in response to the criticisms of John Searle, of his concept of "iterability"[90]:

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[88] Derrida's derision takes the form of a parody of the Declaration of Independence: "We presuppose [*The Trial*], which we hold to be unique and self-identical, to exist as an original version … [which] constitutes the ultimate reference for what might be called the legal personality of the text, its identity, its unicity, its rights, and so on" (Derrida 1982: 185).

[89] Derrida's lengthy engagement with Lacan can essentially be split into two halves. In the first half, Derrida seeks to bring to light Lacan's analytical blindspot. According to Derrida, this blindspot was inherited from Freud and the dubious practice of "applied psychoanalysis" whereby art "is brought into an illustrative position, 'to illustrate' here meaning to read the general law in the example, to make clear the meaning of a law or of a truth" (Derrida 1972a: 425-426), which, Derrida charges, merely results in the critic-as-analyst "anticipating the truth of the text" and thereby denuding the artwork of its original "semantic material" (Derrida 1972a: 415). In the second half, having demonstrated how and where Lacan's analysis was lacking, Derrida sets out to demonstrate and analyze "the recurrence of certain motifs" (such as "the letter hanging under the mantel of the fireplace," which Derrida indicates "has its equivalent in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' [1841]") in order to better understand "The Purloined Letter" both as a unique artwork unto itself, with its own structuring principles, and as part of a "textual network" within Poe's *oeuvre* (Derrida 1972a: 458).

[90] The infamous clash between Derrida and Searle originated with Searle's response (Searle 1977) to Derrida's critique of Austin (Derrida 1972b), which in turn elicited a borderline hysterical response from Derrida (Derrida 1977). Subsequent to this initial battle, they each continued to occasionally and obliquely critique the other (Searle 1983, 2000; Derrida 1988). In what follows, I will limit my focus to the ramifications of Derrida's incoherence regarding the concept of intention. For more comprehensive contextualization/analysis of this clash, both in relation to Derrida and Searle in particular and to deconstruction and ordinary language philosophy more broadly, see, among the many commentaries, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1980), Jonathan Culler (1982), Christopher Norris (1990), Cavell (1994), Gordon C.F. Bearn (1995, 1998), Stephen Mulhall (2001), Leslie Hill (2007), Moi (2009), Raoul Moati ([2009] 2014), and Judith Wolfe (2013).

If the law of iterability, with all its associated laws, exceeds the intentional structure that it renders possible and whose teleo-archaeology it limits … then the question of the specificity of intentionality in this field without limit remains open. What *is* intentionality? What does "intention" properly mean as the *particular* or *original* work (*mise en oeuvre*) of iterability? I admit that this enigma grows increasingly obscure for me. It communicates with the greatest questions of being, of meaning and of the phenomenon, of consciousness, of the relation to the object in general, of transcendence and of appearing *as such*, etc. … [which] only cause[s] my uncertainty to increase, as well as my distrust of this word or of this figure, I hardly dare to say "concept" (Derrida 1988: 130).

This passage indicates the logical and moral consequences, in life and art, of the confusions and contradictions regarding objectivity, consciousness, and intention that I have been discussing in Derrida's philosophical practice. The notion that iterability "renders possible" *and* "limits" the concept of intention follows from Derrida's quasi-Cartesian conception of language as the condition of possibility *and* impossibility of human autonomy. Furthermore, Derrida's "glass half empty" approach to iterability as the condition of impossibility of human autonomy confirms for Derrida that intention can never be "fully conscious" or "actually present to itself." The fact that Derrida was never able to actually indulge in this fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness is due to his recognition (acknowledged in moments of courage, denied in moments of fear) of the following unfortunate consequences:

1) If intention can never be "fully conscious," then ethics, responsibility, authorship – in short, *all* concepts that are predicated on human beings as conscious, volitional entities – are null and void.[91]

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[91] Derrida's conception of "fully conscious" intention begs a number of questions. For example: "Fully" conscious *as opposed to what*? What is the concept of consciousness with which Derrida is working that it makes sensible the postulation of states such as "fully" conscious, "primarily" conscious, "slightly" conscious, etc.? What are Derrida's criteria for determining a given state of consciousness? How often does consciousness "shift" states? How does Derrida explain such shifts? Perhaps as a preemptive measure against such questioning, Derrida introduces, over the course of his dealings with Austin and the concepts of intention and meaning presupposed by ordinary language philosophy, the "supplement" of a "structural unconscious," which he describes as "alien" to and "incompatible with" conscious intention (Derrida 1977: 73). Even if, for the sake of argument, the existence of a structural unconscious is conceded, does not the existence of an "alien" entity pulling the strings of consciousness preclude such ethical haranguing as that to which Derrida subjects Searle?

2) If ethics and responsibility are not valid concepts, then deconstruction loses its sense and purpose.[92]

3) If authorship is not a valid concept, then the concept of meaning in art loses its sense and purpose.[93]

Even though Derrida was never able to successfully resolve these contradictions, he did acknowledge near the end of his life, with disarming sincerity, the problematic ubiquity in his work of contradictions. In his last interview, conducted mere weeks before his death, Derrida stated the following:

> It is true, I am at war with myself, and you have no idea to what extent, more than you can guess, and I say things that contradict each other, that are, let's say, in real tension with each other, that compose me, that make me live, and that will make me die. This war, I see it sometimes as a terrifying and painful war, but at the same time I know that it is life … [Deconstruction thus] proceeds with me from an unconditional affirmation of life … [it] is not death-oriented, just the opposite, it is the affirmation of someone living who prefers living, and therefore survival, to death (Derrida 2004: 15).[94]

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[92] In his introduction to "The Origin of Geometry," Derrida describes his fledgling philosophical method of deconstruction as the means by which to avoid in philosophical practice "aberration, forgetfulness, and irresponsibility" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 52). However, in light of his fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness (and once again highlighting the relevance of Derrida's own point about the implications of "coherence in contradiction" to the practice of deconstruction itself), is Derrida's pathological fear throughout his career of "aberration, forgetfulness, and irresponsibility" not already a rejection of the claim that we are fated "to mean (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than what we mean (to say)"?

[93] In "Force and Signification," Derrida asks if it is possible for meaning to "come forth" if not "animated" by an intentionality, or animated by an intentionality which "does not necessarily and primarily belong to a consciousness" (Derrida 1963: 31). If one were to assess deconstruction as if Derrida believed it *was* possible – as supported, for example, by his critique of Lévi-Strauss – then Derrida's critique of Rousset and his rejection of the idealization of the artistic object denuded of its "internal historicity" and "subjective origin" contradicts the terms of his own fantasy; if, however, one were to assess deconstruction as if Derrida believed it was *not* possible – as supported, for example, by his critique of Lacan – then Derrida's reading of *The Trial* contradicts the terms of his own methodology.

[94] Reflected in this confession is the truth contained in the Jungian sentiment that "any internal state of contradiction, unrecognized, will be played out in the world as fate"; as Peterson elaborates, "if we are suffering from moral uncertainty at the philosophical level and cannot settle the internal war, then our behavior reflects our inner disquiet and we act out our contradictions in behavior, much to our general discredit" (Peterson 1999: 347).

In light of this admirably honest and heartfelt confession from Derrida, which depicts nothing if not a man tortured by his own fears and inadequacies yet unwilling to acquiesce to nihilism, is Jonathan Culler's characterization of deconstruction not profoundly – even shockingly – insulting?

> [Deconstruction] cannot be brought together in a coherent synthesis. For this reason, it may not seem [valid] to many, who would argue that logic forbids [contradiction] ... The objection to this double procedure [invokes] ... physical and empirical inappropriateness. Deconstruction's procedure is called "sawing off the branch on which one is sitting." This may be, in fact, an apt description of the activity, for though it is unusual and somewhat risky, it is manifestly something one can attempt. One can and may continue to sit on a branch while sawing it ... The question then becomes whether one will succeed in sawing it clear through, and where and how one might land ... If "sawing off the branch on which one is sitting" seems foolhardy to men of common sense, it is not so for Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Derrida, for they suspect that if they fall there is no "ground" to hit (Culler 1982: 149).[95]

If, as attested to by Wittgenstein, philosophical errors "can be fitted into what [one] knows aright" (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 11e), then the possibility of a redemptive critique of Derrida and deconstruction gains considerable purchase. It is a testament to the degeneracy of poststructuralism, however, that the first step in such a rescue effort would have to be to rescue Derrida and deconstruction *from poststructuralism*. After all, given Derrida's own disposition, any poststructuralist with even a passing familiarity with Derrida and his work should find horrifying the magnitude of abasement in Culler's repulsive caricature of deconstruction. First of all, the fact that Derrida was unable to bring deconstruction into a "coherent synthesis" and was unable to resolve its fundamental contradictions is not, as Culler would have it, an indication of its *success*. This backwards "logic" might fly in reference to Barthes and his desire to "discard" the "old

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[95] It was in an effort to avoid precisely this type of skeptical nonsense that Descartes implored philosophers to distinguish between "the conduct of life and the contemplation of the truth" (Descartes 1641b: 106), or, as he rendered it elsewhere, "the actions of life and the investigation of the truth" (Descartes 1641d: 243). As he put it: "When I said [in the *Meditations*] that the entire testimony of the senses should be regarded as uncertain and even as false, I was quite serious ... When it is a question of organizing our life, [however], it would, of course, be foolish not to trust the senses, and the skeptics who neglected human affairs to the point where friends had to stop them falling off precipices deserved to be laughed at" (Descartes 1641d: 243). The rise of poststructuralism to philosophical prominence represents perhaps the most tragic kind of validation of the fear expressed by Antoine Arnauld, who worried of the harm those "of only moderate intelligence" could do to themselves and others if they tried to adopt Descartes' "free style of philosophizing which calls everything into doubt" (Arnauld 1641: 151; cf. Descartes 1641a: 15).

specter" of "logical contradiction" in pursuit of the primordial *jouissance* of the infinitely polysemous text, but it is anathema to Derrida's lifelong commitment to logic and morality.[96] Added to which, the characterization of Derrida as gleefully sawing off the branch on which he was sitting in a spirit of philosophical anarchy reduces the pathos of his sincere quest for knowledge of the world and his place in it to something out of Looney Tunes.[97]

The fact that, far from precipitating a swarm of scholars rushing to his defense, Culler's explication of deconstruction was accepted by poststructuralists as the authoritative account of Derrida and his philosophical practice indicates the staggering amount of work facing anyone who wishes to undertake a redemptive critique of deconstruction. First and foremost, it will be necessary to dissolve the philosophical worries that led Derrida into philosophical error and that are responsible for the contradictions at the heart of deconstruction. To his credit, the path for dissolving these philosophical worries, although never followed, was charted by Derrida himself in his moments of courage. As he once acknowledged, in a decidedly Objectivist spirit, it is essential that one lives according to a logic of "all or nothing":

> Every concept that lays claim to any rigor whatsoever implies the alternative of "all or nothing" …
> Even the concept of [for example] relativity is, *qua* concept, determined according to the logic of
> all or nothing, of yes or no … It is impossible or illegitimate to form a philosophical concept outside
> this logic … [and] whenever one feels obliged to stop doing this (as happens to me when I speak
> of *différance*, of mark, of supplement, of iterability, and of all they entail), it is better to make
> explicit in the most conceptual, rigorous, formalizing, and pedagogical manner possible the reasons
> one has for doing so (Derrida 1988: 116-117).

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[96] The troubling fact that Culler frames his landmark text on deconstruction according to the terms of Barthes' hedonistic aesthetics clearly indicates that Culler was reading Derrida on Barthesian terms rather than on Derrida's own terms and thus explains, in part, his distortion of deconstruction (Culler 1982: 31). Derrida himself claimed an undying "love for philosophy" (Derrida 1988: 122) and insisted on an "ethics of discussion" committed to the canons of logic, to "proof, discussion, and exchange" (Derrida 1988: 157) in the quest for "truth" – concepts which Derrida states unequivocally he never sought to "put into question" in the sense of contesting their objective existence in the world or their importance to human existence (Derrida 1988: 150).

[97] Additionally, the anarchic implication of Culler's cartoonish characterization of deconstruction is that, in defiance of logic and reality, one can say and do whatever one wishes. Derrida, however, stressed that, even if this is his legacy, it was not his intention: "I have never accepted saying, or encouraging others to say, just anything at all, nor have I argued for indeterminacy as such … What has always interested me the most, what has always seemed to me the most rigorous … is not indeterminacy in itself, but the strictest possible determination[s]" (Derrida 1988: 144-145).

Strangely enough, the logic of all or nothing to which Derrida aspired with deconstruction is precisely the logic of Objectivism:

> Man cannot survive except by gaining knowledge, and reason is his only means to gain it. Reason is the faculty that perceives, identifies, and integrates the material provided by his senses. The task of his senses is to give to him the evidence of existence, but the task of identifying it belongs to his reason … His means [of identification] is logic, and logic … is the art of *non-contradictory identification* … No concept man forms is valid unless he integrates it without contradiction into the total sum of his knowledge. To arrive at a contradiction is to confess an error in one's thinking; to maintain a contradiction is to abdicate one's mind and to evict oneself from the realm of reality (Rand 1957: 1016-1017).

Recalling Cavell's characterization of skepticism as the history of one's turnings, "in distraction or denial," from reality (Cavell [1971] 1979: 114), deconstruction serves as the history of Derrida's turnings from reality. For giving in to fear and continually turning from reality, Derrida paid the price that all skeptics are forced to pay, the price of, in Cavell's terminology, "living one's skepticism":

> In saying that we live our skepticism, I mean to register [an] ignorance about our everyday position … Not that we positively know that we are never, or not ordinarily, in best cases for knowing … but that we are rather disappointed in our occasions for knowing, as though we have, or have lost, some picture of what knowing … would really come to – a harmony, a concord, a union, a transparence, a governance, a power – against which our actual successes at knowing, and being known, are poor things. To say that there is a skepticism which is produced [not just] by a doubt about whether we can know [but also] by a disappointment over knowledge itself, and to say that this skepticism is lived … is to say that this disappointment has a history (Cavell 1979: 440).[98]

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[98] On one of the rare occasions where Cavell responds specifically to Derrida (more specifically, to what he understands to be the fundamental error of perspective evident in Derrida's formulation of the concept of *différance*), Cavell offers the following: "If each word had to be sounded for its powers before we entrusted ourselves to it, we would be able to say nothing, never come to a beginning, let alone to the end, of a sentence. Some philosophers spook us, or themselves (not alone Derrida), with this thought; they speak, for example, of meaning as always deferred. Who would deny that our words mean more, and other, than we ask them on a given occasion to say? That is reason enough to be interested, as I am, in the fact that meaning is – also – *not* deferred, that I can mean, now, here, exactly, precisely, accurately, fully, assuredly, what I mean" (Cavell 2004: 332).

It is on the basis of this picture of the skeptic as doubtful, fearful, and perpetually disappointed in his attempts to alleviate his doubts and fears that Rodowick makes the case that what philosophy requires is not further conceptual fine-tuning – which was Derrida's proposed solution with his array of idiosyncratic concepts – but rather a "diagnosis or etiology" of the reasons one is compelled to turn from reality (Rodowick 2015: 201). I have attempted in the previous two sections to diagnose Barthes' and Derrida's respective reasons for repeatedly turning from reality and to indicate the consequences of their turnings for their critical practice. What remains in this chapter is to explore the development of film studies in the wake of poststructuralism and to cast out for the sake of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema the specious specters of Barthes and Derrida.

III

Film Studies and the Legacy of Poststructuralism

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of authorship anchored the practice of film criticism. Beginning in post-World War II France and heralded by the writings of such pioneering critics as André Bazin and Alexandre Astruc, what blossomed in the 1950s in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma* under the heading of *la politique des auteurs* was an eminently logical and resolutely moral critical position. However, *contra* Andrew Sarris ([1962] 1979, 1977), it is important to note that the author policy was never meant to be a "theory" of authorship. To the early *Cahiers* critics – including Bazin, one of the founding editors of *Cahiers*, as well as François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, and Claude Chabrol, the "Young Turks" who would go on after changing the landscape of film criticism to also change the landscape of filmmaking – "theorizing" authorship would have made no sense, for, to them, authorship was axiomatic.[99] As proclaimed by Roger Leenhardt, one of the Founding Fathers of the French New Wave and a significant critical influence on the Young Turks:

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[99] On this point, it is worth clarifying that, *philosophically speaking*, authorship was an axiomatic concept for the *Cahiers* critics; however, this is not to imply that, *aesthetically speaking*, they considered all authors to be of the same "order." Similar to the "honorific sense" in which Rand tended to discuss art (see Minsaas 2005: 24-26), the specific concept of the *auteur* was introduced by François Truffaut as an honorific title distinct from, and nobler than, the mere *metteur* (see Truffaut [1954] 1966; see also Sarris [1962] 1979).

A film becomes a work of art only when made by an artist, to the end of expressing a style or a vision of the world … I reject immediately the false problem of collective film creation. The numerous technical specialists, even if you call them collaborators in the production, contribute to the success of the film, but simply in terms of its production – not its creation (Leenhardt [1957] 1966: 43, 49).[100]

More important to the early critics of *Cahiers* than trying to provide theoretical justification for the self-evident fact of authorship was the critical policy according to which what was of primary importance when engaging films as artworks was the adjudication of quality and the determination of value – in short, the pronouncement of aesthetic judgments. If, as encouraged by the *Cahiers* critics, authorship was to be acknowledged as axiomatic, then both the production and the criticism of films would have to be acknowledged as profoundly moral activities.[101] This is the source of the revolutionary impact of the *Cahiers* critics, an impact that was felt both on paper in the pages of *Cahiers* and onscreen in the films of the French New Wave. Fueling this revolutionary spirit was a desire on the part of the *Cahiers* critics to, in Jim Hillier's words, "upset established values and reputations" in order to elevate the art status of the cinema:

There was nothing new or scandalous in either France or Britain or the USA in discussing, say, [F.W.] Murnau, [Luis] Buñuel, [Carl Theodor] Dreyer, [Sergei] Eisenstein, [Jean] Renoir, [Jean] Cocteau, or [Robert] Bresson, or, from the USA, [Erich von] Stroheim or [Orson] Welles or [Charlie] Chaplin, as the auteurs of their films. It was a slightly different matter … to propose, say, Howard Hawks as an auteur … In other words, the closer *Cahiers* moved to what had been traditionally conceived as the "conveyor belt" end of the cinema spectrum, the more their "serious" discussion of filmmakers seemed outrageously inappropriate. As it happens (even if *Cahiers* did not see it in quite these terms at the time), the more they outraged in this way, the more acutely they raised crucial questions, however unsystematically, about the status and criticism appropriate

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[100] Inspired by the films of Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Godard would echo Leenhardt and proclaim that filmmaking "is not group work" and that – in the spirit of Astruc's influential articulation of the concept of *la camera-stylo*, or the "camera-pen," on the basis of which he argued that the filmmaker "writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen" (Astruc 1948) – in the cinema, the filmmaker "is always alone, on the sound stage as in front of the blank page" (Godard [1958] 1966: 59).

[101] For a landmark debate from the "pre-history" of academic film studies which turned on precisely this issue, see the debate conducted in the pages of *Screen* between Alan Lovell (1969, 1970) and Robin Wood (1969). See also the follow-up commentary of John C. Murray (1971). I will return to this debate to consider its logical and moral implications for the practice of film criticism in detail in Chapter 2.

to film as an art form … If *Cahiers* came to be associated primarily with American cinema and a revaluation of its status, it was not because they talked about American cinema more than about other cinema – quite simply, they did not – but because American cinema as a whole, so generally ignored, misunderstood, or undervalued, provided the most obvious site for engagement with these critical questions (Hillier 1985: 7).

From this vantage point, it is not simply inaccurate but downright affronting for Nick Browne to claim that later *Cahiers* critics such as Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni, Serge Daney, and Jean-Pierre Oudart continued and carried on in the spirit of the original author policy.[102] On the contrary, the entire purpose of the later *Cahiers* was to initiate an Althusserian "epistemological break"; as framed by Rodowick, "the idea of the epistemological break, so expressive of the apocalyptic desire to 'return to zero,' [was] the central rhetorical feature" of the era (Rodowick [1988] 1994: xv).[103] The later *Cahiers* critics (and the *Screen* critics they inspired) wanted nothing less than "to make a complete break with the cinema and the theory of the past" (Rodowick [1988] 1994: x). To this end, it is no surprise that the first casualty upon *Cahiers*' change in course was the author.

Intoxicated by the radical spirit of the era and inspired by the critical transformations initiated by such trailblazing French publications as *Communications* and *Tel Quel*, the new collection of critics at *Cahiers* began marching to the beat of a different drum.[104] An early sign of scission is the 1965 roundtable discussion published in *Cahiers* entitled "Twenty Years On: A Discussion

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[102] In an editor's note added to Daney and Oudart's psychoanalytic/deconstructive critique of the concept of authorship, "The Name of the Author" (Daney and Oudart 1972), Browne claims that their essay continues "the early *Cahiers* auteurism" and represents, rather than a *break* with "the traditional figure of the author," a "re-inscription" of that "figure" within "poststructuralist problematics" (Browne 1990: 324). This is demonstrably false; it was plainly the case that the "traditional figure of the author" was the explicit target of Daney and Oudart's psychoanalytic deconstruction and represented to the newly radicalized critics of *Cahiers* a hopelessly romantic (hence bourgeois, hence capitalist, hence deplorable) fantasy to be demolished for the sake of a radical new political (re: Marxist) aesthetic. I will have more to say on this course change in *Cahiers* in what follows. However, for a more accurate assessment of this turbulent period in *Cahiers* and a more thorough chronicle of the critical transformations it produced beyond the scope of this thesis, see Rodowick ([1988] 1994: 67-110).

[103] For more comprehensive accounts of the considerable influence exerted on the critics of this era by Louis Althusser, see, among others, Britton (1979), Carroll (1988b: 53-88), and Rodowick ([1988] 1994: 28-34, 67-110; 2014: 232-251).

[104] For more elaborate treatments of these shifts in the French intellectual terrain, see Rodowick ([1988] 1994: 1-41; 2014: 131-152, 214-231) and Jean-Michel Rabaté (2002: 47-92). Rodowick, in fact, goes so far as to call Barthes and Derrida the "discursive founders" of the problematics of the era (Rodowick 2014: 223) and identifies Derrida in particular as the "philosophical underwriter" of the era's most influential criticism (Rodowick [1988] 1994: 21).

about American Cinema and the *politique des auteurs*" (Comolli et al. 1965). Nearly two decades after the *Cahiers* critics had sown the seeds of what would become the author policy, the *Cahiers* critics were now starting to sow the seeds of what would become the revolt against it. The stated purpose of the discussion was to "look at the balance sheet" and assess the state of contemporary film criticism in the wake of the author policy. The discussants were happy to report that those critics committed to "stand for" the cinema and those "crabby" critics committed to stand against it were equally "aware of the reality of the concept of *auteur* and the soundness of the *politique* … On this front, the battle has been won more decisively than anybody could ever have predicted." Despite the apparent stolidity of the discussants, shortly after this proclamation of victory is a curious remark about how the author policy "exceeded [its] limits," a remark followed by the jarringly incongruous declaration of the discussants' intent to "challenge the elevation of the *politique des auteurs* into dogma" (Comolli et al. 1965: 196).

This (by now all-too-familiar) schizophrenic gesture of affirming and denying the concept of authorship in the same breath is the founding gesture of academic film studies and represents its fundamental impasse. Looking back at the history of film studies, Rodowick claims that the poststructuralist models of film criticism that were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s and that represented the concerted effort of scholars to challenge the author policy are mere "relics of a near past that [have been] surpassed by a variety of approaches" (Rodowick [1988] 1994: vii). Quite the contrary, I think that it would be more accurate to say that, as Paul Bowman observes, film studies did not "surpass" the "relic" of poststructuralism but rather "morphed into [a discipline] dominated by the problematics of poststructuralism" (Bowman 2013: 31). Given the persistence of poststructuralism in film studies, I intend in what remains of this chapter to look at the balance sheet and, in a similar vein as the *Cahiers* assessment of film criticism in the wake of the author policy, assess the practice of film criticism in the wake of poststructuralism.

Now, while it may appear that I am framing this final section as a Dante-esque descent on my part into the film studies Inferno, it is important to stress that, from a certain Objectivist perspective (similar to the Objectivist distinction between evil and error stressed in the previous section), the fact that the academic institutionalization of film studies followed from the dissolution of the author policy is not proof of scholars' "essential evil"; rather, it is "a great and tragic proof of

[their] essential morality" (Rand 1943: 87-88), of their willingness to always consider alternative methodologies and constantly check their premises. This determination on the part of scholars to be wary of error, ignorance, prejudice, etc., is not a vice. In fact, it is a virtue. However, it is important for scholars to be vigilant regarding what Rand calls the "dangerous little catch-phrase" of "keeping an open mind":

> This is a very ambiguous term – as demonstrated by a man who once accused a famous politician of having "a wide open mind." That term is an anti-concept. It is usually taken to mean an objective, unbiased approach to ideas, but it is used as a call for perpetual skepticism, for holding no firm convictions and granting plausibility to anything … What objectivity and the study of philosophy require is not an "open mind" but an *active mind* … An active mind does not grant equal status to truth and falsehood, it does not remain floating forever in a stagnant vacuum of neutrality and uncertainty; by assuming the responsibility of judgment, it reaches firm convictions and holds to them … If you keep an active mind, you will discover (assuming that you started with common sense rationality) that every challenge you examine will strengthen your convictions; that the conscious, reasoned rejection of false theories will help you to clarify and amplify the true ones; that your ideological enemies will make you invulnerable by providing countless demonstrations of their own impotence. No, you will not have to keep your mind eternally open to the task of examining every new variant of the same old falsehoods. You will discover that they are variants or attacks on certain philosophical essentials – and that the entire, gigantic battle of philosophy (and of human history) revolves around the upholding or the destruction of these essentials (Rand 1974b: 21-22).

Proceeding from the notion of what Rand refers to as *the sanction of the victim*, it is one of the principles of Objectivism that "there comes a point in the defeat of any man of virtue when his own consent is needed for evil to win" (Rand 1957: 1048). If, in Randian terms, the gigantic battle of film studies revolves around upholding or destroying the concept of authorship, then it is not possible for the concept of authorship to be destroyed unless those committed to upholding it sanction its destruction. Arguments against authorship are, in and of themselves, harmless. Only when they are given the sanction of reason do they become dangerous. As Rand makes clear, a basic premise is "an absolute that permits no cooperation with its antithesis and tolerates no tolerance" (Rand 1957: 741-742). As it relates to film criticism, any scholar who accepts the denial

of the basic premise of authorship is guilty of "granting the sanction of reason to formal dementia" and "it is they who achieve the destruction of the mind" (Rand 1957: 741).

Recalling the discussion at the end of the previous section, the logic of Objectivism is the logic of all or nothing: "There are two sides to every issue: One side is right and the other is wrong … In any compromise between food and poison, it is only death that can win. In any compromise between good and evil, it is only evil that can profit" (Rand 1957: 1054). Authorship is a basic premise. Cooperation with and tolerance for critical methodologies that deny the basic premise of authorship cannot be permitted. A compromise between an author-based critical methodology and an anti-author critical methodology accomplishes nothing but the destruction of the concept of authorship. A is not A *and* B. A is A. All or nothing.[105] And yet, as a discipline, film studies is remarkable for the insistence of its scholars to try to have their cake and eat it. Myriad film scholars over the years have granted the sanction of reason to arguments against authorship and have tried to reconcile author-based criticism with its antithesis. For example, in his magisterial account of the films of Fritz Lang (in virtually every respect a towering achievement in film criticism), Tom Gunning laments the fact that film studies scholars unproductively "jettisoned" the concept of authorship and thereby "stunted the growth of a dynamic film criticism" (Gunning 2000: x). His solution? To practice criticism as advocated by the author policy but according to the principles of poststructuralism. He encourages scholars to conceptualize authorship in the "novel manner" according to which the Derridean "play of discourse" ought to take precedence over the romantic search for authorial "self-expression" (Gunning 2000: 5). Why? Because, following the "logic" of Barthes' package dealing, just as "the gods [were] created by man," so the author is "the creation of the reader" (Gunning 2000: 7).

In an effort to exorcise from film studies the specious specters of Barthes and Derrida and expel once and for all the "logic" of poststructuralism, I will focus in what remains of this chapter on the book that Rodowick credits with "laying the foundation" for what would eventually become academic film studies (Rodowick [1988] 1994: 45) and, *mutatis mutandis*, the book that I hold

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[105] This is not, of course, to deny the difficulty, in certain instances, of attribution (cf. Knapp 1996: 1-4). Nor is it to deny that film authorship is an exceedingly complex phenomenon (cf. Cameron 1962). It is simply to stress that authorship, though it can at times present *epistemological* problems (determinable only on a case-by-case basis), is not an *ontological* problem (cf. Cavell 1996: 8-9).

responsible for sanctioning the destruction of authorship: Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. To describe Wollen's landmark text as schizophrenic would be an understatement. In an interview with Wollen conducted by "Lee Russell" (Wollen's pseudonym while writing for the *New Left Review* and a disturbing confirmation of his schizophrenic tendencies), Wollen explains that he wrote the first edition of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* in May of 1968:

> As fortune decreed, this has become an emblematic date. May 1968 – it seemed like the beginning of a new epoch. *Signs and Meaning* is full of the same sense of a beginning – a new approach to film studies, a new intellectual seriousness, new theoretical developments, the promise of a new cinema, even the foundation of a new academic discipline (Wollen 1997: 211).

In its original publication, the chapter on the "auteur theory" and the inclusion of a "pantheon" of great directors firmly situated Wollen's text in the early *Cahiers* tradition of the author policy. However, with the publication in 1972 of a new edition, the pantheon was eliminated and a new Conclusion introducing a host of poststructuralist concerns was added. Wollen's decision to eliminate the original pantheon pursuant to a critique of the author policy was, by his own admission, symptomatic of the effect of Barthes' "The Death of the Author":

> I felt that Barthes's [essay was] ridiculous … All the same, I still felt called upon to revise my own section on auteurism and give it a poststructuralist gloss … [which] served to occlude the question of the relationship between the actual author and the textual "author effect." I'm sorry about that (Wollen 1997: 244).

Through Wollen's commendable introspection (and by virtue of his openness and honesty which admirably culminates in an admission of guilt and an apology), it is clear that, at the time, the sheer *force* of the authoritative pronouncements of Attilas like Barthes convinced critics and scholars that there *must* be something to their claims, otherwise why would they be making them with such force?[106] Afraid to hold to his convictions despite correctly identifying the "ridiculous" nature of

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[106] As averred by Descartes: "Confident assertion and frequent repetition are the two ploys that are often more effective than the most weighty [sic] arguments when dealing with ordinary people or those who do not examine things carefully" (Descartes 1642: 358). For an insightful examination of the source of the confusion and malaise discernible in Wollen's remarks, see Rand (1966b). Over the course of her examination, she clarifies that Attilas like Barthes "do not seek to convert you to *their* values – they haven't any – but to destroy *yours*. Nihilism and destruction [are their] *explicit* goals … and the horror is that [their ideas] move on, unopposed. Who is to blame? All those who are afraid

poststructuralism, Wollen, "at the crossroads of the choice between 'I know' and 'They say' ... gave in to so craven a fear of independence that he renounced his rational faculty … [and] chose the authority of others" (Rand 1957: 1044-1045). The result is a book utterly torn apart by contradictions. For organizational economy and conceptual clarity, rather than proceeding through Wollen's text beginning-to-end, I will single out the principal claims that he makes for an author-based critical methodology, organized in relation to the aesthetic principles of objectivity, identity, and causality as I defined them at the beginning of this chapter, and explore the ways that his adherence to principles of poststructuralism undercuts the claims for his proposed methodology.

First, in corroboration of the objectivity principle, Wollen observes that meaning in art is "generated within the [artwork] itself" (Wollen 1972: 139). If this is true, then, as per the objectivity principle, the artwork exists apart from and prior to the act of criticism. A mere paragraph after making this claim, however, Wollen criticizes "all previous aesthetics" for perpetuating the notion that artworks are "monads, each enclosed in its own individuality, a perfect globe, a whole" (Wollen 1972: 139-140). The result of this contradiction is a bizarre (and unmistakably Barthesian) conception of an artwork as "a material object whose significance is determined not by [an author] … but through *its own interrogation of its own code*," a mystical, "self"-generated interrogation which inexplicably produces "meaning of a new kind" (Wollen 1972: 139, my emphasis).[107]

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to speak. All those who are still able to know better but who are willing to temporize, to compromise, and thus to sanction an evil of that magnitude" (Rand 1966b: 114).

[107] For an even more astonishing example of this Barthesian conception of the "autonomy" of the inexplicably volitional and "(self-)conscious" film "text," consider the most recent analysis of the films of Alfred Hitchcock undertaken by William Rothman (2014). Throughout his examination of Hitchcock's films (which, like Gunning's examination of Lang, is in virtually every respect a masterclass in film criticism), Rothman endlessly waffles on the issue of whether it is the author who possesses volition and is thus responsible for the content of a film or whether it is the camera (which, similar to Barthes' conception of capital-L Language, is, in Rothman's critical practice, the capital-C Camera). On the one hand, in a discussion of a shot of Cary Grant in *North by Northwest* (1959), Rothman rationally argues that, "by *choosing* to frame Grant frontally as well as closely," Hitchcock, as the author, "inscribes" his thought in the shot (Rothman 2014: 14, my emphasis). On the other hand, in a discussion of a series of shots of Henry Fonda in *The Wrong Man* (1956), Rothman irrationally argues that "this passage perfectly exemplifies Hitchcock's understanding that the camera is more than a machine that passively takes in whatever happens in front of it. The camera also has *the power to make things happen*" (Rothman 2014: 114, my emphasis). More astonishing still, in his own recent work, even Rodowick ends up ensnared in the same contradiction. After developing even more extensively than Rothman a nonsensical notion of "camera consciousness" for which he claims that "no active powers of consciousness need be attributed" to the camera, Rodowick, exemplifying the illogic of concept stealing, proceeds in the very next sentence to attribute to the camera a "mode of thought" capable of activating mystical "powers" of "expressive intentionality" (Rodowick 2015: 223).

The incoherence here (as was the case with Husserlian phenomenology) is the product of Wollen's reliance on the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy and the resultant distortion of the concept of objectivity. Wollen claims that, in all previous aesthetics, criticism is an "automatic" and "magical" activity in which "ideas shone through marks on paper enter the skull through the windows of the eyes" (Wollen 1972: 140). Wollen refers to this as "the myth of transparency, the idea that the mark of a good [artwork] is that it conveys a rich meaning, an important truth, in a way which can be grasped immediately" (Wollen 1972: 146). The key point to be made here is that this "myth" with which Wollen has speciously saddled all previous aesthetics is more precisely a straw man (indeed, it is the same straw man utilized by Barthes in "The Death of the Author" to justify the extreme version of the reception argument). Added to which, not only does the objective existence of artworks neither preclude nor annul the act(ivity) of criticism, it is precisely the objective existence of artworks that allows for the possibility of criticism in the first place, for an artwork, as defined by Andrew Britton, "is not something simply available to be constituted at will" by critics on the one hand nor a mystical entity in possession of supernatural powers that allow it to "transmit" "knowledge" to critics on the other, but rather, "a historical object to which criticism aspires to be adequate" (Britton 1979: 435).[108]

Further elaborating on the practice of criticism, Wollen makes the rational claim vis-à-vis the identity principle that criticism "has to be justified by an explanation of how the [artwork] itself works" (Wollen 1972: 146). If this is true, then, as per the identity principle, an interpretation of an artwork can be considered valid only if it adequately explains what the artwork is and why the

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[108] Derrida struggles with the same contradiction in the construction of his deconstructive aesthetics (as do Peter Brunette and David Wills in their attempt to resolve this contradiction towards the goal of building a deconstructive aesthetics of cinema [Brunette and Wills {1989} 2014: 86-92]). In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida states very plainly in accordance with the principles of objectivity, identity, and causality that there is a "guardrail" around every text the "indispensable" purpose of which is to keep criticism from "developing in any direction at all and authoriz[ing] itself to say almost anything" (Derrida [1967] 1997: 158). Yet, he also claims in opposition to the principles of objectivity, identity, and causality that it is not possible for criticism to reconstruct in any text the "conscious, voluntary, intentional [meaning] that the writer institutes" (Derrida [1967] 1997: 158) insofar as the "presumed content" so "instituted" is merely "a chain of differential references" which "have always already escaped, have never existed" (Derrida [1967] 1997: 159). Given that the notion of a "guardrail" presupposes something to be guarded, and given that Derrida has just claimed that there is nothing to be guarded, in the context of his deconstructive aesthetics, the notion is divested of all sense, for, if not the meaning (which is to say, the identity) of the objectively existing text, what is it that Derrida thinks this indispensable guardrail is actually guarding?

artwork is the way it is.[109] However, immediately after establishing this eminently rational perspective on criticism, Wollen sets about contradicting himself by irrationally arguing that criticism "is not essentially grounded" (Wollen 1972: 146) in the artwork itself since the very notion of "the artwork itself" is an "illusion" (Wollen 1972: 147).[110] The first claim proceeds from an acknowledgment of the objectivity principle. Recalling Rand's "existence is identity" formula, if an artwork objectively exists, then it has an identity. Moreover, if an artwork has an identity, then it can be identified in criticism. The purpose of criticism, then, would be to identify and interpret objectively existing artworks. The second claim, however, proceeds from a rejection of the objectivity principle. If an artwork does not objectively exist, then it does not have an identity. Moreover, if an artwork does not have an identity, then it cannot be identified in criticism. In support of the latter position, Wollen argues that it is "necessary to insist" that "there is no true, essential meaning" to be "found" "in" an artwork (Wollen 1972: 146). However, if Wollen believes that it is necessary to insist that there is no true meaning to be found in an artwork, then why does he also find it necessary to insist that critics must justify their explanations of artworks? Indeed, to what can the concept of justification possibly refer?

Finally, and most problematically, just as Derrida was tragically torn between two warring conceptions of art, one according to which "the category of intention will not disappear" (Derrida 1972b: 18) and another according to which intention will disappear in the act of "Logos retaking possession of *itself*" (Derrida [1962] 1989: 146), Wollen endlessly waffles on the status of artworks

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[109] Adding to the confusion endemic to deconstruction, despite the position Derrida advocates in *Of Grammatology*, the same impulse vis-à-vis the identity principle evidenced by Wollen here is also discernible in Derrida's critical practice. In a consideration of the various steps taken by a critic in the interpretation of a text, Derrida once observed that, "in asking if [an] interpretation is justifiable, [the critic is] therefore asking" whether or not he has "understood the sign itself": "In other words, has what [the author of the text] said and meant been clearly perceived? This comprehension of the sign in and of itself … is only the first moment but also *the indispensable condition of all hermeneutics* (Derrida 1963: 32, my emphasis).

[110] For an example of the persistence of this contradiction in attempts by film scholars to formulate "progressive" critical methodologies based on poststructuralist principles, consider that Rodowick, at the end of a marvelously perspicacious critique of the contradictions with which nearly every major critical endeavor of the era, including Wollen's, was riddled, promulgates the exact same contradiction. In an effort to ensure the objectivity of artworks against the tendency of critics to "freely apply interpretations as [they] may," Rodowick anchors the practice of criticism in "the given text itself since its particular organization of signs may either serve to facilitate or resist certain avenues of interpretation" (Rodowick [1988] 1994: 282). At the same time, Rodowick claims that "the 'text itself,' or the ontological definition of the text as an autonomous, self-identical formal object, must be dismantled" (Rodowick [1988] 1994: 283). To Rodowick's credit, he seems to have resolved this contradiction in his more recent work (Rodowick 2015).

as either the *products* of or the *producers* of authors. At numerous points throughout his text, Wollen acknowledges the soundness of the author policy and, in effect, affirms the causality principle. He concedes that, of the "great many features" of artworks, the contribution of the author is "the one which carries the most weight" (Wollen 1969: 85-86); he describes story elements as "catalysts" which are "introduced into the mind" of the author and which "fuse with his own preoccupations" and "the motifs and themes characteristic of his work" (Wollen 1969: 93); and he acknowledges that "there can be no doubt" that meaning in art is "connected with the presence" of an author (Wollen 1972: 145). And yet, despite the rationality of these claims, Wollen nevertheless proceeds to contradict himself and posit the following:

> [Film criticism] does not consist of re-tracing a film to its origins, to its creative source. It consists of tracing a structure (not a message) within the work, which can then *post factum* be assigned to an individual, the director, on empirical grounds. It is wrong, in the name of a denial of the traditional ideas of creative subjectivity, to deny any status to individuals at all. But Fuller or Hawks or Hitchcock, the directors, are quite separate from "Fuller" or "Hawks" or "Hitchcock," the structures named after them … It is in this sense that it is possible to speak of a film *auteur* as an unconscious catalyst (Wollen 1972: 144-145).

Plainly obvious in this passage is the influence not only of Barthes and "The Death of the Author," but, more specifically, the influence of Michel Foucault and his conception of what he famously termed the *author-function* (Foucault [1969] 1979). In response to the proliferation of the Barthesian idea of the death of the author, Foucault famously articulated the concept of the author-function in an effort to supersede the allegedly antediluvian, bourgeois concept of the author. In the context of Foucault's explicitly antihumanist philosophical system, the articulation of the concept of the author-function is the logical extension of his larger project to strip away the "privileges of the subject"; as he claims, "the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse" (Foucault [1969] 1979: 28). Galvanized by the sanction provided by Foucault, Wollen followed his lead and sought to strip away the privileges of the author and analyze "authors" as variable functions of critical

discourses. However, if it is true that, rather than the *cause* of an artwork, the author is merely an *effect*, then who/what is the cause?[111]

At certain points in his text, Wollen endows the mystical "structures" and "patterns" of artworks with the creative powers required to "produce" them. For example, he claims in a distinctly Barthesian register that an artwork is not the "expression" of an author/subject but rather "a certain pattern of energy cathexis" (Wollen 1972: 144) which "provides the conditions for the production of meaning within constraints *which it sets itself*" (Wollen 1972: 140, my emphasis). At other points in his text, he shifts to more of a Derridean register and attributes the power of creation to the author's unconscious. For example, he claims that an artwork is "associated" with an author "not because he has played the role of artist, expressing himself or his own vision," but because "it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded … usually to the surprise of the individual involved" (Wollen 1972: 144). And still at other points in his text, he shifts to a Foucauldian register and evades the concept of causality altogether. For example, he claims that "writer and reader" are "indifferently critics" of a given artwork where "artwork" refers not to an "instrument of communication" (Wollen 1972: 141) but rather to "something like a machine for producing meaning" (Wollen 1972: 148).

To Wollen's credit, despite his ceaseless oscillations, he never advocates anything resembling the extreme version of the reception argument where out-and-out murder is passed off as the height of critical nobility. Instead, essentially burying his head in the sand, he follows with something approaching consistency Foucault's reading of "The Death of the Author." Intriguingly, whereas

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[111] Clearly underwriting the poststructuralist objection to the concept of authorship is Nietzsche's objection to the concept of causality. According to Nietzsche, the "chronological inversion" whereby "the cause enters consciousness later than the effect" is proof that the very concept of causality is not only "imagined," hence not real, but imagined *falsely* (I will not hazard a guess as to how one can "falsely" imagine something that does not exist in the first place, though I will point out Descartes' observation in the *Meditations* that the content of one's imagination "cannot strictly speaking be false" *qua* imaginary content [Descartes 1641a: 26]); thus, Nietzsche proclaimed (in language recalling Kant and anticipating Derrida) that consciousness as such is merely a "groping" which is "indissolubly tied to the old error of the ground" (Nietzsche [1888] 1967: 265-266). I will explore the consequences of this Nietzschean perspective for Wollen's critical practice in what follows. For examples of Nietzsche's influence on poststructuralism more broadly, see the work of, among many others, Paul de Man, who thought the "logic" of considering a cause to be "the effect of an effect" and an effect to be "the cause of its own cause" (de Man 1979: 107) was perfectly suited to underwrite his deconstructive aesthetics, and Jonathan Culler, who accepted Nietzsche's proto-deconstruction of causality since the concept of a "causal structure" is not (indicating Culler's Derridean reliance on the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy) something "given as such" but is rather "the product of a precise tropological or rhetorical operation" (Culler 1982: 86).

Barthes was equivocal as to whether art always was and always will be constitutively destructive to authors or whether art is now and should forever be approached by authors as a self-destructive practice, Foucault very clearly historicized sacrificial art as a then-contemporary issue of morality:

> The writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of "expression" … Writing is now linked to sacrifice and to the sacrifice of life itself; it is a voluntary obliteration of the self … In addition, we find the link between writing and death manifested in the total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer … If we wish to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence and in his link to death, which has transformed him into a victim of his own writing (Foucault [1969] 1979: 15-16).

As for the practice of criticism, Foucault excitedly observed the consequences of instituting an altruistic aesthetics:

> It has been understood that the task of criticism is not to re-establish the ties between an author and his work or to reconstitute an author's thought and experience through his works … [but rather] should concern itself with the structures of a work, its architectonic forms, which are studied for their intrinsic and internal relationships … No longer the tiresome repetitions: 'Who is the real author?' 'Have we proof of his authenticity and originality?' 'What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?' New questions will be heard: 'What are the modes of existence of this discourse?' 'Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?' 'What placements are determined for possible subjects?'" (Foucault [1969] 1979: 16, 28-29).

Even though Foucault was strategically vague as to how/why the "new" question "Where does a discourse come from?" was different from the "old" question "Where does an artwork come from?" – not to mention as to what the answer to the "new" question could possibly be – the "logic" is nevertheless clear: If authors voluntarily obliterate themselves and acquiesce to their "function" as victims of writing, then critics may do with "their" artworks *qua* alms whatever they wish; the critic-as-God is endowed in Foucault's Barthesian aesthetic system with the sovereign power to give to and take away from artworks "authors" as he sees fit, "justified" by nothing more (and requiring nothing more) than his whims. Thus, even though Wollen never went so far as to explicitly advocate hedonism, by adhering to the principles of poststructuralism, his proposed

methodology amounts to nothing less than the ideal critical foundation for a hedonistic aesthetics of cinema.[112] And the tragic irony is that the position from which he set out in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* was for all intents and purposes an Objectivist position.

In the original Introduction to the 1969 edition, Wollen acknowledged that, since "criticism necessarily depends upon knowing what a text means," any critical methodology that refuses to acknowledge the aesthetic principles of objectivity, identity, and causality is "condemned to massive imprecision and nebulosity" (Wollen 1969: 10). At this point, having considered at length the arguments of Barthes, Derrida, and now Wollen, it should be clear that, at one time or another, every poststructuralist acknowledges this basic and eminently rational fact. It should be equally clear at this point that every poststructuralist argument invariably turns into a denial of this basic and eminently rational fact in the hopes of evading the responsibility of having to live up to it. Wollen claims at one particularly telling moment that a critic puts his consciousness "at risk" in every engagement with an artwork (Wollen 1972: 139). In the Objectivist sense that thinking is volitional rather than automatic and subject to error rather than infallible, this is true. However, given Wollen's poststructuralist arguments regarding artworks as being subjective constructs which do not objectively exist, which have no essential meaning, and which neither originate in nor emanate from human consciousness, where exactly is the critical risk? If there is no true and objective meaning to be found in artworks – which implies that meaning in art is arbitrarily asserted based solely on critical whim – then how can an ascription of meaning ever be wrong? Far from embracing risk and advocating objective criticism, does Wollen not embrace subjectivism and advocate turning criticism into a risk-free zone in which the whims of critics reign supreme, in which criticism ceases to be a conversation and instead becomes a cacophony of Attilas struggling to outshout those around them, and in which the final arbiter in criticism shifts from logic to force?[113]

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[112] In his lucid rejection of this critical model, Robin Wood shrewdly observed (having recognized both the logical consequences and the moral implications of instituting such a critical model) that "the demolition of the author is necessary and central to a wider operation – the demolition of art. For without artists *there is no art* – only various configurations of signifiers awaiting deconstruction" (Wood 1989: 26, my emphasis).

[113] Perhaps the paradigm case of a poststructuralist shrinking from such risk is Foucault's work on Raymond Roussel, in which, to avoid "the common risk of being wrong" when formulating an interpretation of a text (Foucault [1963] 2004: 5), Foucault shifted the terms of criticism from the terrain of the objective onto the terrain of the *arbitrary* (Foucault [1963] 2004: 8-9), a treasured concept for poststructuralists inasmuch as it is, to their Nietzschean satisfaction, "beyond right and wrong." For the sense of deliverance experienced by poststructuralists, consider the

Recalling the Cavellian notion of the truth of skepticism, I am inspired to identify in the fear that drives poststructuralists to embrace critical subjectivism *the truth of poststructuralism*. To Cavell's mind, subjectivism is a painfully transparent "Kantian bargain" with skepticism, "buying back the knowledge of objects by giving up things in themselves" (Cavell 1986a: 65).[114] To add insult to injury, poststructuralism "tends to soberize, or respectify, or scientize" this bargain, "claiming, for example, greater precision or accuracy or intellectual scrupulousness" (Cavell 1986a: 59). Hence, when Wollen asserts that "it is an illusion to think of any [artwork] as complete in itself" (Wollen 1972: 147), the implication is that once he was blind but now, thanks to poststructuralism, he can see. As expected, *what* he can "see" thanks to poststructuralism is, paradoxically, "the artwork itself," but nonsensically conceived as "the location of thought rather than the mind" (Wollen 1972: 141). Regarding this mystical presumption of a "sixth sense" which allows poststructuralists to "think" in the absence of their minds and paradoxically "see" behind the curtain of (their fantasy of) reality, this, Rand explains, is merely the self-imposed blindness at the heart of skepticism:

> [Skeptics] are germs that attack you through a single sore: Your fear of relying on your mind. They tell you that they possess a means of knowledge higher than the mind, a mode of consciousness superior to reason – like a special pull with some bureaucrat of the universe who gives them secret tips withheld from others. [Some skeptics] declare that they possess an extra sense you lack. This special sixth sense consists of contradicting the whole of the knowledge of your five. [Other skeptics] do not bother to assert any claim to extrasensory perception. They merely declare that your senses are not valid and that their wisdom consists of perceiving your blindness by some manner of unspecified means. [All skeptics] demand that you invalidate your own consciousness and surrender yourself into their power … The secret of all their esoteric philosophies, of all their dialectics and super-senses, of their evasive eyes and snarling words, the secret for which they destroy civilization, language, industries, and lives, the secret for which they pierce their own eyes and eardrums, grind out their senses, blank out their minds, the purpose for which they dissolve the absolutes of reason, logic, matter, existence, reality – is to erect upon that plastic fog a single holy absolute: Their *wish* (Rand 1957: 1034-1036).

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gleeful observation made by Stanley Fish that ignoring objectivity "relieves [scholars] of the obligation to be right" (Fish 1980: 180).

[114] For her part, Rand regards this Kantian bargain with contempt as a "gimmick worn transparently thin" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 61).

Thus, the poststructuralist reliance on the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy betrays, vis-à-vis intrinsicism, "a wish that underlies skepticism, a wish for the connection between my claims of knowledge and the objects upon which the claims are to fall to occur without my intervention" (Cavell 1979: 351-352), as well as, vis-à-vis subjectivism, a wish for omnipotence to compensate for the lack of omniscience, for "consciousness to be an instrument not of *perceiving* but of *creating* existence and existence to be not the *object* but the *subject* [of] consciousness" (Rand 1957: 1036-1037). And, regardless of which side of the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy any given poststructuralist chooses to embrace at any given point in an argument, the fact remains that "there is no honest revolt against reason":

> An honest man does not desire until he has identified the object of his desire. He says: "It is, therefore I want it." [Poststructuralists] say: "I want it, therefore it is." They want to cheat the axiom of existence … But reality is not to be cheated. What they achieve is the opposite of their desire. They want an omnipotent power over existence; instead, they lose the power of their consciousness. By refusing to know, they condemn themselves to the horror of a perpetual unknown (Rand 1957: 1036-1037).

This horrifying space of the perpetually unknown and the constitutively unknowable is the space into which Wollen ventured with *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, and the tragedy is that he knew the direction he was heading but failed to adequately grasp the consequences of continuing down the path he had set for himself.[115] Observe the clarity with which he recognized the logical implications of his poststructuralist conception of criticism:

> The critic, to demonstrate the value of a work, must be able to identify the "content," establish its truth, profundity, and so forth, and then demonstrate how it is expressed … The world itself is an untidy place, full of loose ends, but the [artwork] can tie all these loose ends together and thus convey to us a meaningful truth, an insight, which enables us to go back to the real world with a re-ordered and re-cycled experience which will enable us to cope better, live more fully, and so on. In this way, art is given a humanistic function, which guarantees its value. All this is overthrown when we begin to see loose ends in works of art, to refuse to acknowledge organic unity or integral

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[115] For an added dose of irony, recall that Foucault was initially impelled to formulate the concept of the author-function because he was "not certain that the consequences derived from the disappearance or death of the author [had] been fully explored or that the importance of this event [had] been appreciated" (Foucault [1969] 1979: 16).

content … All current theories of evaluation depend on identifying the [artwork] first and then confronting it with criteria … [but] if we reject the idea of an exhaustive interpretation, we have to reject this kind of evaluation (Wollen 1972: 147-148).[116]

Exemplifying more than just the logical consequences of the Nietzschean conception of causality that underwrites the poststructuralist objection to authorship, Wollen's text also exemplifies the logical consequences of the obstinate refusal of poststructuralists to acknowledge "fixed" meaning (which is to say, to embrace objectivity) and to prefer instead to conceive meaning as "infinitely deferred" (which is to say, to embrace subjectivity). This might – and, given the persistence of poststructuralism, clearly *does* – seem seductive and "progressive," but if meaning is not objectively fixed, then the very concept of "meaning" is lost, for if a given text does not mean *something*, then it does not mean *anything*. As Robin Wood once put it, if texts do not have fixed meanings, "then it makes no difference whether you choose to [analyze] conservative texts or radical ones, *Mein Kampf* [1925-1926] or *Das Kapital* [1867-1883]. The choice is merely arbitrary. Nothing ultimately means anything and nothing ultimately matters" (Wood 1989: 28).

Furthermore, as indicated by Wood and averred by Wollen himself, if objective meaning – and hence the practice of interpretation – is rejected, then the concept of value – and hence the practice of evaluation – must be rejected, as well, for, as I discussed in the Introduction, to value something presupposes that (a) something exists to be valued and that (b) it is being valued for what it is. In the previously quoted passage, Wollen is encouraging critics and scholars to reject this "bourgeois" aesthetic position and to embrace instead the "progressive" position from which the meaning – and hence the value – of an artwork is a subjective construct based on the critic's whims. But, if this is true, then why does Wollen so revere Jean-Luc Godard? In his 1972 Conclusion, Wollen remarks that "it was only right" that *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, across its three editions between 1969 and 1972, "should have built up towards a paean of praise" for Godard (Wollen

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[116] Once again, it was Robin Wood who shrewdly observed the logical consequences of this antihumanist critical model: "If what we used to call works of art are mere ideological constructions, culturally determined, produced out of various combinations of codes, systems, and signifiers, then there is no point in choosing between them. All we need do is disassemble them to see how the mechanisms work – or, more commonly, to prove once again that the mechanisms work in exactly the ways we predicted … It's the perfect gift [for poststructuralists] though something of a dead end. When you've demonstrated that every text can be deconstructed, it becomes fruitless to deconstruct more and more. You can, of course, deconstruct the deconstruction, then deconstruct the deconstruction of the deconstruction: The babushka-doll of contemporary aesthetics" (Wood 1989: 26, 28).

1972: 134). But, given his critical premises, what sense can the concept of "praise" possibly have in this context? If artworks do not objectively exist, if they do not have objectively fixed meanings, and if they are not made by authors, then is the "praise" for the alleged progressiveness of an artwork so nonsensically conceived (or the "blame" for the alleged lack of progressiveness of an artwork so nonsensically conceived) not due the critic for his subjective "construction"? Indeed, would it not be the case that such concepts as "good" and "bad" or "progressive" and "bourgeois" would no longer be attributable to objectively produced artworks (which are "illusions" anyway) and would instead only be attributable to "their" (whatever "they" "are") subjective reception?

Beyond the ubiquitous and flagrant concept stealing and package dealing, the conceptual knots into which poststructuralists so often twist themselves bring to light another fallacy which Rand terms *context dropping*, whereby one attempts to ignore major premises in order to make minor arguments. She elaborates on the "logic" of context dropping as follows:

> Context dropping is one of the chief psychological tools of evasion. In regard to one's desires, there are two major ways of context dropping: The issues of *range* and of *means*. A rational man sees his interests in terms of a lifetime and selects his goals accordingly. This does not mean that he has to be omniscient, infallible, or clairvoyant … It means that he does not regard any moment as cut off from the context of the rest of his life and that he allows no conflicts or contradictions between his short-range and long-range interests. He does not become his own destroyer by pursuing a desire today which wipes out all his values tomorrow (Rand 1962b: 36).[117]

The term that Rand uses to identify the mechanism that facilitates context dropping, meanwhile, is *blanking out*, which she describes as "the willful suspension of one's consciousness, the refusal to think – not blindness, but the refusal to see; not ignorance, but the refusal to know" and which

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[117] To return to the impasse that Derrida reaches in *Of Grammatology*, it is context dropping that provided him with the necessary (though not sufficient) out in his subsequent battle with Searle (which, fittingly enough, was fought over Derrida's essay "Signature, Event, Context," in which Derrida explicitly worked to invalidate the concept of context). Indeed, Derrida's haranguing of Searle for allegedly misinterpreting his essay, in which is contained, according to Derrida, "precisely what [Searle] claims to oppose to it *and could have found in it*" (Derrida 1977: 52, my emphasis), is the paradigm case of context dropping in poststructuralism. The problem for Derrida – a problem that he confessed was a constant bother in his career (Derrida 1988: 146) – is that, even though he wants to use the principles of objectivity, identity, and causality to assert and protect the objective/discoverable meaning of/in *his* texts, the fundamental premises of deconstruction vis-à-vis the nonexistence of objective/discoverable meaning of/in texts *as such* prevent him from doing so…unless he drops the context and contradicts the fundamental premises of deconstruction.

she explains makes possible attempts, undertaken "on the unstated premise that a thing will not exist if only you refuse to identify it, that A will not be A so long as you do not pronounce the verdict 'it is,'" to "wipe out reality." But, as Rand avers, "existence exists; reality is not to be wiped out; [such attempts] merely wipe out the wiper" (Rand 1957: 1017-1018).[118]

The nature and the consequences of Wollen's context dropping are most clearly evidenced in his efforts to theorize the significance and proclaim the value of Godard's films. If, as Wollen contends, criticism necessarily depends upon knowing (a) that an artwork exists, (b) what the artwork is, and (c) what the artwork means – which it does – then it likewise depends upon the objective existence of artworks the identities, meanings, and value of which it is the task of criticism to determine and adjudicate. If, however, the fundamental premises of a critical methodology dictate that artworks do not objectively exist, then the only possible way to produce criticism is to drop the context; steal the concepts of objectivity, identity, and causality; and blank out on the fact that the criticism produced contradicts the premises of the critical methodology per which the criticism has ostensibly been produced. And, sure enough, this is the exact trajectory followed by Wollen as he builds up to his "paean of praise" for Godard. In order to praise Godard and to insist on the development of a Godardian "counter cinema" on the one hand and a critical methodology capable of adequately interpreting and evaluating such a counter cinema on the other (Wollen 1972, [1972] 2009, 1976), Wollen drops the context of his poststructuralist methodology; steals the concepts of objectivity, identity, and causality; and blanks out on the fact that the criticism produced within the pages of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* contradicts the terms of the poststructuralist methodology *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* is ostensibly meant to

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[118] From a similar vantage point, and on similar grounds, Charles Sanders Peirce derided "the person who confesses that there is such a thing as truth … and then, though convinced of this, dares not know the truth and seeks to avoid it" and summarily rejected such a "sorry state of mind" (Peirce 1877: 1018). Analogizing this sorry state of mind to "when an ostrich buries its head in the sand," Peirce acknowledged the possibility that "a man may go through life systematically keeping out of view all that might cause a change in his opinions" (Peirce 1877: 1014). However, contrary to such cowardice, Peirce encouraged the following (distinctly perfectionist) stance: "A clear logical conscience does cost something – just as any virtue, just as all that we cherish, costs us dear. But we should not desire it to be otherwise. The genius of a man's logical method should be loved and reverenced as his bride … She is the one that he has chosen, and he knows that he was right in making that choice. And, having made it, he will work and fight for her, and will not complain that there are blows to take, hoping that there may be as many and as hard to give, and will strive to be the worthy knight and champion of her from the blaze of whose splendors he draws his inspiration and his courage" (Peirce 1877: 1018). Incidentally, Peirce's choice to analogize blanking out to ostriches burying their heads in the sand was apt; recently, the evolutionary behavioral scientist Gad Saad coined the diagnostic term "Ostrich Parasitic Syndrome" for this degenerate impulse (Saad 2016d, 2017c, 2017d).

establish.[119] The question that remains: If one must drop the context of one's critical methodology in order to produce criticism, then should one not simply drop the critical methodology?

Given that throughout this chapter I have worked to elucidate the myriad fallacies, contradictions, and equivocations entailed in the poststructuralist objection to authorship and to demonstrate the logical and moral consequences of embracing, in any critical methodology, for any purpose, the deleterious philosophical premises of poststructuralism, it should be no surprise that my answer is a resounding, "Yes!" Perhaps slightly more surprising – and very encouraging – is the fact that, by 1997, nearly three decades after he had begun the influential investigation that was conducted within the pages of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* and that set the course for film studies, Peter Wollen had acknowledged that film studies needed a new foundation on which to build a new aesthetics of cinema:

> When you make a film, you ask yourself whether a cut is good or bad, whether a way of delivering a line is good or bad, whether a camera movement is good or bad. Production mainly consists of judgments about value and quality. Critics and theorists shouldn't try to insulate themselves from a discourse which is so intrinsic to [artistic] practice. After all, our natural response after seeing a film at the cinema is to talk about whether it was good or bad … I strongly believe we need to make judgments of taste and then defend them with rational arguments … Maybe that means a new aesthetics (Wollen 1997: 245).

In *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, the extent of Wollen's self-sabotage in the form of his adherence to the principles of poststructuralism was grave but not fatal. While his example is proof of the deleteriousness of poststructuralism, it is also proof of the redemptive power of reason. Rand once expressed the sentiment that "no man can predict the time when others will choose to return to reason" (Rand 1957: 771). If, as she believed, "it is impossible to predict the time of a philosophical Renaissance," then the most that one can do is "define the road to follow" (Rand

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[119] Though it is beyond the scope of my present critique, it is worth mentioning that Wollen's notion of a Godardian "counter cinema" inspired him to produce more than just film criticism. In addition to collaborating on the screenplay for Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975), Wollen also made in collaboration with Laura Mulvey two avant-garde films, *Penthesilea* (1974) and *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). For considerations of Wollen's filmmaking practice in relation to his critical premises, see Britton (1979: 412-413, 424) and Rodowick ([1988] 1994: 244-247).

[1969] 1975: 115). It is from this perspective that I will now turn away from poststructuralism and set about defining the road to follow towards an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema.

2

Objectivism and the Future of Film Studies

Do you wish to continue the battle of your present or do you wish to fight for my world? Do you wish to continue a struggle that consists of clinging to precarious ledges in a sliding descent to the abyss, a struggle where the hardships you endure are irreversible and the victories you win bring you closer to destruction? Or do you wish to undertake a struggle that consists of rising from ledge to ledge in a steady ascent to the top, a struggle where the hardships are investments in your future and the victories bring you irreversibly closer to the world of your moral ideal?

– Ayn Rand (1957: 1068)

In the previous chapter, I expressed a desire to see debates in film studies and the epistemological and axiological commitments taken up by film scholars transformed. For too long, film studies has been bogged down by a host of irrational and immoral ideas, many of which have found their most extreme and influential expression in the philosophical school of poststructuralism. While the previous chapter consisted of, to borrow a phrase from Andrew Britton, "the necessary demolition work" (Britton 1986: 384), the present chapter will undertake the necessary construction work towards the goal of building an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema. To this end, I will return to and expand upon the discussion in the Introduction of the Objectivist aesthetics. Through extensive considerations of the processes of *interpreting* a film on the one hand and *evaluating* a film on the other, I will establish the foundation on which scholars can enable themselves to *objectively* interpret and evaluate films. Rand once remarked that the formulation of aesthetic principles to guide objective interpretations and evaluations of artworks was "a task at which modern philosophy has failed dismally" (Rand [1969] 1975: 33). It will be the goal of this chapter to demonstrate that the Objectivist aesthetics is more than up to the task.

The Objectivist aesthetics falls in line with a tradition in aesthetics that may be characterized as Aristotelian, the chief opposition to which has been a tradition that may be characterized as Kantian

(of which poststructuralist aesthetics is a contemporary and extreme variant).[120] To claim, as Barthes does, that an artwork is less like a "message" and more like "the thread of a stocking" (Barthes 1967: 147), or to claim, as Derrida does, that an artwork is "a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin" (Derrida 1966: 369), is to claim that an artwork is "purposive without purpose." The Kantian basis for such claims as those made by Barthes and Derrida (and countless others) is often taken to be a section of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* titled "Analytic of the Beautiful" (Kant [1790] 2007: 35-74). In this section (in which Kant is importantly concerned with objects of *nature*, not art), Kant discusses the concept of aesthetic purposiveness in the following terms:

> Purposiveness, therefore, may exist apart from a purpose, insofar as we do not locate the causes of this form in a will … [Hence], we may at least observe a purposiveness with respect to form and trace it in objects – though by reflection only – without resting it on an end (Kant [1790] 2007: 52).

Additionally, following David Hume, Kant anchored his consideration of aesthetic judgments in judgments of *beauty* and *taste* as opposed to *meaning* and *value*. I argued in the previous chapter that Barthes' quasi-Kantian conception of an artwork as analogous to the thread of a stocking entails a reconceptualization of what an artwork is/does. By the same token, such a quasi-Kantian reconceptualization of what an artwork is/does requires a further reconceptualization of what criticism is/does. The consequences of the Kantian aesthetic tradition for the practice of criticism are spelled out by Carroll:

> Critics have a taste for beauty that is analogous to the sensitivity for sweetness that certain of our taste buds possess … Because critical taste is being analogized so closely to sensory taste, and beauty is being associated with sensations like sweetness, the use of the very model of taste for critical judgment brings with it not only the notion that critical approbation (or disapprobation) is

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[120] Despite the heuristic value in framing the aesthetic battle in this fashion, there are, of course, innumerable discriminations and specifications that can and should be made with respect to the attempts of individual philosophers to fashion philosophies of art. For my purposes here, one such discrimination that must be made at the outset is that what scholars invested in the Kantian aesthetic tradition have taken from Kant and fashioned as their Kantian philosophies of art are often *not*, strictly speaking, Kantian philosophies of art. Rather than explore Kant's arguments relating to art, the vast majority of scholars have concerned themselves solely with Kant's broader philosophy of aesthetic beauty. For more on the ramifications of this dubious prerogative, see Barrowman (2018a). See also Carroll (1991, 1998) and Kamhi (2003, 2014).

subjective, in the literal sense of being in the subject (where, in fact, all experiences belong), but also the suggestion that critical judgments are subjective in the contemporary sense of being highly personal, individual, widely variant, and even idiosyncratic. The latter surmise follows smoothly from the analogy between critical approval (Taste with a capital T) and taste (with a small t). For, we know that gustatory taste is extremely variable – highly personal and even idiosyncratic. So, isn't it reasonable to suppose that Taste is likewise? (Carroll 2009: 157-158).

The problems caused by the Kantian aesthetic tradition are numerous, and they are by no means limited to poststructuralists. Quite the contrary. For as unfortunate as this is, though, it should come as no surprise, for, as Carroll points out, "Kant is probably the last philosopher whom the various diverse traditions of Western philosophy share in common" (Carroll 1998: 107). Thus, an overarching concern of this chapter will be to repudiate the Kantian aesthetic tradition in favor of the Aristotelian tradition. To start, I will consider the most pressing concerns in the realm of film interpretation in an effort to justify – metaphysically, epistemologically, and ethically – an intentionalist philosophy of art anchored by the axiom of authorship.

I

Objectivity and Interpretation

Inspired by John Crowe Ransom's characterization of literary criticism, David Bordwell famously labeled the discipline of film studies "Interpretation, Inc." (Bordwell 1989c: 26). Despite the many changes in theoretical fashion, interpreting films quickly became and has since remained "a going concern to be maintained at all costs" (Bordwell 1989c: 26). At the same time, and again despite the many changes in theoretical fashion, interpretation has suffered from the persistence of premises deriving from the Kantian tradition. In this and the following section, I will focus on the two following Kantian premises: First, that *artworks are purposive without purpose*, which is to say, *artworks are objects of free beauty*; second, that *aesthetic judgments are judgments of taste*, which is to say, *aesthetic judgments are subjective*.

Given that this tradition has its roots in (misapplications of) Kantian philosophy, it will be useful initially to refute these premises in Kantian terms. The first premise, that artworks are purposive

without purpose, presupposes that artworks are objects of what Kant calls free, as opposed to dependent, beauty. Kant explains the distinction in the following manner:

> There are two kinds of beauty: Free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) or beauty which is merely dependent (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The first presupposes no concept of what the object should be; the second does presuppose such a concept and, with it, an answering perfection of the object. Those of the first kind are said to be (self-subsisting) beauties of this thing or that thing; the other kind of beauty, being attached to a concept (conditioned beauty), is ascribed to objects which come under the concept of a particular end (Kant [1790] 2007: 60).

Kant's example of choice for an object of free beauty is a flower. According to Kant, "no perfection of any kind, no internal purposiveness as something to which the arrangement of the manifold is related," underlies a judgment such as, "This flower is beautiful." Since a flower is not "defined with respect to its end," it may "please freely"; were it to be defined with respect to its end, it would introduce "an incumbrance which would only restrict the freedom of the imagination that, as it were, is at play in the contemplation of the outward form" (Kant [1790] 2007: 60). Extrapolating to a philosophy of film, the preceding implies the following: First, that an interpretation/evaluation of a film presupposes no concept of what the film should be (i.e. neither a concept of medium nor of genre), and, second, that an interpretation/evaluation of a film presupposes no perfection or internal purposiveness and instead inclines towards a freedom of imagination and play.

This, however, seems to be at odds with how we actually engage with films in our everyday lives. Ordinarily, we not only presuppose a concept of "film," we presuppose such concepts as "action film" or "horror film" or "romantic comedy," and with them, an "answering perfection." Added to which, we ordinarily interpret and evaluate films with respect to their ends based on their internal purposiveness, a purposiveness often attributed to the filmmakers. We also ordinarily restrict our imaginations in the contemplation of films to what can be plausibly attributed to the filmmakers. Thus, it would appear to be the case, in both ordinary and academic life, that films are most commonly and most naturally treated as objects of dependent beauty rather than objects of free beauty. Ironically, Kant meant for this distinction to "settle many disputes" in criticism, "for we may show [critics] how one side is dealing with free beauty and the other with that which is

dependent" (Kant [1790] 2007: 62). The reason that confusion rather than clarity has been Kant's legacy is because occluded in his aesthetics is the concept of objectivity. Consider the following passage:

> In respect of an object with a determinate internal end, a judgement of taste would only be pure where the person judging either has no concept of this end, or else makes abstraction from it in his judgement. But in cases like this, although such a person should lay down a correct judgement of taste, since he would be judging the object as a free beauty, he would still be censured by another who saw nothing in its beauty but a dependent quality (i.e. who looked to the end of the object) and would be accused by him of false taste, though both would, in their own way, be judging correctly, the one according to what he had present to his senses, the other according to what was present in his thoughts (Kant [1790] 2007: 62).

The key phrase here is "both would, in their own way, be judging correctly." Applied to film, if I were to judge *Inception* (2010) as an attempt on the part of Christopher Nolan to neutralize the threat of skepticism and someone else were to judge it as an unsolvable puzzle that thwarts the notion of objective reality and embraces skepticism, then we would both, in our own way, be judging correctly. That is, if *Inception* is conceived as an object of free beauty, then one's imagination may – indeed, *should* – be given free rein and the question of which interpretation is "right" need not – indeed, *should not* – be of any concern; if, however, *Inception* is conceived as an object of dependent beauty, then one's imagination may *not* – indeed, *should not* – be given free rein and the question of which interpretation is right should – indeed, *must* – be of the utmost concern in order to ensure that one is attending to the object in its specificity, as an objectively existing artwork the meaning of which it is the responsibility of the critic to accurately interpret and conscientiously evaluate.[121]

To eliminate this confusion, we must agree on whether artworks are objects of free beauty or objects of dependent beauty. I have argued that they are objects of dependent beauty. If this is true – and I hope that I have convincingly demonstrated that it is – then not only does the first premise,

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[121] This example was inspired by the exceedingly problematic interpretations of *Inception* that have been offered by the likes of, among (far too many) others, Mark Fisher (2011), Todd McGowan (2012), Ruth Tallman (2012), Jason Southworth (2012), and Dan Weijers (2012).

that artworks are purposive without purpose, go by the board; so, too, does the second premise, that aesthetic judgments are judgments of taste. I will deal with the second premise more thoroughly in the next section. For the moment, it is worth highlighting the fact that judging a film as an object of free beauty is not a matter of taste, it is not a subjective preference; it is a *mistake*, it is objectively *wrong*. In reference to Wollen's waffling in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* vis-à-vis the identity principle, I maintained that, recalling Rand's "existence is identity" formula, if an artwork objectively exists, then it has an identity. Moreover, if an artwork has an identity, then it can be identified in criticism. The purpose of criticism, on this picture, would be to identify and interpret objectively existing artworks. Unfortunately for many scholars, this picture of criticism precludes the notion of free play attendant to objects of free beauty. Hence the all-too-familiar scholarly tactic of trying to have one's cake and eat it – a tactic which, it warrants mentioning, was endorsed by Kant:

> Since the freedom of the imagination consists precisely in the fact that it schematizes without a concept, [aesthetic judgment] must found upon a mere sensation of the mutually enlivening activity of the imagination in its *freedom* and of the understanding with its *conformity to law*. It must therefore rest upon a feeling that allows the [artwork] to be estimated by the purposiveness of the representation (by which an [artwork] is given) for the furtherance of the cognitive faculties in their free play (Kant [1790] 2007: 117).

Try as critics might to have this Kantian cake and eat it, once it is conceded that artworks are objects of dependent beauty, to proceed in criticism as if they are objects of free beauty (in pursuit of ideals of free play, infinite polysemy, *différance*, etc.) is childish obstinacy at best.[122] As Cavell puts it with his characteristic equipoise:

> The idea of infinite possibility is the pain, and the balm, of adolescence. The only return on becoming adult, the only justice in forgoing that world of possibility, is the reception of actuality – the pain and balm in the truth of the only world: That it exists, and I in it (Cavell [1971] 1979: 117).

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[122] In his famous tract on "mysticism and logic," Bertrand Russell identified this Kantian "attitude of mind" as antithetical to logic; contrariwise, Russell characterized logic as a matter, "in the interests of the desire to know," of "sweeping away … any wish except to see [the object] as it is, and without any belief that what it is must be determined by some relation, positive or negative, to what we should like it to be" (Russell [1910] 1959: 44).

From a similar vantage point as the one from which Cavell designates philosophy "the education of grownups" (Cavell 1979: 125), the Objectivist aesthetics of cinema for which I am arguing may be designated *criticism for grownups*. Grownup criticism proceeds in accordance with the principles of objectivity, identity, and causality, and it sees in art not Kantian "finalities without end," but rather, instances of Aristotelian *final causation*. Rand explains the logic of an Aristotelian philosophy of art in the following manner:

> I call your attention to Aristotle's concepts of *efficient* and *final* causation. Efficient causation means that an event is determined by an antecedent cause. For instance, if you strike a match to a gasoline tank and it explodes, the striking of the match is the cause and the explosion is the effect. This is what we normally mean by causality as it exists in physical nature. Final causation means that the end result of a certain chain of causes determines those causes … Final causation applies only to the work of a conscious entity – specifically of a *rational* one – because only a thinking consciousness can choose a purpose ahead of its existence and then select the means to achieve it. In the realm of human action, everything has to be directed by final causation. If men allow themselves to be moved by efficient causation – if they act like determined beings, propelled by some immediate cause outside themselves – that is totally improper. (Even then, volition is involved: If a man decides to abandon purpose, that is also a choice, and a bad one.) Proper human action is action by means of *final* causation. An obvious example here pertains to writing. As a writer, you must follow the process of final causation: You decide on the theme of your book (your purpose), then select the events and the sentences that will concretize your theme. The reader, by contrast, follows the process of *efficient* causation: He goes step by step through your book being moved toward the abstraction you intended. Any purposeful activity follows the same progression (Rand [1958] 2000: 20-21).[123]

Furthermore, Rand clarifies (using her own literary work as an example) the "process of communication" (Rand [1969] 1975: 25) between authors and critics with reference to what she calls the "circle" of interpretation:

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[123] It bears mentioning that Rand is far from the only artist to adopt an Aristotelian perspective. The playwright and screenwriter Aaron Sorkin, for example, has vociferously urged all writers to consult Aristotle. As he puts it in his screenwriting *Masterclass*: "It's the rules that make art not finger painting … [and] the rule book is the *Poetics* by Aristotle" (Sorkin 2016).

When you compose a story, you start with an abstraction, then find the concretes which add up to that abstraction. For the reader, the process is reversed. He first perceives the concretes you present and then adds them up to the abstraction with which you started. I call this a "circle." For instance, the theme of *Atlas Shrugged* is "the importance of reason" – a wide abstraction. To leave the reader with that message, I have to show what reason is, how it operates, and why it is important. The sequence on the construction of the John Galt Line is included for that purpose – to concretize the mind's role in human life. The rest of the novel illustrates the consequences of the mind's absence. In particular, the chapter on the tunnel catastrophe shows concretely what happens to a world where men do not dare to think or to take the responsibility of judgment. If, at the end of the novel, you are left with the impression, "Yes, the mind is important and we should live by reason," these incidents are the cause. The concretes have summed up in your mind to the abstraction with which *I* started, and which I had to break down *into* concretes (Rand [1958] 2000: 13).[124]

For Rand, then, artworks very clearly have purposes, purposes which it is the responsibility of artists to be as clear, coherent, and consistent about in the creation of art as possible and which it is the responsibility of critics to be as discerning, precise, and scrupulous about in the criticism of art as possible. Already, however, the Objectivist aesthetics would appear to be faced with an insurmountable problem: What about (post)modernist/avant-garde/experimental art? I have claimed that it is wrong to proceed in criticism as if authorial intention is irrelevant and as if there is no objective meaning to be discovered in artworks. But am I not presupposing very specific kinds of artworks? What about artworks the purpose of which are to be ambiguous and to encourage the free play of subjective interpretations? Is the ontology of art presupposed by the Objectivist aesthetics not woefully restrictive?

From an evaluative perspective, one could argue, as Rand does, that such art, if it is art at all, is merely "child's play along its periphery" (Rand [1969] 1975: 75). I will return to this argument in the following section.[125] For now, I would simply like to clarify that this ontological "problem" is, in reality, a pseudo-problem. As I demonstrated in my critique of "The Death of the Author," the

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[124] In another discussion of the circle of interpretation, she adds that "the creative process resembles a process of deduction [while] the viewing process resembles a process of induction" (Rand [1969] 1975: 25).

[125] For the most elaborate ontological argument against such art from the Objectivist perspective, see Torres and Kamhi (2000a), according to whom such art is "more akin to madness, or to fraud, than to art" (Torres and Kamhi 2000a: 1). See also Kamhi (2014).

idea that authors have sought to problematize in various ways and to varying degrees the concepts of authorship and objectivity still presupposes authorial intention (i.e. problematizing the concept of authorship *is* the authorial intention, is, in Kantian terms, the purpose) and objective meaning (i.e. the problematization of objectivity *is* the objective meaning). Applied to film, if I were to argue that it is impossible to objectively resolve the central enigma of Jim Jarmusch's *Broken Flowers* (2005), in which a man receives at the beginning of the film an anonymous letter claiming that he fathered a child and who remains clueless at the end of the film as to the identity of the letter's author and the veracity or spuriousness of the letter, this would in no way invalidate the concepts of authorship or objectivity, for the film's ambiguity is *intentional* and the lack of a determinable, objective resolution to the film *is* its determinable, objective meaning.

In fact, in an ironic twist of fate, clarifying this pseudo-problem allows me to make an additional and seemingly paradoxical point. Even though my previous efforts were to make the case that poststructuralism has no philosophical merit, I would like to stress that, from this, it does not follow that poststructuralism has no merit *tout court*. Its merit, I would argue, is hermeneutical rather than philosophical; that is to say, poststructuralism can potentially be of use as a hermeneutic tool even though it is not valid as a conceptual orientation. Malcolm Turvey makes this point with respect to psychoanalysis:

> The way psychoanalysis is used [is] for the most part … as a theory that generates interpretations. People will look at a Hitchcock film or a David Lynch film and say, "You can interpret this film through psychoanalytic theory." You can, for example, interpret the behavior of a character as being motivated by unconscious desires or impulses. I see no problem with this because there are certain films and works of art that lend themselves very easily to psychoanalytic interpretation. And that's no surprise, because the psychoanalytical view of human nature, broadly speaking, is one shared by many artists, and therefore they will design works in which characters have unconscious desires … It's more problematic to me to say that psychoanalysis is true as a theory of mind and mentality … That seems to be a much more problematic enterprise (Turvey 2013: 90-91).[126]

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[126] My agreement with Turvey extends beyond theory to practice: While I share his sense of the dubiousness of psychoanalysis as an all-encompassing "theory of mind and mentality," I have nevertheless generated an elaborate Lacanian interpretation of Hitchcock's philosophy of filmic romance (Barrowman 2012b).

In a similar vein, I have argued that, as a philosophical perspective on metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, political, and aesthetic issues, poststructuralism is nonsense. As a hermeneutic tool, however, poststructuralism can be put to productive use when it comes to interpreting films concerned with poststructuralist hallmarks such as the phenomena of miscommunication and misunderstanding, the play of presence and absence, the impossibility of objective knowledge, etc. Cartesian skepticism may be nonsense, but interpreting *The Matrix* (1999) as if Descartes never conjured up that evil demon strikes me as an exercise in futility.[127] Likewise, interpreting Jarmusch's films as if Derrida never waxed philosophical on the vicissitudes of communication will make it difficult to come to terms with Jarmusch's enigmatic dialogue and ambiguous narratives.[128] In other words, selecting the proper interpretive tools for the job is a matter of knowing what the job requires. Speaking in such a register presupposes, of course, that it is possible to (objectively) *know* the job (i.e. the film) prior to opening one's toolkit. That is, it presupposes that the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a given interpretive tool is determinable only with reference to the objective content of the film to be interpreted.

If I have managed to dodge the ontological bullet, I must now dodge a series of epistemological bullets. First, have I not entered the realm of the chicken or the egg (or, to preserve Kantian terminology, the realm of "phenomena and noumena")? Far from the objective content of a film (the "thing-in-itself") determining the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a given interpretive tool, is it not the case that the interpretive tool "determines" the "objective content"? This is what I will refer to as the *paradigm subjectivity argument*, the "logic" of which is discernible in the following exemplary explication:

> Questions that bear on the institutional maintenance of the hermeneutical field as such [such as which interpretive tool is most appropriate for a given film] ... are not concerns which come *after* the particular text in question or which are properly "extrinsic" to it – they are concerns which address the very definition of the textual artifact as an artifact. Insofar as the artifact is meaningful

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[127] This example was inspired by the Cartesian interpretation of *The Matrix* elaborated by Thomas E. Wartenberg (2007: 55-75).

[128] This example was inspired by the Derridean interpretation of *Dead Man* (1995) elaborated by Evelina Kazakevičiūtė (2018).

> ... it is because [scholars] continue to support the [hermeneutical] structures ... which read the artifact on their terms (Mowitt 1992: 214-215).

The paradigm subjectivity argument has been running rampant in film studies for decades.[129] Dudley Andrew has argued that "there is no objective truth about signification in films, only a tradition of reading them in such and such a way" (Andrew 1984: 14). Likewise, Slavoj Žižek has argued that postulating the existence of a given film as an "objective reality" merely "begs the question of what 'objective reality' means ... [for] the procedures of posing problems and finding solutions to them always and by definition occur within a certain [paradigm] that determines which problems are crucial and which solutions acceptable" (Žižek 2001: 17-18). It would appear that the paradigm subjectivity argument relies principally on the phenomenon of disagreement. Carroll comments on the frequency with which disagreement is adduced as evidence against the possibility of objective evaluation, to which he responds by stressing, as a corrective to the distortion that has followed from this, the far more common phenomenon of agreement (Carroll 2009: 32-43). I will return to this issue in the following section. For the moment, I wish to extend this argument to defend the possibility of objective interpretation.

Obviously, so the argument goes, given the different philosophical/political/historical/critical perspectives/agendas of different paradigms, it stands to reason that different paradigms will have different investments and will thus "discover" different "objective truths" in the "same" artwork. Does this actually stand (up) to reason, though? Recall the controversy between Derrida and Lacan vis-à-vis Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter" (1844), which I briefly discussed in the previous chapter. Part of Derrida's strategy was to use Marie Bonaparte as a foil; he indicates the numerous methodological differences and interpretive strategies that separate Lacan and Bonaparte in their interpretations of the story. Yet, at the conclusion of his consideration of Lacan *avec* Bonaparte, which corresponds to the point at which their interpretations "mysteriously" converge, he asks a question with very important consequences:

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[129] Even though I am remaining within the disciplinary confines of film studies, the influence across both the sciences and the humanities of Thomas Kuhn cannot be overstated, for it was Kuhn who gave currency to the paradigm subjectivity argument with the simple yet destructively mistaken postulation that "a paradigm is prerequisite to perception itself" (Kuhn 1970: 113; cf. Sokal and Bricmont [1997] 1999: 67-73; Hicks 2004: 74-83; and Binswanger 2014: 383-390). For further considerations of the paradigm subjectivity argument, see Barrowman (2018a, 2018c, 2019b).

> Why [if Lacan's method is so different from Bonaparte's] does [he] refind, along with the truth, the same meaning and the same topos as [she] did … Is this a coincidence? Is it a coincidence if, in allegedly breaking with psychobiographical criticism … one rejoins it in its ultimate semantic anchorage? (Derrida 1972a: 444).

Put simply: No, it is not a coincidence. It is not a coincidence that, despite protestations against author-based criticism, Lacan ultimately "rejoins it" (any more than it is a coincidence that Derrida does the same in his own work). Nor is it a coincidence that, despite methodological differences and despite differences in interpretive strategies, Lacan's interpretation fits neatly alongside Bonaparte's (and, at some points, matches it exactly). After all, there is only so much that one can do with a finite amount of material.[130] This point corresponds to what Paul Ricoeur formulates as the "injunction of the text" (Ricoeur [1981] 2016: 155), on which Britton expounds in his discussion of how, in the Objectivist terms of this thesis, the objective content of a film determines the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a given interpretive tool:

> By ["text," Ricoeur means to indicate] a "made object," an artifact which has a concrete existence in a certain order – an order which produces certain structures of meaning. These structures will be historically determinate and, variously, complex, mutually qualifying, or contradictory, but inasmuch as the text is, in Ricoeur's phrase, "fixed by writing," meaning is not arbitrary. That characteristic phenomenon of 20th Century art, the work which is, theoretically, interminable … does not imply that meaning is any the less determined by structures of made relations, any the less an "injunction of the text" … No one for a moment denies that … the text "comes into existence" in the reading … But, [poststructuralism] to the contrary … we must be concerned with "the integrity of the text" unless we prefer doodling to reading: The text always precedes the reader in a way which Ricoeur's formulation suggests. The desire to avoid (quite rightly) any simple subject/object relation (the myth of "presence") is perpetually in danger of denying the object altogether (Britton 1979: 424-425).

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[130] Not to mention Poe is one of the most profoundly Aristotelian of authors; the meticulousness with which he structured his stories thus accounts for the inevitability of interpretive convergence regardless of paradigm allegiances. For more on this point, see Poe's extraordinary breakdown of his writing process for "The Raven" (1845), in which he argues, in a spirit that Rand no doubt would have appreciated, that "nothing is more clear [sic] than that every plot worth the name must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or *causation*, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the *intention*" (Poe [1846] 2012: 318, my emphases).

Indeed, as I have demonstrated repeatedly, not only is the object frequently denied, the concept of objectivity itself is frequently – necessarily – denied. The paradigm subjectivity argument leads inexorably to the patently ludicrous conclusion that interpretive paradigms are used not to (objectively) *understand* but to (subjectively) *construct* artworks. In response to this nonsensical notion, Britton was even more hostile:

> All intellectual fashions have their slogan, and the proposition that "theory constructs its objects," seductive and comforting as it is, is now part of the thinking literary person's commonsense. This proposition, when it is not a truism, is little more than a self‑ serving scholastic fiction and a license for intellectual irresponsibility, and that conception of theory is illegitimate in which the necessarily creative and formative nature of discourse is understood as a means of freeing the theory in question from the elementary critical obligation of demonstrating its own pertinence. Such theory is anti‑ theoretical, as well as a betrayal of the function of criticism (Britton 1986: 383).

If, having debunked the paradigm subjectivity argument, I have managed to dodge the first epistemological bullet, the second bullet will not be far behind. Signaled by the above passage from Britton, the question has now become: *What is* the function of criticism? Let's say it is conceded that artworks are objectively existing, intentional objects (or, in Kantian terms, objects of dependent beauty). If this is true – and, once again, I hope that I have convincingly demonstrated that it is – then the function of criticism is to interpret and evaluate such objects. To repeat Rand's formulation in full: "Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification" (Rand 1957: 1016). If films objectively exist, then they have identities; if films have identities, then their identities can be identified. Interpretation, then, is the identification of the identities, or the meanings, of objectively existing films. Now I must dodge the second epistemological bullet: How can I know if I have correctly identified the identity of a given film? Even if it is conceded that objective interpretation is *ontologically* possible – a concession that I hope is now easier for scholars to make – is it *epistemologically* possible? Is it not the case that, eventually, I will be forced to admit that, no matter how thorough or sophisticated a given interpretation of mine may be, I have no grounds on which to claim that I know the interpretation to be *right*?

This is what I will refer to as the *aesthetic skepticism argument*. Incidentally, it is on this issue that Wollen's point that a critic puts his consciousness "at risk" in every engagement with an artwork

(Wollen 1972: 139) hits with its greatest impact. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, in the Objectivist sense that thinking is volitional rather than automatic and subject to error rather than infallible, Wollen's point is absolutely true. To then claim, as Wollen did (and, truth be told, as all scholars with an affinity for poststructuralism or the Kantian aesthetic tradition invariably do), that artworks are subjective constructs which do not objectively exist, which have no essential meaning, and which neither originate in nor emanate from human consciousness, however, is to try to eliminate that risk. But that risk cannot be eliminated. Every interpretation, as with every knowledge claim, comes with the risk of being wrong. Thus, as it relates to film interpretation, the answer to the question "How do I know?" can only be answered in what Cavell refers to as a specific "act of criticism" (Cavell [1971] 1979: 219), an act in which the critic willingly and bravely decides, as Daniel Morgan puts it, to "play with danger" (Morgan 2014). In order to avoid such critical danger, scholars all-too-frequently go the route of the Kantian "Copernican Revolution" and demand films conform to their interpretations of them. In the hopes of making less appealing to grownup critics this route of the child smashing or biting off parts of puzzle pieces to make them fit into whatever slot he wants, I would like to attempt, before getting into the specifics of the aesthetic skepticism argument, to blunt the force of the general skepticism fueling it.

The first source of unease motivating any form of skepticism is likely to be the concept of knowledge deployed. In the Introduction, I described what Cavell refers to as the truth of skepticism, that "*what* skepticism questions or denies my knowledge of *is* the world of objects I inhabit, is the *world*" (Cavell 1979: 448). From this point, he argues that the desire of skeptics to know with certainty the existence of the world paradoxically gives ground to "a sense of powerlessness" in the face of "the precariousness and arbitrariness of existence, the utter contingency in the fact that things are as they are" (Cavell 1979: 236), thus leading skeptics to embrace subjectivism and to replace *the* (objective) world – or, in the terms of aesthetic skepticism, *the* (objective) film – with *a* (subjective) world/film they fancy as subject to their whims. Expanding on this argument, Cavell shifts to what he refers to as *the moral of skepticism*, that "the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing" (Cavell 1979: 241).

The key phrase is obviously "what we think of as knowing." What do we think of as knowing?[131] More often than not – and always in skeptical arguments – the concept of knowledge deployed is some sort of quasi-Hegelian "Absolute Knowledge" to rival the omniscience enjoyed by God. In response to this tendency, Cavell asks: "What rootlessness, or curse, made us, lets us, think of our basis in this way?" (Cavell 1979: 241). Religion is one obvious curse.[132] The intrinsic/subjective dichotomy is another. A third source of confusion, and one with direct relevance for the aesthetic skepticism argument, is the very language of criticism. When critics discuss *the* interpretation of a film, is the implication not that they know *the one and only true* interpretation? In addition to a confused conception of knowledge, it turns out that there is also often floating around in aesthetics a confused conception of truth, one which Carroll rejects under the heading of "the final word conception of truth" according to which "a proposition about some state of affairs x is true if and only if that proposition exhausts x to such an extent that there is nothing left to be said about x." This, to Carroll's mind, is "simply a nonstarter," although the currency of this "phony conception of truth" does at least help to clarify one of the reasons that aesthetic skepticism gains purchase. Carroll acknowledges the possibility of scholars being misled "by the fact that we sometimes speak of *the* interpretation of an artwork," the definite article implying, as already indicated, the one and only true interpretation; however, he also avers that "generally we are speaking of *an* interpretation of a work," an interpretation which, moreover, "may be complemented or supplemented or otherwise enlarged by others" (Carroll 2009: 125).

A proponent of the aesthetic skepticism argument may consider the refutation of "the final word conception of truth" as conceding skepticism, for am I not endorsing the claim that there is no one "right" interpretation of an artwork? Indeed, does this position not also unwittingly let the paradigm subjectivity argument back in? Am I not conceding that, since there are only *interpretations* of an artwork, different interpretations generated by different paradigms may, in Kantian terms, each be correct in their own way? In fact, I *am* conceding that different interpretations generated by different paradigms may each be correct in their own way. But this is

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[131] For a stirringly ambitious attempt to unpack this question from a psychological perspective, see Peterson (1999: 237-242). From the Objectivist perspective, meanwhile, Binswanger (2014) has provided an astonishingly shrewd and precisely articulated explication of what we know and how we know it.

[132] For insights into the anti-theological thrust of Objectivism, see Rand (1934a, [1943] 2007, 1957, [1945, 1948a, 1950, 1961c, 1963b] 1995), Michael S. Berliner (1981), Peikoff (1982, 1986), and Binswanger (2014).

a far cry from endorsing the aesthetic skepticism argument and/or the paradigm subjectivity argument. It is, by contrast, what I will refer to as the *complimentary paradigm argument*.

To clarify the terms of this argument, consider the following example. On the one hand, according to a psychoanalytic paradigm, I could interpret the coming-of-age romantic comedy *Secret Admirer* (1985) – which, much like *Broken Flowers*, revolves around the authorship and veracity of a series of anonymous letters received, rightly or wrongly, by the central characters – as an expression of Lacan's thesis that "a letter always arrives at its destination" (Lacan 1966: 30); on the other hand, according to a deconstructionist paradigm, I could interpret the film in light of what Derrida describes as the "postal principle" (Derrida 1979: 189-193); still not exhausted by these two competing paradigms, I could even interpret the film according to an ordinary language paradigm as an indication of the centrality of intention in "performative utterances" (Austin 1962b). These paradigms may not be philosophically compatible, but they each illuminate aspects of *Secret Admirer* based on their respective hermeneutic strengths. And, brought together, the interpretations of crucial aspects of the film generated by these three paradigms contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the film's objective content, which is neither determined by nor exhausted by a single paradigm.

As this example should make clear, what is crucially missing in the paradigm subjectivity argument is the concept of objectivity (hence its name). Since there is allegedly no objectively existing film, each paradigm is free to generate myriad interpretation(s) without worrying about right and wrong (for on what grounds could one even claim an interpretation to be right or wrong?). The key to avoiding confusion on this point is to know at what level claims of right and wrong ought to be pitched. Preserving the example of *Secret Admirer*, if I were to claim that the Lacanian interpretation on the basis of which the film proves that a letter always arrives at its destination is true, the implication, as Carroll points out, is that the Lacanian interpretation exhausts the meaning to be discovered, that the Lacanian interpretation says all there is to say about the film. It may be true that, for a given film, a certain paradigm affords a more comprehensive interpretation than any other paradigm; it is unlikely, however, that any one paradigm could exhaust an entire film.

But the point is that none of this is in any way problematic for either the complimentary paradigm argument or the concept of objectivity as such. It is simply to acknowledge a fact about interpretation – a fact, moreover, that connects art and its criticism in a very important respect. In the same vein as Rand defines art as the selective recreation of reality, I will define interpretation as *the selective recreation of artworks*. Having similarly intuited the necessarily selective nature of interpretation, Cavell has argued that the completion of an interpretation "is not a matter of providing *all* interpretations but a matter of seeing one of them *through*" (Cavell 1981a: 37), the benefit of which for criticism is the way it "leaves open to investigation what the relations are" between a film, an interpretation of a film, and complimentary/conflicting interpretations of a film (Cavell 1981a: 38).

The proponent of the aesthetic skepticism argument is likely still skeptical. I may have usefully clarified certain facets of interpretation, but even if it is conceded that films are objectively existing, intentional objects; even if it is conceded that interpretation is an objective process; and even if it is conceded that objective interpretation is a necessarily selective process the focus of which is on selected aspects of films and not entire films, I still have not addressed the problem of the alleged groundlessness of the process. That is, I still have not answered the fundamental question: How do I know? If it is my goal to build an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema anchored by the axiom of authorship, such a goal would imply that I believe authors to be the most obvious sources of knowledge about artworks. But how can I know an author's intentions? To answer this question, I will have to clarify the terms of the intentionalist philosophy of art logically entailed by an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema.

To this point, I have been concerned in this thesis with relations between individuals and the external world. In my considerations of skepticism, I have therefore not surprisingly focused primarily on one side of the skepticism coin, viz. skepticism of the external world (or, in the terms of the aesthetic skepticism argument, skepticism of the external film). But there are two sides to the skepticism coin. The other side of the skepticism coin is skepticism of other minds (or, in the terms of the aesthetic skepticism argument, skepticism of authorial minds). Having reached the point of considering the possibilities of an intentionalist philosophy of art, I have also reached the point at which I must deal with this other side of the skepticism coin. With respect to skepticism

of the external world, Cavell has argued that the final destination reached by skeptics is insanity (Cavell 1979: 447)[133]; with respect to skepticism of other minds, however, he has argued that the final destination reached by skeptics is tragedy (Cavell 1979: 389-496). Skepticism of the external world is, for Cavell, the easier dilemma to solve. As he puts it, recalling his discussion of "living one's skepticism," to say that one cannot live skepticism of the external world "is to say that there is an alternative to its conclusion that [one is] bound, as a normal human being, to take" (Cavell 1979: 448). Therefore, if one does not take that conclusion, one is clearly not normal (one is, to recall the remark of Wittgenstein's invoked vis-à-vis Barthes' aesthetic hedonism, demented). Skepticism of other minds is, epistemologically and ethically, the far more difficult dilemma, for "there is no such alternative, or no such conclusion" (Cavell 1979: 448).

Interestingly, part of Cavell's strategy in dealing with skepticism of other minds is to observe that, despite being of greater difficulty to resolve, it is, logically speaking, rarely as radical as skepticism of the external world. The endpoint of the skeptical argument against the external world is often that it is not only unknowable, *it may not even exist*; the endpoint of the skeptical argument against other minds, however, is often only that they are unknowable. The existence of other minds is rarely doubted. As Cavell expresses it, "the other is [often] left, along with his knowledge of himself; so am I, along with mine" (Cavell 1979: 353). And yet, despite the fact that, in the terms of the aesthetic skepticism argument, the existence of authorial minds is often conceded, it is likewise far more difficult for scholars to acknowledge the authorial mind than to acknowledge the external film. Cavell maintains that "the alternative to my acknowledgment of the other is not my ignorance of him but my avoidance of him, call it my denial of him" (Cavell 1979: 389). Proponents of the aesthetic skepticism argument tend to rely, in their last-ditch attempts to justify the avoidance/denial of authors, on two further epistemological objections.

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[133] Sounding a similar note, the famous 18th Century Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler once observed: "If a clown should take it into his head to conceive such [radical] doubt and should say, for example, he does not believe that his bailiff exists, though he stands in his presence, he would be taken for a madman, and with good reason; but when a philosopher advances such sentiments, he expects we should admire his knowledge and sagacity, which infinitely surpass the apprehensions of the vulgar" (Euler [1761] 1802: 375). Euler's sentiment corresponds with the sentiment in Wittgenstein's humorous parable: "I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again, 'I know that that's a tree,' pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: 'This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy'" (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 61e). The point, as Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont explain, is that "no one is *systemically* skeptical (*when he or she is sincere*)" (Sokal and Bricmont [1997] 1999: 53, my emphases).

The first and most common epistemological objection to acknowledging the author is that nobody is psychic. I cannot possibly *know* what Martin Scorsese was thinking when he devised the camera movement during Robert De Niro's uncomfortably awkward phone call to Cybill Shepherd following their disastrous date in *Taxi Driver* (1976)…or can I? Do I need to be a psychic to be able to be a mind reader? Carroll points out that, short of being psychics, we nevertheless spend most of our time reading minds:

> Mind reading, as the evolutionary psychologists call it, is one of the most important advantages that natural selection has bequeathed to human beings. The man lines up to the hot dog stand and the vendor recognizes that he intends to buy a frankfurter. My secretary knocks on my door, and I infer she needs something signed. The driver stops behind my parking space and waits for me to pull out; I suspect he wants my space. We spend our days and nights reading the minds of our conspecifics continuously, and a simply stunning number of our surmises are correct. Other people are hardly consummately unfathomable. We are wrong on numerous occasions, but most of us are right far more often than we are wrong. If we weren't, neither our life nor human life in general would probably last for long. But if we are so good at grocking intentions in everyday life, why suppose we sour at it when we turn to art? (Carroll 2009: 71)[134]

This would appear to be one epistemological objection down. The second epistemological objection is that nobody is a medium. If I claim, short of being a psychic, to be able to read Scorsese's mind and "divine" his intentions in *Taxi Driver*, there is at least the possibility of having my claims verified by the author. What about my claims for Charlie Chaplin's intentions in making *The Circus* (1928)? I certainly cannot ask him to verify my claims. In this instance (and, truthfully, in all instances of interpretation), I must let the reasoning in my interpretation stand against any objections. This is where the Wittgensteinian notion of "bedrock" becomes relevant (Wittgenstein [1949] 1967: 3 [§1], 85 [§217]). Cavell relates how the persistence of the "How do I know?" question is the reason why skepticism, "should we feel its power, is devastating: [The skeptic] is not challenging a particular belief or set of beliefs about, say, other minds; he is challenging the ground of our beliefs altogether, our power to believe at all" (Cavell 1969b: 240). With reference

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[134] Additionally, Carroll quickly acknowledges the follow-up objection: That sometimes there are aspects of films that were not intended (either not consciously intended or simply accidental). He also quickly points out, in perfect accordance with the Objectivist position on concept stealing, that the identification of something as being unintended presupposes knowledge of what was intended (Carroll 2009: 79; see also MacDowell and Zborowski 2013).

to the aesthetic skepticism argument, the persistence of the "How do I know?" question has led countless scholars to the erroneous belief that it is impossible to actually know what a film means. To avoid making this error, scholars must recognize the nonsensical argumentative protocols on which skepticism relies for its "power."

If I answer the "How do I know?" question by formulating an interpretation (which, in effect, is an answer in the form of "*This* is how I know") but the skeptic remains skeptical, then I have reached bedrock. The point that I wish to make with reference to the Wittgensteinian notion of bedrock is that if, in response to my answer (in the form of an interpretation) to the "How do I know?" question, the skeptic cannot produce a counterargument (in the form of an alternate interpretation), then I may consider the question answered and the interpretation correct. Of course, in lieu of a counterargument, skeptics often have recourse, as a corollary to the "How do I know?" question, to the statement "Maybe you are wrong." But this pseudo-rebuttal, as Leonard Peikoff (1981) has cogently argued, is merely the hollow Hail Mary of skepticism; it is not a counterargument to be rebutted in turn. Moreover, as Wittgenstein argues, the position from which the "Maybe you are wrong" statement is uttered betrays "a false picture of doubt" (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 33e). Wittgenstein explains his logic by way of two examples of this false picture:

> If someone said that he doubted the existence of his hands, kept looking at them from all sides, tried to make sure it wasn't "all done by mirrors," etc., we should not be sure whether we ought to call that doubting. We might describe his way of behaving as *like* the behavior of doubt, but his game would not be ours (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 33e-34e, my emphasis).

> If someone said to me that he doubted whether he had a body, I should take him to be a half-wit. But I shouldn't know what it would mean to try to convince him that he had one. And if I had said something, and that had removed his doubt, I should not know how or why (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 34e).

Austin, for his part, takes a similar tack. Wittgenstein remarks that doubt is epistemologically valid, but only "in particular circumstances" (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 33e). It is from this position that Austin argues the following:

Doubt or question[ing] … has always (*must* have) a special basis, there must be some "reason for suggesting" [the "How do I know?" question/"Maybe you are wrong" statement] in the sense of some specific way, or limited number of specific ways, in which it is suggested that [I do not know] … [Otherwise] I am entitled to ask, "How do you mean?" … The wile of the [skeptic] consists in [asking the "How do I know?" question/making the "Maybe you are wrong" statement without] specifying or limiting what may be wrong with [the argument], so that I feel at a loss "how to prove" it (Austin [1946] 1961: 55).[135]

"Fair enough," a skeptic may say at this point. I may have convincingly defended my proposed Objectivist aesthetics of cinema and the author-based critical methodology presupposed by it on both metaphysical and epistemological grounds. But I have yet to defend it on ethical grounds. Even if films are objectively existing, intentional objects; even if the interpretation of films is an objective process; and even if it is possible in the formulation of interpretations to ground knowledge of films in the intentions of their respective authors, why *should* interpretation be concerned with authorial intention? A skeptic may have recourse at this point to what is commonly referred to as the "is-ought gap" and claim, following Hume, that what one *ought* to do does not automatically follow from what *is* the case – or, translating this Humean dilemma into Kantian terms, as often happens, what *is* the case does not automatically generate an *imperative*.

But this ethical "problem" is yet another pseudo-problem. Hume was wrong (as was Kant after him) to implicitly shift the terms of "ought" to (an unconditional) "must." This, in effect, betrays a desire for ethics to be taken out of our (human) hands, for choice (and responsibility) to be removed from the equation. Against this picture, Rand emphasizes that ethical action "is a process of reason, of thought; it is not automatic nor instinctive nor involuntary nor infallible. Man has to initiate it, to sustain it, and to bear responsibility for its results" (Rand 1961a: 11). Aesthetically speaking, Cavell frames the ethical responsibilities involved in art, for both authors and critics, in the following terms:

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[135] Austin's famous example in his discussion is the goldfinch, with reference to which he expounds: "If you say, 'That's not enough' [to claim that you know that what is before you is a goldfinch], then you must have in mind some more or less definite lack. 'To be a goldfinch, besides having a red head it must also have the characteristic eye-markings,' or, 'How do you know it isn't a woodpecker? Woodpeckers have red heads, too.' If there is no definite lack, which you are at least prepared to specify on being pressed, then it's silly (outrageous) just to go on saying, 'That's not enough'" (Austin [1946] 1961: 52).

In morality, tracing an intention limits a man's responsibility; in art, it dilates it completely. The artist is responsible for everything that happens in his work – and not just in the sense that it is done, but in the sense that it is *meant*. It is a terrible responsibility; very few [artists] have the gift and the patience and the singleness to shoulder it. But it is all the more terrible, when it *is* shouldered, not to appreciate it, to refuse to understand something meant so well (Cavell 1967: 236-237).

This is, in relation to the aesthetic skepticism argument, the nature of the tragedy that results from skepticism of authorial minds. It is important to note, however, that, even though in the previous chapter I exposed the essence of the altruistic aesthetics promulgated by poststructuralists as an Aesthetics of Death, it does not follow that critics *must* promulgate an Aesthetics of Life. If a critic does not value (his) life, then it follows that he will not act for the sake of (his) life and will, instead, act as a(/his own) destroyer. This ability to act as our own destroyers is one of our less noble traits as human beings, and one on which Rand had the following to say:

Man has the power to act as his own destroyer – and that is the way he has acted through most of his history. A living entity that regarded its means of survival as evil would not survive. A plant that struggled to mangle its roots [or] a bird that fought to break its wings would not remain for long in the existence they affronted. But the history of man has been a struggle to deny and to destroy his mind. Man has been called a rational being, but rationality is a matter of choice – and the alternative his nature offers him is: Rational being or suicidal animal (Rand 1957: 1013).[136]

This is why, as I clarified in the Introduction, Rand's conception of moral perfection is "an *unbreached rationality* – not the degree of your intelligence, but the full and relentless use of your mind, not the extent of your knowledge, but the acceptance of reason as an absolute" (Rand 1957: 1059). This is also why, despite my best efforts to prove that poststructuralism (and, indeed, the entire Kantian aesthetic tradition) has no philosophical merit, my arguments will have no effect until the goal of poststructuralism (and the Kantian tradition) is acknowledged as a breach of rationality and rejected. Rand clarifies this point in a discussion of economics:

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[136] On a similar note, Cavell sees philosophy as concerning "those necessities we cannot, being human, fail to know. Except that nothing is more human than to deny them" (Cavell 1965: 96).

People are not embracing collectivism because they have accepted bad economics. They are accepting bad economics because they have embraced collectivism. You cannot reverse cause and effect. And you cannot destroy the cause by fighting the effect. That is as futile as trying to eliminate the symptoms of a disease without attacking its germs. Marxist (collectivist) economics have been blasted, refuted, and discredited quite thoroughly … yet people go right on accepting Marxism. If you look into the matter closely, you will see that most people know in a vague, uneasy way that Marxist economics are screwy. Yet, this does not stop them from advocating the same Marxist economics. Why? … [Because] that which society accepts as its purpose and ideal (or, to be exact, that which men think society should accept as its purpose and ideal) determines the kind of economics men will advocate and attempt to practice … [So,] when the social goal chosen is by its very nature impossible and unworkable (such as collectivism), it is useless to point out to people that the means they've chosen to achieve it are unworkable. Such means go with such a goal; there are no others. You cannot make men abandon the means until you have persuaded them to abandon the goal (Rand 1946: 257-258).

I have already demonstrated the consequences of pursuing the goal of free play for art, that it entails nothing less than the destruction of art. I have not demonstrated, however, the consequences of pursuing free play for criticism. Contrary to the violence entailed by aesthetic hedonism, I argued that the moral alternative is a conception of art which is not predicated on *looting*, on demanding and taking the unearned, but on *trading*. In line with the discussion in the Introduction of Rand's emphasis on trade as "the moral symbol of respect for human beings" (Rand 1057: 1022), I offered a conception of art as trade and authors and critics as traders. The nature of aesthetic trade is similar to the exchange of ideas in a conversation. Carroll provides a useful formulation for understanding our engagement with an author's work as akin to entering into a conversation with him:

When we read a literary text or contemplate a painting, we enter a relationship with its creator that is roughly analogous to a conversation. Obviously, it is not as interactive as an ordinary conversation, for we are not receiving spontaneous feedback concerning our own responses. But just as an ordinary conversation gives us a stake in understanding our interlocutor, so does interaction with an artwork. We would not think that we had had a genuine conversation with someone whom we were not satisfied we understood. Conversations, rewarding ones at least, involve a sense of community or communion that itself rests on communication. A fulfilling

conversation requires that we have the conviction of having grasped what our interlocutor meant or intended to say. This is evinced by the extent to which we struggle to clarify their meanings. A conversation that left us with only our own clever construals or educated guesses, no matter how aesthetically rich, would leave us with the sense that something was missing. That we had neither communed nor communicated … This prospect of community supplies a major impetus motivating our interest in engaging literary texts and artworks. We may read to be entertained, to learn, and to be moved, but we also seek out artworks in order to converse or commune with their makers. We want to understand the author, even if that will lead to rejecting his or her point of view (Carroll 1992: 174).

As for the ethical stakes of conceptualizing aesthetic experience as conversational, Carroll points out (in an ironic fashion considering the vehement anti-capitalism rhetoric that is part and parcel of poststructuralism) that the goal of prioritizing critical free play indifferent to or even in opposition to authorial intention "has a very 'consumerist' ring to it" inasmuch as "it reduces our relation to the text to an I/It relationship" where the "it" is unceremoniously chewed up and spit out; this as opposed to cultivating "an I/Thou relation to the author of the text" (Carroll 1992: 175). To Carroll's mind, when we watch a film, one of our "abiding interests" is to commune with another human being, to get insight into the mind of another person and to consider what they think in light of what we think (Carroll 1992: 175). It would be easy at this point for a scholar invested in the Kantian aesthetic tradition to simply retort: "But I have no conversational interest in films. Nor do I have any interest in what anyone else thinks. My interest is in fashioning the most elaborate, sophisticated, imaginative, politically useful, etc., interpretation that I possibly can." This is, recalling Rand's dismay at those to whom she referred as "Nietzschean egoists," a corruption of art and a short-range view of aesthetic experience that reduces (if it does not preclude entirely) the range of satisfaction and enlightenment afforded by art. It is, in short, not merely destructive, but also self-destructive. As Carroll puts it:

> We [ought to] have an investment in really encountering interesting and brilliant authors, not simply in counterfeiting such encounters. Knowing that [Ed Wood's *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959)] is a schlock quickie, but responding to it as if it were superbly transgressive, is … a matter of sacrificing genuine conversational experiences for aesthetic pleasures. And, in doing so, one is willing to lower one's self-esteem for the sake of an aesthetic high (Carroll 1992: 178).

In a similar vein, Cavell once expressed his dissatisfaction with the ontological position of anti-intentionalist criticism not only for its fallacious conception of authorship but also and even more importantly for the abnegation of ethics entailed by that fallacious conception:

> I [have been] told that it is not [the author] speaking to us, but a mask of [the author] speaking to…anyway not to us. We don't so much hear his words as overhear them. That [conception of authorship] explains something. But it does not explain our responsibility in overhearing, in listening, nor [the author's] in speaking, knowing he's overheard, and meaning to be. What it neglects is that we are to accept the words, or refuse them; wish for them, or betray them. What is called for is not merely our interest, nor our transport – these may even serve as betrayals now. What is called for is our acknowledgment that we are implicated, or our rejection of the implication. In dreams begin responsibilities? In listening begins evasion (Cavell 1967: 229).

I acknowledge that there may still be scholars out there who are unconvinced, scholars I have failed to persuade to abandon the irrational and immoral philosophical premises that drive the Kantian aesthetic tradition. But then, in line with my discussion of the Objectivist ethics in the Introduction, the purpose of the Objectivist aesthetics is not to provide a basis for punishment, it is not a club with which to beat critics over the head until they fall in line. If critics refuse to act like grownups, it does not fall on the shoulders of grownup critics to force them to acknowledge the error of their ways. They must be left to suffer the grownup consequences of their childish actions. In Cavellian terms, their suffering takes the form of a tragic, self-inflicted "spiritual torture":

> Skepticism … is a cover story for … the attempt to convert the human condition, the condition of humanity, into an intellectual difficulty, a riddle … Tragedy is the place [where] we are not allowed to escape the consequences, or price, of this cover … The failure to acknowledge a best case of the other is a denial of that other, presaging the death of the other … and the death of our capacity to acknowledge as such, the turning of our hearts to stone, or their bursting. The necessary reflexiveness of spiritual torture (Cavell 1979: 493).[137]

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[137] Peterson corroborates Cavell's claims, stressing that individuals who "flout" this ethic, "in ignorance or in willful opposition," are "doomed to misery and eventual dissolution" (Peterson 1999: xx).

To recall the point of Rand's with which I closed the previous chapter, "no man can predict the time when others will choose to return to reason" (Rand 1957: 771). No more can he force others to return to reason, or force them to stop torturing themselves. My efforts in this section have not been to provide aesthetic "commandments" which scholars must obey. I have sought, rather, to provide a rational and moral foundation for film interpretation in accordance with the Objectivist aesthetics. If scholars remain unconvinced, then, to invoke Wittgenstein again, all that is left for me to say is: "This is simply what I do" (Wittgenstein [1949] 1967: 85 [§217]). Indeed, this Wittgensteinian position – which is also echoed in Austin's position vis-à-vis the goldfinch, that, at some point, "enough is enough" (Austin [1946] 1961: 52) – is endorsed by Rand in the passage quoted in the Introduction:

> We do not tell – we *show*. We do not claim – we *prove*. It is not your obedience that we seek to win, but your rational conviction. You have seen all the elements of our secret. The conclusion is now yours to draw – we can help you to name it, but not to accept it – the sight, the knowledge, and the acceptance must be yours (Rand 1957: 735).

I have made my case for objective interpretation in accordance with the Objectivist aesthetics and I have endeavored to prove its validity beyond a reasonable doubt. The conclusion is now yours to draw – or else, the counterargument is now yours to make.

II

Objectivity and Evaluation

In the previous section, Kant served as the starting point for my discussion of the possibility of objective interpretation. It is on the strength of Kantian premises (first, that artworks are objects of free beauty, and, second, that aesthetic judgments are subjective) that what I have been calling the Kantian aesthetic tradition has all but displaced what I have been calling the Aristotelian aesthetic tradition. I worked in the previous section to prove that the first premise, that artworks are objects of free beauty (and, by extension, that there is no objective basis to the interpretation of artworks), was false. In this section, I will work to prove that the second premise, that aesthetic

judgments are subjective (and, by extension, that there is no objective basis to the evaluation of artworks), is also false. The question that I wish to address in this section is the following: If there is no sense in arguing against the claim that the interpretation of art is firmly within the realm of the objective, is there also no sense in arguing against the claim that the evaluation of art is firmly within the realm of the subjective?

In the Introduction, I observed that the Objectivist aesthetics lacks a coherent alternative to Kantian aesthetic subjectivism. So, too, it is important to stress, does film studies. In film studies, it is a matter of fact that evaluation is subjective and hence of no use, of no *value*, to the "serious" study of the cinema. Consider, as a representative example of this state of affairs, Swagato Chakravorty's remarks in his review of Daniel Yacavone's recent book, *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema* (2015). Responding to a point in Yacavone's text where he was arguing that correctly interpreting films is a prerequisite to evaluating their "artistic success and interest" (Yacavone 2015: 255), Chakravorty characterized Yacavone's emphasis on evaluation as "archaic," for, as he opined, "it can surely be said that we are some decades past the time when judgment and taste constituted crucial parts of art criticism and theory" (Chakravorty 2017: 153).

In response to Chakravorty's review, Yacavone confessed to being "perplexed" by the "bald assertion" regarding the irrelevance of evaluation to film studies (Yacavone 2017: 159). What I find perplexing, however, is Yacavone's confession to being perplexed. In the previous section, I brought up Bordwell's famous characterization of film studies as "Interpretation, Inc." I wonder if Yacavone would still find Chakravorty's assertion perplexing if he considered the fact that at no point in the history of film studies was the discipline ever characterized as "Evaluation, Inc." Indeed, so entrenched in the study of the cinema is the idea that evaluation is a worthlessly subjective activity that, even today, it is hard to imagine a future for film studies in which it might be characterized as such. This is true all the way down to the undergraduate level, where students are routinely instructed to leave out of their essays any evaluative claims or references to any emotional investments. The result is the sad state of affairs lamented by F.R. Leavis where scholarship consists of "those depressing 'contributions to knowledge' which are so patently uninformed by any first-hand perception of why the subject should be *worth* study" (Leavis [1952] 2011: 97).

Looking back at the history of film studies, I am consistently drawn to the coincidence that, in 1972, the same year that Peter Wollen published the influential third edition of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* and thereby set the philosophical agenda for the discipline of film studies, there was another book published that could have set a very different agenda: V.F. Perkins' *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*. Robin Wood considered *Film as Film* to be "among the most valuable books on the cinema," and he considered Perkins' arguments to be "beautifully developed with meticulous logic" to the point of being "virtually impregnable" (Wood 1976: 30). Carroll takes Wood's praise one step further, claiming that *Film as Film* stands as "the most thoughtful, ambitious, and original attempt to construct a film theory in the seventies" (Carroll 1988a: 74) and commending Perkins for being the only film scholar to have even attempted "to deal rigorously with the issue of film evaluation" (Carroll 1988a: 256). At these earlier moments in the history of film studies, the opinions of Wood and Carroll were, regrettably, minority opinions. As Carroll explains:

> The main direction that film theory took in the seventies was scientific, or pseudo-scientific (the synthesis of semiology, psychoanalysis, and Marxism), whereas Perkins' approach was aesthetic – that is, he was concerned with the "artistic quality" of films, a concept that many [then and even now] would laugh out of court (Carroll 1988a: 74-75).

Today, however, scholars are (re)turning to Perkins' text and the issues with which he was grappling with greater frequency.[138] I consider this (re)turn to be symptomatic of a more general desire for a (re)turn to the question of value. Murray Pomerance, for instance, argues that "something is inevitably missing" in all academic analyses of films, "and that something is the experience of actually watching the film" (Pomerance 2008: 5). Taking his cue from André Bazin,[139] Pomerance passionately affirms that:

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[138] For two representative examples of this (re)turn to *Film as Film*, see David Sorfa (2015) and Dominic Lash (2017).

[139] Pomerance was inspired by a moment in Bazin's discussion of Anthony Mann's *The Man from Laramie* (1955). After differentiating between film *appreciation*, which "presupposes love and familiarity," and film *analysis*, which "can yield nothing but a crude enumeration which overlooks the essence that only taste can uncover," Bazin wryly exclaimed: "But try to make taste the subject of criticism!" (Bazin 1956: 165). More recently, as part of an investigation into the "taste of crime" in French New Wave cinema, Pomerance was again inspired to reflect on this Bazinian point, reaffirming that: "My claim – and, I think, Bazin's – is that the noblest and most serious aim of all film criticism is to make taste its subject, to elucidate and open the work of film in such a way as to make understandable how it can be a pretext for love" (Pomerance 2017).

Because cinema is art, it remains true that the most assiduous and earnest commitment to looking at its historical, social, psychological, compositional, authorial, and political aspects finally brings any serious viewer to a consideration of love: Love of the screen, love of the cinematic image, love of the peculiar kind of light that is to be glimpsed in the dark theater coming from this magical world, that holds us fast to our fixation upon film – love of life, because, just as it includes people, life includes cinema (Pomerance 2008: 8).

In a similar spirit, contemporary scholars such as Alex Clayton,[140] Andrew Klevan,[141] William Rothman,[142] D.N. Rodowick,[143] and Tom Gunning[144] – as well as, of course, the two preeminent

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[140] Over the course of a critique of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's (1997) mode of engagement with Howard Hawks' *His Girl Friday* (1940), Clayton strives (in a rather Bazinian register) to reaffirm the fact that, "whilst criticism is apt to involve analysis," the goal should be "to do so without 'breaking the film' and without straining for a plateau above experience" (Clayton 2011: 29); the goal of criticism, Clayton persuasively argues, should be the articulation of "the developing nature of a response [that] is forged through an undertaking to reconnect with the film on its own terms, ideally *in* its own terms" (Clayton 2011: 36).

[141] By way of concluding his illuminating investigation of Cavell's critical practice, Klevan emphasizes that, in addition to undertaking criticism "because we feel that we might owe it to the creators of the work," another one of the most powerful reasons to undertake criticism is a certain "compulsion to share" on the basis of which criticism can take the following form: "I choose this moment to discuss because I value it and you may value it, too. You may have missed it, *or* you sensed it but let it go, *or* you saw it, too – you are not alone" (Klevan 2011a: 61).

[142] In his most recent book, Rothman encourages as an alternative to rote scholarship that "purport[s] to tell us *a priori* what films are and are not capable of" that scholars (re)learn how "to *receive* films, to read them, moment by moment, trusting [in their] experience" (Rothman 2014: 280). And this sentiment importantly continues a long-running thread in Rothman's work, as evident by the following (still unheeded) plea made to film scholars decades before: "Too many academic film critics today deny their experience [of films] … Predictably, the resulting criticism reaffirms an attitude of superiority to the films ... Such criticism furthers rather than undoes the repression of these films and the ideas they represent ... [and] we [as scholars] cannot play our part in reviving the spirit of the films we love without testifying, in our criticism, to the truth of our experience of those films" (Rothman 1986: 46).

[143] In one of his most recent books, Rodowick considers the possibility of film scholarship becoming "a diagnosis of values" (Rodowick 2015: 95); indeed, he stresses the importance of film scholars (re)learning *how to value* films, a process which would involve, as Rodowick adumbrates, "adding to one's cognitive stock, amplifying one's perceptual sensitivity and openness to new experience, acquiring new frameworks or contexts for judgment, and developing the potential for imaginatively applying or creating concepts" (Rodowick 2015: 103).

[144] In a recent consideration of the state of academic film criticism, Gunning observes how, "as academic critics, we know that evaluative categories exist and shape what we write about … but where they come from seems to be avoided as if we were prudish parents invoking the stork rather than answering tricky questions" (Gunning 2016).

voices on this front, Cavell[145] and Carroll[146] – have all voiced similar sentiments.[147] In the hopes of contributing to this surge of scholarly interest in film evaluation, I will proceed in what remains of this chapter to dissolve a number of additional Kantian worries towards the goal of establishing the rationale for an Objectivist conception of evaluation under the heading of what I previously introduced as an Aesthetics of Life. To start, I would like to return to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. If the basic premise on which I am focusing in this section – that aesthetic judgments are subjective – is a premise that scholars invested in the Kantian aesthetic tradition believe to be true, they are not without their reasons. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> The green color of the meadows belongs to *objective* sensation … but its agreeableness belongs to *subjective* sensation … i.e. to feeling, through which the object is regarded as an object of delight (which involves no cognition of the object) (Kant [1790] 2007: 38).

As Kant sees it, to consider something (e.g. an artwork) to be good or bad (or, in Kant's terms, agreeable or disagreeable) is a matter of *feeling* (i.e. is relegated to *emotions*). And matters pertaining to feelings/emotions are not, as Kant sees it, connected in any way to thinking/reason. Thus, since only that which pertains to thinking/reason may be considered objective, and since aesthetic judgments do not pertain to thinking/reason, aesthetic judgments are not objective. This is a fallacious chain of "logic" which merely reifies the ancient mind/body split. Furthermore, that this chain of "logic" is fallacious is something that Kant himself indicates when he turns to art (as opposed to nature), for it does not take him very long to introduce thinking/reason into the conversation. In a discussion of the aesthetic value of tragedy, Kant notes that "many an individual

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[145] In a reconsideration of Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), a film that he had already analyzed as part of a larger study of the genre of what he calls "the comedy of remarriage" (Cavell 1981a), Cavell opined that it is only in one's "concrete" appreciation for individual films that "genuine conviction of [the cinema's] value for study can, or should, develop" (Cavell 1985b: 136).

[146] In the only work by a film scholar where the possibility of objective evaluation is explicitly and elaborately defended, Carroll unequivocally avers: "I regard the discovery of value as the primary task of criticism in contrast to the championing of criticism as the almost clinical dissection and interpretation of various codes or signifying systems or regimes of power. Rather, I maintain that evaluation is the crux of criticism and that this inevitable connection to human value is the litmus test of membership in the humanities" (Carroll 2009: 7).

[147] I will come back to this point and consider in greater detail the landscape of contemporary film studies in the Conclusion.

… thinks himself improved by a tragedy"; he notes further that this would seem to imply that aesthetic judgments "in every case have reference to our *way of thinking*" (Kant [1790] 2007: 104).

Breaking that chain of "logic" was easy enough. But then why do scholars persist in dividing interpretation/reason/objectivity and evaluation/emotions/subjectivity? As I discussed briefly in the previous section, Carroll identified as the major problem on this front Hume's (and, later, Kant's) misguided choice to anchor aesthetic judgments in the concept of *taste*. Kant is very explicit with respect to his choice on this front (though less so with the consequences of his choice):

> If anyone reads me his poem, or brings me to a play, which, all said and done, fails to commend itself to my taste, then ... I stop my ears: I do not want to hear any reasons or any arguing about the matter ... This would appear to be one of the chief reasons why this faculty of aesthetic judgement has been given the name of taste. For someone may recount to me all the ingredients of a dish, and observe of each and every one of them that it is just what I like, and, in addition, rightly commend the wholesomeness of the food, yet I am deaf to all these arguments. I try the dish with my own tongue and palate, and I pass judgement according to their verdict … I [therefore] take my stand [regarding the aforementioned judgment passed on the hypothetical poem or play] on the ground that my judgment is to be one of taste, and not one of understanding or reason (Kant [1790] 2007: 114-115).

The "logic" of this passage is very clearly that of the Copernican Revolution, the terms of which dictate that we ought to assume (contrary to Rand's "Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification" formula) that "objects must conform to our cognition" (Kant 1787: 110). To corroborate this charge, consider the claim that Kant makes when he has occasion to return to his earlier example of the flower:

> To say, "This flower is beautiful," is tantamount to repeating its own proper claim to the delight of everyone. The agreeableness of its smell gives it no claim at all. One person revels in it, but it gives another a headache. Now what else are we to suppose from this than that its beauty is to be taken for a property of the flower itself which does not adapt itself to the diversity of heads and the individual senses of the multitude, but to which they must adapt themselves, if they are going to pass judgement upon it? And yet this is not the way the matter stands. For the judgement of taste

consists precisely in a thing being called beautiful solely in respect of that quality in which it adapts itself to our mode of receiving it (Kant [1790] 2007: 111-112).

Having already rejected the "logic" of the Copernican Revolution in the Introduction, I will leave it at calling attention to its manifestation at this point in Kant's discussion of aesthetic judgment and the way it underscores Kant's evident frustration that humans must adapt to artworks rather than artworks having to adapt to humans. As it relates specifically to claims of criticism, the problems one encounters in Kant's arguments are, in Wittgensteinian terms, grammatical problems. First, it is important to note that the aesthetic judgment vis-à-vis the flower (viz. "This flower is beautiful") and the grounds upon which the judgment is made (viz. its smell) have no logical connection. Beauty is ordinarily a matter of sight ("That is a beautiful canvas"), though the concept may also be extended to sound ("That is a beautiful melody"). But to say of an odor that it *smells* beautiful (or of a wall that it *feels* beautiful, or of a steak that it *tastes* beautiful) is, in Wittgensteinian terms once again, to conflate very different language-games. Added to which, suffering a headache upon smelling a flower (due presumably to some sort of allergic reaction) is not, strictly speaking, a judgment (even so, however, is it not possible to determine the *reason* why a person may suffer a headache upon smelling a certain flower?).

As regards Kant's aesthetic judgment vis-à-vis the hypothetical poem or play, his argument again suffers from a faulty chain of "logic." As far as Kant is concerned, aesthetic judgments *must be* subjective *because* he has the inclination to stop his ears when his judgment is challenged. But it must be pointed out that this inclination is not evidence of a metaphysical fact regarding the nature of aesthetic judgments; rather, it is evidence of an (un)ethical decision regarding the nature of aesthetic argument. Kant is making a (poor and childish) choice to stop his ears and to refuse to listen to reason. The fact that he then had the gall to try to pass off such childish nonsense as philosophical insight merely adds insult to injury, and any scholar who provides such impudence with the sanction of reason and virtue is guilty of sanctioning the reduction of criticism to a playground full of children stomping their feet with their hands over their ears shouting, "I can't hear you!"

In point of fact, Kant's very phrasing here – saying that he does not want to hear any *reasons* or arguing about his hypothetical aesthetic judgment – undercuts his Copernican position inasmuch as it presupposes both the existence of reasons that could explain said judgment (i.e. that could confirm that said judgment was, in fact, *reasonable*) and the existence in the realm of aesthetic judgment of reason as such. To introduce taste at this point merely muddies the conceptual waters, for judgment and taste are not analogous. Similar to the way that suffering an allergic reaction to the smell of a flower is not a judgment passed on the basis of reasoned deliberation, a given food object being or not being to someone's taste is likewise not, strictly speaking, a judgment. Even Kant points out that, upon trying a dish with *his* "tongue and palate," *his* "judgment" is a result of "*their* verdict." Kant does not even allow a space for "his own" "judgment" when it comes to taste. For an obvious reason, too: Because judgment and taste are two very different concepts.[148] And only the concept of judgment is relevant in aesthetic philosophy.[149]

Though his decision to place his consideration of aesthetic judgments on the Humean ground of taste was misguided, Kant's critique is nonetheless evidence of his well-intentioned refusal to simply write aesthetic judgment off as irredeemably and uselessly subjective. Similar to Derrida's valiant struggle to refuse to acquiesce to nihilism despite a susceptibility to nihilistic tendencies, Kant struggles throughout his critique of aesthetic judgment to refuse to acquiesce to subjectivism. This struggle comes into sharp focus as he works to solve what he calls the antimony of taste:

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[148] In a related discussion of the concept of choice, Emerson mounts a comparable critique. He characterizes the "choices" of what he calls "the appetites" as at best "partial" acts, whereas the choices of what he calls (likely invoking Kant intentionally) the "faculties" he characterizes as "whole" acts, as acts involving one's "constitution" (Emerson 1841b: 195). It is in this vein that I mean to distinguish the act of judging a given dish from the act of judging a given artwork.

[149] To corroborate this point, Carroll usefully contrasts the grammatical contours of conversations about movie preferences versus condiment preferences: "Of utmost importance, observe [that in conversations about movie preferences] we are *arguing*. There would [be] no point in our arguing [about condiments]. You like ketchup; I like mustard. That's it. Period. Full stop. We accept each other's preferences as facts; I don't suppose it makes much sense to attempt to argue you out of your relish for ketchup … However, in stark contrast, we are *arguing* [in conversations about movie preferences]. And that entails, furthermore, that our discussion revolves around coming up with *reasons* that we believe should sway or even compel others to accept our viewpoint" (Carroll 2008: 195). This is just a choice example of what Carroll describes as the "ineluctable tendency for [aesthetic arguments] to drift from reports of subjective enjoyment or lethargy to questions of objective evaluation" (Carroll 2008: 194). For more elaborate treatments of these issues, see Carroll (2008: 194-199; 2009: 155-159).

The first commonplace concerning taste is contained in the proposition under cover of which everyone devoid of taste thinks to shelter himself from reproach: *Everyone has his own taste*. This is only another way of saying that the determining ground of this judgement is merely subjective (gratification or pain) and that the judgement has no right to the necessary agreement of others. Its second commonplace, to which even those resort who concede the right of the judgement of taste to pronounce with validity for everyone, is: *There is no disputing about taste*. This amounts to saying that, even though the determining ground of a judgement of taste [is] objective, it is not reducible to definite concepts, so that, in respect of the judgement itself, no *decision* can be reached by proofs … Between these two commonplaces, an intermediate proposition is readily seen to be missing. It is one which has certainly not become proverbial, but yet, it is at the back of everyone's mind. It is that there may be contention about taste (although not a dispute). This proposition, however, involves the contrary of the first one, for in a matter in which contention is to be allowed, there must be a hope of coming to terms. Hence, one must be able to reckon on grounds of judgement that possess more than private validity and are thus not merely subjective. And yet, the above principle, *everyone has his own taste*, is directly opposed to this (Kant [1790] 2007: 165-166).

Once again, there are a number of grammatical problems in this passage that warrant investigation. Prior to conducting a grammatical investigation of Kant's antinomy of taste, however, I would like to follow his chain of "logic" through to the end so as to bring to light the mystical core of the Kantian aesthetic tradition. Kant's "solution" to the antinomy of taste involves the postulation of a "supersensible substrate" in which the answers to all our questions are contained but which reason is (inexplicably) constitutively incapable of entering:

The solution of an antinomy turns solely on the possibility of two apparently conflicting propositions not being in fact contradictory, but rather, being capable of consisting together, although the explanation of the possibility of their concept transcends our faculties of cognition … The thesis should therefore read: The judgement of taste is not based on determinate concepts … [while the antithesis should therefore read:] The judgement of taste does rest upon a concept, although an indeterminate one (that, namely, of the supersensible substrate of phenomena); and then there would be no conflict … Beyond removing this conflict between the claims and counterclaims of taste, we can do nothing. To supply a determinate objective principle of taste in accordance with which its judgements might be derived, tested, and proved is an absolute

impossibility, for then it would not be a judgement of taste … This illusion is [allegedly] natural and for human reason unavoidable … [though, with Kant's "solution," it] no longer misleads us (Kant [1790] 2007: 168).

This is Witch Doctoring at its most transparent. This also reflects more perfectly than parody Gunning's observation that discussions of evaluation often resemble "prudish parents invoking the stork rather than answering tricky questions." The stork in Kant's story of the birth of objective evaluation is "the supersensible," a dimension from which we are forever barred but the existence of which Kant tries to assure us is beyond question. Here, Kant betrays an operating procedure that Rand warned against as patently nonsensical; recalling Rand's distinction between Witch Doctors and Attilas, Witch Doctors often postulate "a mode of consciousness superior to reason" (Rand 1957: 1034) which they typically traffic under the heading of *faith*:[150]

> They keep telling you what it is not, but never tell you what it is. All their identifications consist of negating: God is that which no human mind can know, they say, and proceed to demand that you consider it knowledge – God is non-man, Heaven is non-Earth, soul is non-body, virtue is non-profit, A is non-A, perception is non-sensory, knowledge is non-reason. Their definitions are not acts of defining, but of wiping out. It is only the metaphysics of a leech that would cling to the idea of a universe where a zero is a standard of identification … [And] if an honest person asks them "How?" they answer with righteous scorn that … the concept of superior spirits is "Somehow" (Rand 1957: 1035).[151]

And yet, despite the myriad of equivocations and contradictions that mar his critique of aesthetic judgment, there is contained in Kant's critique a moment of clarity. In the previously quoted

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[150] For corroboration, recall that Kant himself characterized his efforts with his three critiques as seeking a way "to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith" (Kant 1787: 116).

[151] Regarding film studies in particular, this dubious operating procedure has been rightly rejected from the start. However, the only substitute that has been offered for mysticism of this Kantian variety has been skepticism of the poststructuralist variety. To borrow from Peikoff's characterization of the "progress" of Kantianism from Platonism to make the same point vis-à-vis the "progress" of poststructuralism from Kantianism: "While condemning [Kant's] *mystic* view [of aesthetic judgment], the [poststructuralists] embrace the same view in a *skeptic* version. Condemning [aesthetic judgments] as implicitly arbitrary, they institute an *explicitly* arbitrary equivalent. Condemning [Kant's] "intuitive" [conception of aesthetic judgment] as a disguised subjectivism, they spurn the disguise and adopt subjectivism … as though a concealed vice were heinous, but a brazenly flaunted one, rational … The [poststructuralist] "advance" over [Kantianism thus] consist[s] of secularizing his theory. To secularize an error is still to commit it (Peikoff 1967: 96).

passage, Kant remarked that to claim objectivity for a given aesthetic judgment is "an absolute impossibility" because "then it would not be a judgment of taste." This leads him precisely to the point that he needed, but failed, to make: *Aesthetic judgments are not judgments of taste*. Rather, as I will argue, aesthetic judgments are judgments of *value*. To shift the terms in discussions of aesthetic judgment from taste to value would be a small victory, but it would by no means magically solve all the problems attendant to the assertion of the objectivity of evaluation. Even if, in the interest of conceptual precision and clarity, the concept of taste is replaced with the concept of value, the objection is still the same: How can a judgment of value be made objectively? It will be my task in the remainder of this section to answer this question, and I will do so by returning to the arguments made by Rand in relation to the possibilities of an Objectivist aesthetics. In the Introduction, I began my consideration of the Objectivist aesthetics with a discussion of the *nature* and the *function* of art. As I discussed, art, by its very nature, is per Rand a *concretization of metaphysics*; it is of the nature of art to embody, or *objectify*, the metaphysical value-judgments of artists. The function of art, meanwhile, is bound up with its nature. Given that art objectifies metaphysical value-judgments, the function of art is to bring human concepts to the perceptual level of consciousness in order that they may be grasped directly. However, as Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi usefully point out, "it is not with just *any* concepts that art is primarily concerned, but rather, with the basic value-judgments about reality that most profoundly bear upon [an] individual's life" (Torres and Kamhi 2000a: 27). They further clarify that art, from this perspective, "like language … serves the basic cognitive need to condense and integrate knowledge and experience into graspable concretes" (Torres and Kamhi 2000a: 27).

This understanding of the nature and the function of art is quite clearly a cognitive understanding. From the Objectivist perspective, art is not detachable from life. This is an important point on which the Objectivist aesthetics departs from the Kantian aesthetic tradition. Rand asserted unequivocally that "there is no such thing as 'non-practical knowledge' or any sort of 'disinterested' action" (Rand 1957: 1066). Thus, the following axiom of the Kantian aesthetic tradition is obviously anathema to the Objectivist aesthetics:

> Everyone must allow that [an aesthetic judgment] which is tinged with the slightest interest is very
> partial and not a pure [aesthetic judgment] … One must not be in the least prepossessed in favor of

the existence of the [artwork], but must preserve complete indifference in this respect, in order to play the part of judge (Kant [1790] 2007: 37).

In the Kantian aesthetic tradition, it is axiomatic that art serves no *essential* function in human life, that there is nothing of *fundamental* value in either aesthetic creation or aesthetic experience. Rand, by contrast, argues that art *does* serve an essential function in human life, that aesthetic creation and aesthetic experience *are* of fundamental value. In fact, she goes so far as to argue that art is "inextricably tied to man's survival" (Rand [1969] 1975: 5):

> Consciously or subconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, man knows that he needs a comprehensive view of existence to integrate his values, to choose his goals, to plan his future, to maintain the unity and coherence of his life – and that his metaphysical value-judgments are involved in every moment of his life, in his every choice, decision, and action. Metaphysics … involves man's widest abstractions. It includes every concrete he has ever perceived, it involves such a vast sum of knowledge and such a long chain of concepts that no man could hold it all in the focus of his immediate conscious awareness. Yet, he needs that sum and that awareness to guide him, he needs the power to summon them into full, conscious focus. That power is given to him by art (Rand [1969] 1975: 7-8).

To support her argument regarding the essential function and enduring value of art, Rand points out that art has "existed in every known civilization" and has "accompan[ied] man's steps from the early hours of his prehistorical dawn" (Rand [1969] 1975: 3). Indeed, even in its role "as an adjunct (and, often, a monopoly) of religion," it served the purpose of concretizing the metaphysical value-judgments of primitive cultures (Rand [1969] 1975: 8). This is not a coincidence or a contingent historical oddity. This is simply what art does.[152] If this is the nature and the function of art, then such familiar notions from the history of aesthetic philosophy as "disinterested pleasure" and "art for art's sake" are nonsensical and have no place in the Objectivist

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[152] For more thorough Objectivist elaborations on the centrality of art in human existence and evolution, see Sciabarra ([1995] 2013: 191-192), Torres and Kamhi (2000a: 109-130), and Kamhi (2014: 141-168). And, of course, it goes without saying that Rand was neither the first nor the last person to stress the essential importance of art in human history. Joseph Campbell, for instance, highlighted "the unity of our species" by tracking the "mythological aims and concerns" that have been "shaping the arts and world of *Homo sapiens*" ever since "the emergence of our species" (Campbell 1966: 21). In addition to Campbell's work (Campbell [1949] 2004, 1960, 1962, 1965, 1968, 1972), see also the work of, among others, Mircea Eliade ([1954] 1991, [1957] 1987, [1976] 1978, [1978] 1982, [1983] 1985), Northrop Frye (1982, 1990), Ellen Dissanayake ([1992] 1995), Peterson (1999, 2012), and Saad (2012).

aesthetics. On the contrary, these ideas indicate a philosophical abnegation with respect to art. As Rand strenuously argued:

> To isolate and bring into clear focus, into a single issue or a single scene, the essence of a conflict which, in "real life," might be atomized and scattered over a lifetime in the form of meaningless clashes, to condense a long, steady drizzle of buckshot into the explosion of a blockbuster – *that* is the highest, hardest, and most demanding function of art. To default on that function is to default on the essence of art (Rand [1969] 1975: 75).

It is at this point that I think that it is worth recalling my brief discussion in the previous section of (post)modernist/avant-garde/experimental art. In discussing artworks the purpose of which are to be ambiguous and to encourage the free play of subjective interpretations, I observed that one could argue, as Rand did, that such artworks, if they even qualify as art in the first place, are merely "child's play along its periphery" (Rand [1969] 1975: 75). The sense of this observation should now be clear. To compare, at opposite ends of the aesthetic spectrum, the poignancy and profundity of Sergio Leone's meditation on the passage of time in *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984) to the self-indulgent flickerings of Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963) is to compare two completely different filmic objects the first of which is definitively an art object and the second of which is, if anything, an *anti-art* object.[153] I would argue that such experimental work as Brakhage's films is

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[153] Though, as I said, I think that at this point the sense of the Objectivist rejection of experimental work such as Brakhage's from the realm of art is clear, I would like to elaborate a bit so as to avoid having my characterization of Brakhage's work as self-indulgent nonsense dismissed out of hand. Despite lacking Rand's unique brand of vitriol (e.g. Rand [1969] 1975, 67-70), Kamhi's rejection of such work from the realm of art follows the same logical track: In a discussion of how certain (pseudo-)artists aim to convey "their inmost feelings" above/in disregard of all else, she makes the point that just because a piece of work "might well *feel* deeply meaningful" to its creator during the creative process does *not* mean that that piece "can be similarly meaningful to anyone else" (Kamhi 2014: 61). In Brakhage's case, he described his creative process for *Mothlight* in the following manner: "Here is a film that I made out of a deep grief. *The grief is my business* … but the grief was helpful in squeezing the little film out of me, that I said 'these crazy moths are flying into the candlelight, and burning themselves to death, and that's what's happening to me. I don't have enough money to make these films, and … I'm not feeding my children properly, because of these damn films, you know. And I'm burning up here … What can I do?'" (Brakhage 2003, my emphasis). Obviously, I do not know everybody who has ever watched *Mothlight*; still, I am confident enough to contend that nobody who has ever watched *Mothlight* has said upon finishing it, "Wow, what a powerful artistic rendering of the pain of being unable to support one's family due to one's commitment to one's passion." More often than not, I would wager that the response is more of the "What the hell was that?" variety. And rightly so; as Rand put it, works like *Mothlight* should be "of no interest to anyone outside a psychotherapist's office" (Rand [1969] 1975: 70). If it is not possible to make heads or tails of something without the author explicitly laying everything out blow-by-blow, then it is aesthetically meaningless (see Kamhi 2014: 61-68). That is not to imply that Brakhage's or his ilk's feelings have no validity whatsoever. Nor is it to imply that expressing one's feelings has no

not even on the periphery of art; it is outside the realm of art, perhaps as a challenge to art, but nevertheless not as art according to the nature and the function of art properly so called.[154]

It might appear, based on the preceding argument against anti-art, that the Objectivist conception of aesthetic value is essentially utilitarian, that the value of art is directly related to its utility in life. I would not feel compelled to reject such a characterization, as the Objectivist conception of art does, indeed, emphasize the importance of art in the life of individuals. However, if one were to attempt to take this argument a step further and say that the ethical foundation of the Objectivist aesthetics is therefore essentially utilitarian, *that* I would feel compelled to reject. On the contrary, the Objectivist aesthetics is inextricably linked with the Objectivist ethics, particularly the notion of *the virtue of selfishness* as I discussed it in the Introduction. The terms of the Objectivist rejection of utilitarianism were laid out by Peikoff:

> Utilitarians teach that an action is moral if its result is to maximize pleasure among men in general. This theory holds that man's duty is to serve, according to a purely quantitative standard of value. He is to serve not the well-being of the nation or of the economic class, but "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," regardless of who comprise it in any given issue. As to one's own happiness … the individual must be "disinterested" and "strictly impartial"; he must remember that he is only one unit out of the dozens, or millions, of men affected by his actions (Peikoff 1982: 119).

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artistic validity whatsoever. It is simply to say that the form that Brakhage's and his ilk's expressions of their feelings take is not art.

[154] The logical conclusion to this argument is that such experimental work, while *potentially* valuable, is ultimately *less* valuable than art properly so called, and, if valuable, then valuable in different ways and for different reasons. Kamhi makes a similar point in a discussion of what is commonly referred to as "abstract art": "What's wrong with 'abstract art'? My answer is: Nothing – *if* one is willing to regard it as merely decorative [as opposed to artistic]; that is, as having some visual interest or appeal owing merely to its color or design. But if one insists on claiming that it is an intelligible vehicle of meaning or emotional expression [which is to say, that it is art], I think it must be viewed as an essentially failed enterprise" (Kamhi 2014: 68). For greater elaboration on these and related issues, see Kamhi (2014: 50-96). And it is worth mentioning that Kamhi is by no means alone on this issue. As Cavell once related: "It is worth trying to go on with some thought[s] of [a different] kind for the value of [their] opposition to what is, I believe, the currently reigning view (among philosophers? among critics?) that everything and anything and nothing else but something that just about any 'community' calls (or institutes as) art (or rather an 'artwork') is art" (Cavell 1989: 3).

Peikoff's rejection of utilitarianism follows the contours of Rand's initial rejection, in which she made clear that no conception of "the good" is achieved "by counting numbers" or "by the sacrifice of anyone to anyone" (Rand [1946] 1998). Moreover, she stressed that "art belongs to a non-socializable aspect of reality which is universal (i.e. applicable to all men) but non-collective," i.e. "the nature of man's consciousness" (Rand [1969] 1975: 4). That said, just as difficulty was encountered in trying to reconcile the concept of selfishness and the concept of objectivity in the realm of the Objectivist ethics, there is likewise great difficulty in trying to reconcile the concept of selfish, interested aesthetic judgments and objective evaluation in the realm of the Objectivist aesthetics. If I have established the nature, function, and value of art in general, I have yet to establish the grounds on which one might formulate an objective aesthetic judgment regarding the value of a given artwork. I will try to do so now.

In the Introduction, my discussion of Rand's position on aesthetic judgment was limited to debunking her oft-repeated and dubious epistemological surmise that "emotions are not tools of cognition" (Rand [1969] 1975: 32). I demonstrated on the contrary that emotions *are* tools of cognition, and *valuable* tools, at that. Moreover, I demonstrated that Rand herself recognized as much, and that her distinction between a *sense of life* and a *philosophy of life* did not serve the same purpose as the familiar distinction between (respectively) subjectivity and objectivity. Rather, it served to distinguish between a life lived on the basis primarily of emotions (but with reason as an ineliminable constituent) and a life lived on the basis primarily of reason (with emotions following from consciously held premises). I will now take the opportunity to expand on this discussion, particularly in relation to Rand's concept of a sense of life and the role it plays in artistic production and reception. To do so, I would like to return to the passages in which Rand initially laid out the terms of a sense of life versus a philosophy of life and of their respective roles in artistic production and reception.

The first passage that I quoted in the Introduction featured Rand's explication of her concept of a sense of life. A sense of life is, according to her, an "implicit metaphysics," it represents an "implicit view of life" formed after years of "habitual," "automatic" responses to external stimuli. Every thought and every action taken, she maintains, implies an estimate about oneself and of the world. From the habits and automated responses that have generated an individual's implicit

metaphysics over the course of the maturation process, she points out that any given individual "may draw conscious conclusions" from this implicit metaphysics, which would then set him on the path of defining an explicit philosophy of life, "or he may remain mentally passive," which would keep him on the path of functioning according to an implicit, undefined "sense" of life (Rand [1969] 1975: 15). In Rand's usage, a sense of life is not a pejorative. That said, it is clear that there is a developmental path from a sense of life to a philosophy of life that any individual committed to moral perfectionism must follow. She speaks of a sense of life as representing an individual's "early" value judgments as he gathers knowledge and experience "to reach full conceptual control and thus to *drive*" his sense of life (Rand [1969] 1975: 18).

I discussed in the Introduction, in relation to the concept of moral perfectionism, Rand's conception of the hero who strives for more than merely continued existence. From a related vantage point, she acknowledges as heroic the "rare exception" for whom the shift from guidance by merely a sense of life to a fully-formed philosophy of life "is a natural, absorbing, if difficult, process" in which one is committed to "transforming [his] wordless feeling[s] into clearly verbalized knowledge and laying a firm foundation, an intellectual roadbed, for the course of his life," ultimately "validating and, if necessary, correcting in conceptual terms what he had merely sensed about the nature of man's existence" (Rand [1969] 1975: 18). It is a smooth transition from this conception of moral perfectionism to what I will call, in the aesthetic register, *aesthetic perfectionism*. Aesthetic perfectionism obviously has two sides to it, one pertaining to artists and one pertaining to viewers. A perfectionist artist is an individual who has shaped his sense of life into an explicit and conscious philosophy of life and in whose work that philosophy is clearly manifest as the driving force of his art. A perfectionist artist must possess a fully-formed philosophy of life and be committed to exploring via his chosen artistic medium the elements of that philosophy. A perfectionist viewer, meanwhile, is similarly an individual who has shaped his sense of life into an explicit and conscious philosophy. Where the perfectionist viewer differs from the perfectionist artist is in the fact that, whereas the latter is committed to *exploring* the elements of his philosophy via his chosen artistic medium, the latter is committed to *cultivating* the elements of his philosophy by entering into what I will call, following Rodowick, "artful conversations" (Rodowick 2015).

According to the terms of Rodowick's conceptualization, artful conversation encompasses both the mode of conversation that I discussed in the previous section, where one communes with an author in the experience of one of his artworks, as well as the mode of conversation that I have been discussing in this section, where one communes with another viewer regarding a given artwork. Rodowick stresses (and rightly so) that, in both modes of conversation, the point ought to be to come to a better understanding both of oneself and of those with whom one has chosen to commune (Rodowick 2015: 262-263). That Rodowick was led to this conceptualization of artful conversation by Cavell's aesthetic writings is no surprise; even less surprising is the fact that, as Rodowick acknowledges, the concept of artful conversation is bound up with the concept of moral perfectionism (Rodowick 2015: 262). As Cavell once put it:

> In confronting another with whom your fate is, by your lights, bound up … you risk your understanding of the other as of yourself – it is part of the [artful conversation] you have initiated, or accepted the invitation to enter, to determine whether you have sufficiently appreciated the [artwork] from the other's point of view, and whether you have articulated the ground of your own conviction (Cavell 2004: 235).

The moral force of Cavell's conception of artful conversation follows from his broader conception of conversation as such. Over the course of his articulation of the concept of a *passionate utterance*, which he was inspired to conceptualize following an explicitly Aristotelian "rehearsing" of the (neglected) place of passion in rhetoric, specifically in Austin's work on performative utterances (Cavell 2005a: 178), Cavell profoundly retools the Austinian mode of ordinary language philosophy for use in ethics and aesthetics. In Austinian terms, "in the case of [a] performative utterance, failures to identify the correct procedures are characteristically reparable … Our future is at issue, but the way back, or forward, is not lost." In Cavellian terms, however, in the case of a passionate utterance, "failure to have singled you out appropriately … characteristically puts the future of our relationship, as part of my sense of my identity, or of my existence, more radically at stake." A performative utterance, on Cavell's understanding, is "an offer of participation in the order of law"; a passionate utterance, in Cavell's articulation, is "an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire":

From the root of speech, in each utterance of revelation and confrontation, two paths spring, that of the responsibilities of implication and that of the rights of desire. It will seem to some that the former is the path of philosophy, the latter that of something or other else … In an imperfect world, the paths will not reliably coincide, but to show them both open is something I want of philosophy. Then we shall stop not at what we should or ought to say, nor at what we may and do say, but take in what we must and dare not say, or have it at heart to say, or are too confused or too tame or wild or terrorized to say or to think to say. We do not know where the dream of harmony may take us, with others, with ourselves, nor when – so often – time or patience and talent or magnanimity and conscience or perception, in a word, our responsiveness, will run out on our efforts to make the dream practical. Philosophy must nevertheless not lose its thread … [which, for Cavell, is the perfectionist challenge of] acknowledging a mode of speech in or through which, by acknowledging my desire in confronting you, I declare my standing with you and single you out, demanding a response in kind from you, and a response now, so making myself vulnerable to your rebuke, thus staking our future (Cavell 2005a: 194-195).

This leads Cavell to a conception of artful conversation "as confrontation, as demanding, as owed," and "not only, but perhaps especially, when it is molded in the form of moral reasons," for each artful conversation "directs, and risks, if not costs, blood" (Cavell 2005a: 196).[155] As to the question of value, which Cavell identifies as "the heart of the aesthetic matter" (thus placing it at the heart of artful conversations), it is from this position that Cavell contends that no (form of) argument and no (kind or amount of) reason(s) can, in and of itself/themselves, convince an individual of the value of a given artwork (as opposed to the way counting easily dispels disputes in arithmetic, to borrow one of Plato's examples from his *Euthyphro* dialogue). Instead, and much more difficultly, value is something that you discover "in your own experience, in the persistent

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[155] This point seems to have developed out of Cavell's longstanding fascination, whether in a moral or an aesthetic register, with the question put to Euthyphro by Socrates, the question which perhaps inaugurated the philosophical conviction in disagreement as invalidating the possibility of objectivity in the realms of ethics and aesthetics: "But what kind of disagreement, my friend, causes hatred and anger? … If you and I were to disagree as to whether one number were more than another, would that make us angry and enemies? Should we not settle such a dispute at once by counting? … And if we were to disagree as to the relative size of two things, we should measure them and put an end to the disagreement at once, should we not? … Then what is the question which would make us angry and enemies if we disagreed about it and could not come to a settlement? … Is it not the question of the just and unjust, of the honorable and the dishonorable, of the good and the bad? Is it not questions about these matters which make you and me and everyone else quarrel, when we do quarrel, if we differ about them and can reach no satisfactory agreement?" (Plato 395 BCE: 12-13). Cavell's interest in Plato's *Euthyphro* dialogue dates back to the very beginning of his efforts in philosophy; he references it in the title essay of his first book (Cavell 1969a: 21). For his most salient citations/examinations of this particular moment from the dialogue as they pertain to the issues with which I am concerned in this thesis, see Cavell (1979: 45, 253-273; 2004: 12-18, 25-27).

exercise of your own [judgment], [a process which] hence [necessitates] the willingness to challenge your [judgment] as it stands, to form your own artistic conscience" (Cavell 1981b: 93).

This rehearsal of Cavell's Platonic slant on artful conversation will help to shed light on the most significant problem in Cavell's philosophical position – a problem which Rodowick compounds over the course of his explication of Cavell's aesthetic writings and his concomitant articulation of the concept of artful conversation. At a key moment in the formulation of his own position, Rodowick misconstrues Cavell's most significant contribution to the philosophy of art vis-à-vis his attempt to "revisit Kant's examination of the paradoxical quality of aesthetic conversation in the context of ordinary language philosophy"; after correctly identifying Cavell's engagement with Kant as the lynchpin to his aesthetic philosophy, Rodowick proceeds to incorrectly identify as the purpose of Cavell's engagement with Kant the remapping of "a series of relationships … wherein aesthetic and moral discussion[s] are investigated and revalued such that criteria of logic … [would] no longer dominate … the rational exercise of [aesthetic] thought" (Rodowick 2015: 192-193).

It must be stated very clearly that this was never, in any sense or in any context, Cavell's aim in revisiting Kant's critique. Perhaps this is *Rodowick's* ideal destination for the philosophy of art – a distinctly Kantian realm wherein something other than logic (such as?) determines what counts as rational thought (is this not concept stealing, or is there a way of conceiving of "rational thought" without relying on/stealing the concept of "logic"?) – but Cavell's ideal destination for the philosophy of art was a realm wherein the logic of aesthetic judgment was properly understood as rational and, indeed, objective. In his most sustained engagement with Kant's critique, Cavell starts by pointing out that, "catching the assumption that agreement provides the vindication of judgment, but no longer able to hope for either," Kant proceeded in his critique as if aesthetic arguments "lack something" in light of the fact that "the arguments that support them are not conclusive the way arguments in logic are nor rational the way arguments in science are." Indeed, he goes on to aver, "they are not, [for] if they were, there would be no such subject as art."

Having said this, the key point that Cavell makes is that, just because there are different argumentative protocols in artful conversation and just because those protocols extend beyond the

realm of science, "it does not follow, however, that [artful conversations] are not conclusive and rational" (Cavell 1965: 88). To support his argument, Cavell explicitly takes up the question of how and where concepts of logic and rationality are applicable in artful conversations. He contends that "those of us who keep finding ourselves wanting to call [differences in aesthetic judgments] 'logical' are, I think, responding to a sense of necessity we feel in them, together with a sense that necessity is, partly, a matter of the *ways* a judgment is supported." Additionally, he maintains that "it is only by virtue of these recurrent patterns of support that [an aesthetic judgment] will count" as logical, for, as he persuasively contends, being able to support an aesthetic judgment with reasons "is essential to making an aesthetic judgment" in the first place (Cavell 1965: 93).

By contrast, he argues that scholars like Rodowick "who refuse the term 'logic'" are responding to a sense "that 'logic' is a matter of arriving at conviction in such a way that anyone who can follow the argument must, unless he finds something definitely wrong with it, *accept the conclusion*, agree with it" (Cavell 1965: 94).[156] They are responding, in other words, to the sense that if aesthetic judgments are objective then it is possible for an aesthetic judgment to be *wrong* – or, to put it more accurately (if more affrontingly) so as to explain the hostility shown towards this position, it is possible for *a scholar making an aesthetic judgment* to be wrong. And, to a certain scholarly sensibility, that is unacceptable.[157] Throughout his (ostensibly Cavellian) articulation of the concept of artful conversation, Rodowick is obviously uncomfortable with and hence avoids taking the (properly Cavellian) step from arguing that "encounters with art and the artful conversations [artworks] inspire may lead to perfectionist moments of self-education in which I grant myself the possibility of change … or undergo transformation" (Rodowick 2015: 263) to arguing that, in an artful conversation, an individual has the potential to educate another individual and inspire him to change or undergo a transformation. In other words, so long as

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[156] Then again, as Charles Sanders Peirce once noted, "whether, when the premises are accepted by the mind, we feel an impulse to accept the conclusion also" is an issue neither of fact nor of knowledge – for "the true conclusion would remain true if we had no impulse to accept it" – but of *belief* (Peirce 1877: 1011). To this end, Peirce understood the impulse to "dismiss reason" in the interest of clinging to a particular belief or belief system – for example, with reference to religious people, "if it be true that death is annihilation then the man who believes that he will certainly go straight to heaven when he dies" enables himself, having dismissed reason, to enjoy a "cheap pleasure" – even if "we know how it must turn out at last" (Peirce 1877: 1018).

[157] As Thomas Hobbes observed in his *Leviathan*: "Such is the nature of men that howsoever they may acknowledge many others to be more witty [sic] or more eloquent … they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves" (Hobbes [1651] 1996: 87).

scholars are educating themselves, everything is fine, but to even suggest, much less to explicitly argue, that all scholars do not already know everything that there is to know about everyone and everything is to allegedly commit the heinous academic crimes of moralism and dogmatism.

Moralism is a particularly irritating academic buzzword that serves most often as a smoke screen meant to afford scholars a "safe space" in which they may do and say anything they wish without having to worry about being held accountable much less being proven wrong. Cavell once lamented the "amnesia of the fact, or a wish to be free of the fact, that we have claims upon one another, count for one another, matter to one another" suffered by most philosophers of art, and he contrasted with this amnesia/apprehensiveness his conception of moral perfectionism, which he hoped would foreground "the demand to make ourselves, and to become, intelligible to one another." Moralism only results if, upon entering into an artful conversation with another individual, one expects/demands their interlocutor to change without allowing for the possibility of having to change *one's own* mind or reconsider *one's own* judgments (which, ironically, is the bullying tactic of choice for those who most frequently and most forcefully level charges of moralism).[158] As Cavell formulated it, "confronting another morally risks one's identity; otherwise one risks moralism" (Cavell 2000b: 339).[159]

It should now be clear that to characterize Cavell's aim in revisiting Kant's critique as an attempt on his part to eliminate logic from the aesthetic realm is to commit an egregious error. How was

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[158] Elaborating on this irony, Ben Shapiro contends that "buried beneath all of [this] supposed hatred for bullying is a passionate *love* for bullying – the use of power to force those who disagree to shut up, back down, or face crushing consequences [such as] loss of reputation [and] career destruction" (Shapiro 2013: 4).

[159] As for the charge of dogmatism, Cavell is equally eloquent: "The philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community … It may prove to be the case that I am wrong, that my conviction isolates me, from all others, from myself. That will not be the same as a discovery that I am dogmatic … [for] the wish and search for community is the wish and search for reason" (Cavell 1979: 20). Once again corroborating Cavell's claims, Peterson's conception of conversation similarly turns on the notion of accepting the risk of suffering a Jungian "ego death" (Peterson 2017q): "If you're having a good conversation ... [then] you're decomposing parts of yourself, your false presuppositions, you're letting them die and you're letting something new be born as an alternative. You're participating in this process of death and rebirth constantly when you're having a meaningful conversation. 'Oh, that was wrong, I'm going to let that die. That's a little painful, I was kind of attached to that concept, but I'll let it go, I'll let it burn off,' and a new part of you will emerge. And then another part dies and the new part emerges. That's this process of eternal death and rebirth" (Peterson 2017k; see also Peterson 2017g). In its perfectionist emphasis, Peterson's conception of conversation attests to the truth in Cavell's observation that "knowledge of the self as it is always takes place in the betrayal of the self as it was" and that the pain this process entails is the reason that the perfectionist path is "so rarely taken" (Cavell [1971] 1979: 160). For more on this dimension of perfectionism, see Barrowman (2019b, 2019c).

Rodowick led to such a misguided characterization of Cavell's efforts? Not unlike the way I argued that Derrida's confusion vis-à-vis Husserlian objectivity was ultimately attributable to Husserl's own confusion, I would argue that, given his unfortunate tendency to equivocate, the fault is ultimately with Cavell. I do not think that it is a coincidence that one of the key passages from Cavell for Rodowick is the following, in which the seed for the concept of artful conversation was originally planted:

> The philosopher appealing to [artful conversation] turns to [his interlocutor] not to convince him without proof but to get him to prove something, test something, against himself. He is saying: Look and find out whether you can see what I see, wish to say what I wish to say … [the] implication [being] that [an individual engaged in an artful conversation is] … powerless to *prove* [his aesthetic judgment] … All [he can do] … is to express, as fully as he can, his world, and attract our undivided attention to our own (Cavell 1965: 95-96).

On the basis primarily of his confused conception of "proof," this passage contradicts on several points Cavell's most impassioned arguments relating to epistemology (inasmuch as it acquiesces to the anti-Wittgensteinian notion of a private language), ethics (inasmuch as it acquiesces to moral relativism), and aesthetics (inasmuch as it acquiesces to aesthetic subjectivism).[160] Most pertinent to the present discussion is the fact that Cavell's contention that individuals are powerless to prove the validity of their aesthetic judgments – contradictory with respect to the rest of his aesthetic writings though it may be – relies for its persuasiveness on the same implicit premise that Socrates' question to Euthyphro relies on, viz. that there is no objective basis on which to ground an aesthetic (or, for that matter, an ethical) judgment. Trying to make the point that "confronting another morally risks one's identity" while at the same time trying to argue that individuals are powerless to prove their judgments after having so confronted another is utter nonsense. On my reading, this is an example of even Cavell's susceptibility to skepticism and, more specifically, to the fear that motivates acquiescence to aesthetic subjectivism.

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[160] The source of this contradiction warrants investigation, as do the consequences of Cavell's tendency to equivocate generally, but such an investigation is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, for a trenchant critique in this vein of what he refers to as Cavell's problematic penchant for "esotericism," see Bruce Krajewski (2016).

This point of contradiction in Cavell's *oeuvre* has interestingly brought the discussion back to the related issues of risk and fear in criticism. I have previously argued that there is *epistemological* risk in the formulation of interpretations of artworks and that scholars have concocted all sorts of nonsensical philosophical tracts on the impossibility of objective interpretation in response to their fear of this risk. In a similar vein, I will argue that there is also *ethical* risk in the formulation of evaluations of artworks and that it is in response to an even greater fear that scholars automatically assume the impossibility of objective evaluation. Before mounting this argument, it will be useful to recall my proposed Objectivist model of aesthetic judgment, which I outlined in the Introduction as follows: I *like* (or *dislike*) an artwork; I must discover the *reason(s)*. From this, I argued that the steps that a critic takes in coming to terms with the initial emotional response provoked by a given artwork are as follows: First, the critic *interprets* the artwork towards the goal of understanding what it is, how it works, and whether or not it succeeds on the terms established by the artist; second, the critic *evaluates* the artwork towards the goal of articulating why he likes it (or does not like it), i.e. articulating what it is about the artwork (if anything) that he *values* and why.

As if criticism was not scary enough, in the event that a given artwork has been interpreted correctly – which is to say, in the event that the epistemological risk braved in the formulation of an interpretation has paid off – the next step (viz. evaluation) comes with not just more, but even greater, risk. According to Rand, when one pronounces judgment on a given artwork (likewise when one creates an artwork), one puts oneself, one's very soul, on the line. As Rand once poignantly put it in a discussion of literary criticism: "An artist reveals his naked soul in his work – and so, gentle reader, do you when you respond to it" (Rand [1969] 1975: 34). Cavell's realization of this fact inherent in artful conversation takes the following form:

> Whatever the difficulties will be in trying to characterize this procedure fully and clearly, this much can be said at once: If we find we disagree [in our respective aesthetic judgments, then] … what we should do is either (a) try to determine why we disagree (perhaps we are [interpreting] the [artwork] differently) – just as, if we agree in response, we will, when we start philosophizing about this fact, want to know why we agree, what it shows about our concepts; or (b) we will, if the disagreement cannot be explained, [try to] find some explanation for *that* … Disagreement is not disconfirming: It is as much a datum for philosophizing as agreement is. At this stage philosophizing has, hopefully, not yet begun (Cavell 1965: 95).

In the previous section, I mentioned that the phenomenon of disagreement vis-à-vis aesthetic judgments is often adduced as evidence of the impossibility of objective evaluation. Carroll observes that "the consideration often adduced is that our evaluations of works of art … are supposedly wildly divergent and obdurate" and that the conclusion scholars often reach (or, more accurately in my estimation, often start from) is that, "strong as they may be, [aesthetic judgments] are not reasoned" (Carroll 2009: 34). Taking the baton from Carroll on this front, I intend to demonstrate in what remains of this section that the preponderance of divergent/obdurate aesthetic judgments speaks not to the ontological impossibility of objectivity in aesthetics but rather to the preponderance of epistemologically/ethically dubious aesthetic judgments formulated with the ontological impossibility of objectivity as a tacit (illicit) presupposition. To do so, I will work through two exemplary artful conversations. My primary example will be an artful conversation between Robin Wood and V.F. Perkins, while my secondary example will be a prior artful conversation between Wood and Alan Lovell.

Around the time of these artful conversations, Wood and Perkins were often linked for their shared commitment to close analyses of films and their shared belief that the question of value is, indeed, as Cavell put it, the heart of the aesthetic matter. However, Wood confessed that, despite his overall agreement with Perkins' arguments with respect to film theory and film criticism, he nevertheless found that he would often "disagree with [Perkins] over details of evaluation" (Wood 1976: 30). In trying to "pinpoint the sources of [his] dissatisfaction" (Wood 1976: 30-31) – specifically with reference to Perkins' considerations of certain dramatic effects used by Nicholas Ray and Michelangelo Antonioni in *Bigger than Life* (1956) and *Red Desert* (1964) respectively (Perkins 1972: 84-86) – Wood admitted that "the precise evaluative status of many of Perkins's examples [was for him] rather difficult to determine" (Wood 1976: 32). This uncertainty prompted Wood to postulate that what was motivating Perkins' responses to these film(makers)s – and, equally, what was motivating Wood's own oppositional responses, as well as, by implication, what motivates any individual viewer's response to any individual film(maker) – was something subjective and thus not "textually demonstrable" (Wood 1976: 32).[161]

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[161] The question of how to objectively compare different film(maker)s, while of crucial importance to understanding the objective foundation of aesthetic judgments, is regrettably beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I will only focus in what follows on the questions of, first, whether or not judgments of value pronounced on individual films can be made objectively, and, second, whether or not disagreements in judgments of value pertaining to individual films

The critique that Wood fashioned from this postulation, though neither accurate nor convincing, is nevertheless instructive. In order to grasp the terms and the stakes of this artful conversation, I want to explore a particular moment in Perkins' consideration of *Bigger than Life* that Wood singles out and the counterargument by which he seeks to invalidate it:

> As [the protagonist of *Bigger than Life*] walks away from the school building, with its background of respectable greys and browns, the image dissolves into a general view of the cab-park photographed so that the screen is virtually covered with the garish yellow of the taxi-ranks. The transition thus handled gains an emotional coloring which conveys not only the physical strain under which the man lives but also his *déclassé* feeling of shame in his secondary occupation (Perkins 1972: 84-85).

> This complex significance seems to depend almost exclusively on our responding to the yellow cabs as "garish." Substitute "bright and cheerful" and the significance vanishes, the transition then conveying (perhaps) a sense of release that is soon to be ironically contradicted, but no "physical strain," let alone a "*déclassé* feeling of shame" (Wood 1976: 33).

What is of interest here is the way that Wood's point in his artful conversation with Perkins contradicts a point that he had made previously in an artful conversation with Alan Lovell in the pages of *Screen*. In that earlier artful conversation, which involved, among other issues, a quarrel over Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), Lovell objected to Wood there in the same manner as Wood is objecting to Perkins here.

> Mr. Lovell quotes me at some length on *North by Northwest* and remarks: "I see no evidence in the film that Hitchcock invites us to make such a judgement of [Cary Grant's character Roger O. Thornhill]," (i.e. that he is "immature" and "his life a chaos"), "and Wood quotes none." Hitchcock presents a man who has got through two marriages, his attitude to which is extremely casual; who, in early middle age, is still dominated by his mother; who drinks heavily; who shows no attachment to other people (mother partly excepted) and *uses* them very irresponsibly. This, I think, establishes him as immature. Are "beliefs and values" so uncertain that there is really no agreement as to what constitutes immaturity? The movement of the film as a whole carries Thornhill (whose initials are

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can be resolved objectively. For further considerations of the issues surrounding the possibility of objectively pitting film(maker)s against one another, see Carroll (2008: 218-223; 2009: 35-37, 191-196).

R.O.T. – "O for nothing," as he says) to the point where he is willing to risk his own life to save a woman and preserve his relationship with her. His success in doing these things is presented, I think, as a happy, rather than tragic, outcome. This, for me, is "evidence" (Wood 1969: 38-39).

At the center of both of these disputes, between Lovell and Wood and between Wood and Perkins, is a dispute over (what counts as/the correct interpretation of) "evidence." To Wood's mind (and rightly so), for an evaluation to be valid, the interpretation of the film on which it is based must also be valid.[162] Wood judges Grant's character in *North by Northwest* to be immature, and he believes that this characterization was intentional on Hitchcock's part for the sake of the character arc over the course of the ensuing narrative. Confronted with the evidence provided by Wood, Lovell expressed dismay at Wood's arrogance and presumptuousness to have pronounced *any* moral judgment on Thornhill's character, let alone the "severe" judgment of immaturity (Lovell 1970: 82), and attempted to counter Wood's example of Thornhill cheating two women out of a taxi as an indication of his immaturity and obliviousness by alleging that it could just as easily be interpreted as indicating his "ability for quick improvisation (getting the taxi by inventing an excuse on the spur of the moment) and witty rationalization (his claim that he has made the people he cheated out of the taxi feel like Good Samaritans)" (Lovell 1970: 82).

Recalling David Kelley's conception of ethical argumentation, over the course of an artful conversation, one must be committed to "observing *how* a person thinks," to "attending to his reasoning rather than his conclusions in isolation" (Kelley [1990] 2000: 56). Above and beyond simply refuting Lovell's counterargument, it is important to refute the position from which he mounted the counterargument. After his (in his mind successful) attempt to checkmate Wood, Lovell confessed that, where Wood felt invited by Hitchcock to pronounce a negative moral judgment on Grant's character, he did not feel invited to make any such judgment (Lovell 1970: 82). Having previously betrayed his Platonic presuppositions in his admitted confusion as to why Wood puts such stress on the "moral qualities" of films, filmmakers, and scholars in the first place, to say nothing of what he thinks "gives him the right to judge" anything or anyone at all (Lovell

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[162] As he expressed himself in his artful conversation with Lovell: "One writes every time a sort of personal testament out of one's sense of vital contact with a director's work, one's sympathy and recoil: This is what these films mean to *me*. At the same time, one tries to respond to the films *as they are*, avoiding temptations to produce one's own versions" (Wood 1969: 44-45).

1970: 77), Lovell's desire – full of contradictions to the point of being self-refuting, not to mention, as evidenced by the plethora of severe negative judgments that he pronounced on Wood over the course of their artful conversation, hypocritical and dishonest – to "shift the emphasis from *the critic* to *criticism*, from personal qualities to impersonal ones, from moral qualities to intellectual ones" (Lovell 1970: 77) makes it painfully obvious as to why he failed to recognize Hitchcock's invitation to pronounce moral judgment: Because, in his mind, *no one* should *ever* make moral judgments of *any* kind for *any* reason. Thus, having blanketed Hitchcock's film with his own (a/im)moral agenda, is it any surprise that Lovell's interpretative and evaluative efforts never so much as touched the film?

The fact that Wood was on the right side of this dispute in his artful conversation with Lovell makes it all the more ironic to see him on the wrong side of this dispute in his artful conversation with Perkins. As an early (and, to my mind, still the most exemplary) herald of the kind of moral criticism for which I have been arguing in this thesis, Wood, to his eternal credit, rejected as patently ludicrous any such desire for the separation of "intelligence" and "morality," of morality and art, or of art and life as was expressed by Lovell.[163] However, Wood endlessly waffled on the issue of critical objectivity. In his debate with Lovell, he very clearly (and, as I indicated, correctly) asserted as objectively true the nature of Grant's character and the function of that character within Hitchcock's larger narrative. Yet, in his engagement with Perkins, he objects to Perkins' interpretation of the nature of James Mason's character and the function of that character within Ray's larger narrative by implying that Ray's reason for including the yellow cabs at that point in his film is not objectively knowable.

Wood's claim that the substitution of "bright and cheerful" for "garish" would invalidate Perkins' interpretation and subsequent evaluation of the taxi scene in *Bigger than Life* is equally as misguided (hence as vacuous) as Lovell's claim was that the substitution of "witty" for "immature" would invalidate Wood's interpretation and subsequent evaluation of the taxi scene in *North by*

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[163] In fact, Wood closed his response to Lovell by quoting a remark made by F.R. Leavis over the course of his (in)famous critique of C.P. Snow: "Criticism must begin and end with a sense of value, whatever comes in between. If the purpose of criticism is not a discussion of values, then I don't see what it is. To indicate briefly what I mean by 'values,' let me quote from … [Leavis'] answer to C. P. Snow: 'I don't believe in any "literary values," and you won't find me talking about them; the judgements the literary critic is concerned with are judgements about life'" (Wood 1969: 48; see also Leavis [1962] 2013).

Northwest.[164] Lovell's reasoning is the far more dangerous for its perversion of morality, but in both instances, the presupposition is that such meanings can be arbitrarily mixed and matched at will based on nothing more (and requiring nothing more, for there allegedly is nothing more) than critical whim.[165] On the contrary, it must be stated that Perkins' interpretation of the scene and his evaluation of Ray's skill in executing it is valid not because yellow is garish *as such*, nor because yellow cabs are garish *as such*, but because, *in this case*, based on the "textually demonstrable" evidence adduced and analyzed, the yellow cabs are being used by Ray, and used efficiently and eloquently, to conjure up garishness. Hence, Perkins' judgment of value was objective and correct.

Of course, the points on which the artful conversations between Wood and Perkins and Wood and Lovell turned were relatively minor points. All the same, the fact that I was able to produce two different cases in which disagreements over judgments of value were objectively resolved should contribute to the overall effect of this section to the end of dissolving a number of additional Kantian worries vis-à-vis objective evaluation, as well as providing a lever with which to open up a space for precisely these types of artful conversations in which the concept of objectivity is preserved rather than eliminated. If scholars are committed to engaging each other in passionate and perfectionist artful conversations, then, in Cavellian terms, disagreement should no longer be viewed as a "Do Not Enter" sign for the philosophy of art. On the contrary, disagreement should represent an opportunity for perfectionist viewers to cultivate their powers of reason, clarify their moral and aesthetic premises, and arrive at better understandings – of themselves, of each other, and of the artists and artworks under consideration.

In response to those scholars for whom none of what I have said has appeared to have so much as touched the questions that pertain to the problems and possibilities of objective evaluation, let alone to have provided answers or a playbook for how to go about always ensuring the objectivity

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[164] As Perkins himself noted, as if in response to Lovell and Wood: "A failure to discern quality is not a demonstration of its absence … If we fail to perceive functions and qualities, it may [simply] be because we are looking for them in inappropriate ways" (Perkins 1972: 190).

[165] To add a final bit of irony, the objection that I am raising here against Lovell and Wood was raised by Wood himself against Penelope Houston and her treatment of Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963): "'Why not try the birds as the Bomb; or as creatures from the subconscious; or start from the other end with Tippi Hedren as a witch?...' Why not, indeed? Go ahead, Miss Houston! '…One could work up a pretty theory on any of these lines…' (except that a minute's consideration of the film would be enough to show that one couldn't)" (Wood 1965: 60; cf. Houston 1963).

of one's evaluations, I am reminded of one of Perkins' most perspicacious observations. As if anticipating the objections to his work of scholars in the Kantian aesthetic tradition – viz. that his arguments for the possibility of objective evaluation do not provide a list of rules to determine how each judgment of value is to be made so as to be *a priori* correct in every instance – Perkins averred that "a theory of judgment cannot remove the necessity for judgment" (Perkins 1972: 193), which is to say that determining the objective validity of particular judgments of value can only be determined on a case-by-case basis.[166] Or, to put it another way, given that artful conversations demand every part of a person's constitution – reason *and* emotion, intellect *and* desire – each artful conversation is no better or worse than its participants.

To this point, I have been vociferously making the case that, before artful conversations can yield the greatest profit, the philosophy of art requires considerable philosophical overhaul. And I do, indeed, mean for my vociferation to take the form of a rebuke, for it is my sincere hope that inspiring scholars to check their premises will ensure that we are in the best possible position to overhaul the philosophy of art and thereby increase the profitability of our artful conversations. Cavell once remarked that, short of such an overhaul, we will not be able "to make our desires, hence our actions, intelligible (and to ourselves)"; that, instead, we will find ourselves "hampered in our demand and right to be found intelligible" as well as in our ambition "to ask residence in the shared realm of reason" (Cavell 2005a: 196-197). To reconceive artful conversation along these lines, as a mode of conversation on the basis of which each participant asks the other for residence in the shared realm of reason, is to bring artful conversation into an Objectivist realm wherein, as Rand framed the ideal exchange of ideas: "When I disagree with a rational man, I let reality be our final arbiter. If I am right, he will learn; if I am wrong, I will. One of us will win, but both will profit" (Rand 1957: 1023). This is the aesthetic Atlantis that awaits the discipline of film studies.

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[166] Similarly, Wittgenstein once expressed the following: "Can't it be described how we satisfy ourselves of [e.g. the validity of an aesthetic judgment]? Oh, yes! Yet, no rule emerges when we do so. But, the most important thing is: The rule is not needed. Nothing is lacking … [if we could only] forget this transcendent certainty" (Wittgenstein [1951] 1969: 8e; see also Sokal and Bricmont [1997] 1999: 49-95, esp. 56-58).

Conclusion – Approaching Atlantis

Observe the persistence, in mankind's mythologies, of the legend about a paradise that men had once possessed, the city of Atlantis or the Garden of Eden or some kingdom of perfection, always behind us. The root of that legend exists, not in the past of the race, but in the past of every man. You still retain a sense – not as firm as a memory, but diffused like the pain of hopeless longing – that somewhere in the starting years of your childhood, before you had learned to submit, to absorb the terror of unreason and to doubt the value of your mind, you had known a radiant state of existence, you had known the independence of a rational consciousness facing an open universe. *That* is the paradise which you have lost, which you seek – which is yours for the taking.

– Ayn Rand (1957: 1057-1058)

In 1996, David Bordwell and Noël Carroll famously declared that the discipline of film studies had entered the "post-Theory" age (Bordwell and Carroll 1996). This declaration was the culmination of two decades of intellectual combat within film studies centering on what was often referred to as "Grand Theory" (or, more pejoratively, "SLAB Theory," for Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, and Barthes [Bordwell 1989b]) and which Bordwell and Carroll defined as that "aggregate of doctrines derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, structuralist semiotics, poststructuralist literary theory, and variants of Althusserian Marxism" (Bordwell and Carroll 1996: xiii). Surveying the last two decades of film studies scholarship, it seems to be true that film studies is by and large post-Theory. And, with the current popularity of film-philosophy, most contemporary film scholars seem eager to chart new territory and to leave to the past the battles over Grand Theory. However, I think that it would be prudent to conclude my efforts in this thesis – so much of which has been geared towards clearing the philosophical path for the sake of those eager to chart new disciplinary territory – by issuing a word of warning. I think that it would behoove scholars to remember Carroll's insistence that, "however the demise of Theory came about," the fact that film studies had entered the post-Theory age did not mean that there were not still "major obstacles" in its path. In fact, Carroll warned that, "as long as these obstacles continue to grip the imaginations of scholars," it is "unlikely" that film studies will be able to escape the "legacies" of Grand Theory and truly thrive (Carroll 1996b: 38).

For as much as the philosophical sophistication of film studies has increased since Bordwell and Carroll inaugurated the age of post-Theory, I have had the sinking suspicion that this is precisely the disciplinary drama that is currently being played out. The legacies of Grand Theory still seem to have a firm grip on the imaginations of contemporary film scholars, as evidenced by the lasting influence of the paradigm subjectivity argument and the zombie-like persistence of poststructuralism. Carroll once remarked (indicating his preference for "robust pluralism" as opposed to "coexistence pluralism" [Carroll 1996b: 62-67]) that, in the history of the still comparatively young and immature field of film studies, orientations and methodologies have been embraced and disavowed (with a randomness that I think is more befitting the world of fashion), yet, amidst this flurry of scholarly activity, "what may be of use and what is plainly wrong has not been sorted out properly" (Carroll 1996a: 291).

On this point, regarding the necessity to properly sort out what may be of use and what is plainly wrong, I think that it is safe to say that film studies has its work cut out. I think that there is an untold number of conversations that need to be started/resumed in film studies. And some conversations will invariably be politer than others. Some conversations may be downright polemical. But I do not think that scholars should shy away from future battles in the spirit of the old "Theory Wars." After all, as Cavell once quipped: "Lines are to be drawn, or what's a conversation for?" (Cavell 1981a: 227; see also Barrowman 2018c). For my part, I have in recent years been striving to clarify the stakes of the present disciplinary situation for film studies, identify persistent problem areas, and offer potential solutions (see Barrowman 2012a, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2015, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a). Having done that, I have more recently focused my attention on the flip side to that disciplinary coin and have been striving to identify alternative routes open for the future of film studies (see Barrowman 2018a, 2018c, 2019a). In particular, I have been keen to find a place for Objectivism in the contemporary film studies landscape with respect to current disciplinary activity. It is my hope that this thesis has served as an important first step in that direction.

In the Introduction, I began by explicating the major ideas, terms, and arguments that constituted Objectivism for Rand as she was developing and articulating her philosophy. From her metaphysical axiom of the primacy of existence (as opposed to the dominant axiom of modern

philosophy, which she termed the primacy of consciousness), to her epistemological clarifications regarding concept formation and her critique of the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy for its distortion of objectivity, to her ethical reconceptualization of the virtue of selfishness and the sovereignty of the individual over and against altruism, to her political championing of capitalism and individualism over and against socialism and collectivism, to her aesthetic musings on artistic production and reception and the means by which artists create artworks and critics analyze artworks, I worked my way through the major premises of Objectivism explicating, clarifying, and, where necessary, challenging them for the purpose of establishing the context for an Objectivist intervention into the philosophy of art generally and the discipline of film studies specifically.

From there, I moved on in Chapter 1 to bring the analytical tools provided by Objectivism to bear on the philosophical school of poststructuralism. With reference to Rand's critiques of the logical fallacies of concept stealing, package dealing, and context dropping as well as her moral critiques of hedonism, nihilism, and subjectivism, I critiqued the work of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida and demonstrated the extent to which their work relied on such fallacies and denounced the moral presuppositions which subtends them. I then considered the work of Peter Wollen, who was responsible for providing the then-nascent discipline of film studies with a poststructuralist foundation, and I explored the extent to which his work suffered from the same epistemological and ethical errors as the work of Barthes and Derrida and lamented the consequences of his incorporation into film studies of poststructuralism.

Finally, in the hopes of ridding film studies of the specious specters of Barthes and Derrida and charting a fruitful path for the future of film studies away from poststructuralism, I considered myriad alternative options with reference to tenets of the Objectivist aesthetics. First, in the realm of film interpretation, I clarified the terms of the intentionalist philosophy of art presupposed by the Objectivist aesthetics and in the process dissolved a number of additional philosophical worries in relation to authorship in film, focusing in particular on refuting the Kantian sense of artworks as being purposive without purpose. Second, in the realm of film evaluation, I clarified the sense in which aesthetic judgments are judgments of value, not judgments of taste, and, on the basis of a reconceptualization of D.N. Rodowick's conception of artful conversation, I challenged the

Kantian premise that an objective aesthetic judgment is a contradiction in terms and explained the means by which scholars can pursue objectivity in criticism.

If this has been the first step in the direction of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema, the most obvious question to consider here in the Conclusion is: What is the next step? In the previous chapter, I claimed that contemporary film scholars had in recent years been showing signs of a desire to (re)turn to the question of value. It is my contention that this (re)turn is the perfect entryway into film studies for Objectivism. This (re)turn to value has two component parts, a *quality* component and a *function* component, both of which would benefit from ideas and arguments prevalent in Objectivism. The quality component is best exemplified by the *MOVIE* tradition of "close reading" (Cameron 1972), which has reemerged as a fertile disciplinary activity courtesy of scholars affiliated with the *MOVIE* journal such as Douglas Pye, John Gibbs, Andrew Klevan, Alex Clayton, and James MacDowell. In addition to the *MOVIE* journal itself – which, in recent years, has emphasized the centrality of intention in filmmaking and the importance of evaluation in criticism by publishing work on "choices" in films[167] – the work of the aforementioned scholars has done much to draw attention (back) to the work not merely of understanding what filmmakers are doing and why but of judging whether what filmmakers are doing is good or bad and why. On this front, one of the most important examples is Clayton and Klevan's 2011 anthology *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*. In addition to featuring important contributions from some of the most influential contemporary film scholars, Clayton and Klevan also provide with their anthology a provocative argument for a mode of critical engagement with the cinema that is in step with the Objectivist aesthetics – an argument which even calls for and requires an Objectivist anchor.

As the very first sentence of their introduction makes clear, film criticism as characterized by Clayton and Klevan is "a form of writing which addresses films as potential achievements and wishes to convey their distinctiveness and quality (or lack of it)" (Clayton and Klevan 2011b: 1).

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[167] For examples of such work on filmmakers' choices – importantly inspired by V.F. Perkins' emphasis on "moments of choice" (Perkins 1981) – see, among the many possible examples, *MOVIE* 7 (2017), which features an entire section on "Opening Choices" in which the contributors devote their attention to the opening scenes of films from *Rio Bravo* (1952) and *Bunny Lake is Missing* (1965) to *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012).

This is the quality component of the value turn in a nutshell. As Clayton and Klevan rightly observe – in line with my observations in the previous chapter vis-à-vis the jettisoning of value from the institution of film studies – "most academic writing aims for a prose that is neutral" and most academics are "suspicious of personal involvement with films and apprehensive of value judgments, except for ideological critique (for instance, where a film is implied to be 'transgressive' in some way, or its representation of a social group 'positive')" (Clayton and Klevan 2011b: 2); as they expound:

> It is felt, perhaps, that serious academic analysis should differentiate itself from the evaluative reactions of the ordinary film viewer – 'he's really good in this', 'this is definitely her best film' … For the most part, films are used illustratively (valued primarily for their usefulness) rather than engaged with critically (valued for their achievements). Despite this, much film writing, of whatever hue, in its choice of films and examples, and in its assumptions, either contains remnants of film criticism, or is haunted by its absence (Clayton and Klevan 2011b: 2).

The significance of this argument is manifold. First, it connects up with the observation made by Peter Wollen which I quoted to close Chapter 1 with respect to "ordinary" aesthetics and his postulation that scholars "shouldn't try to insulate themselves" from such ordinary aesthetic discourses, since, "after all, our natural response after seeing a film at the cinema is to talk about whether it was good or bad" (Wollen 1997: 245).[168] Second, it unites interpretation and evaluation within an intentionalist philosophy of film, for the notion of a particular film being, in whole or in part, either an achievement or a failure presupposes (the ability to acquire) knowledge of what that particular film was intended to achieve.[169] Third, and most importantly, it calls out scholars on their hypocrisy and disingenuousness in light of the fact that, as Andrew Britton similarly argued,

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[168] As Clayton and Klevan themselves elaborate: "Evaluation is not simply something one might do, something optional; it is intrinsic to the viewing experience. This is how the text makes sense to us: *what it means to us*. Viewers feel a work to be deft, tender, or delicate, or perhaps condescending, smug, or arch, as much as they feel for characters or their situations (indeed, whether the fiction affects them or communicates to them at all will depend on the quality of the expression)" (Clayton and Klevan 2011b: 5).

[169] As Clayton and Klevan themselves elaborate: "One might argue that most, if not all, films are made to be good and this objective is an integral part of their presentation and address. For film criticism, the tension between a film's aspiration or potential and its actual achievement is as palpable to a viewer as that generated by plot or character or composition. The viewer monitors the success with which the film handles its elements; and this is not of supplementary interest, but of pressing importance every step of the way. It affects the moment-by-moment viewing of the film" (Clayton and Klevan 2011b: 5).

critical inquiry "is already implicitly evaluative"; there is no such thing as an "impartial discourse" and scholars "should be aware of this fact and should write accordingly," for "if readers do not know where the critic stands in relation to the work, they have no means of defining or assessing the critic's judgments – which may, of course, be found seriously to misrepresent the work" (Britton 1986: 435).[170]

From this point, Clayton and Klevan make an argument that is very similar to my argument in this thesis against what I have termed, following Rand, the intrinsic/subjective dichotomy. Unfortunately, Clayton and Klevan refer to it as the "subjective-objective" dichotomy, and, while they usefully clarify the sense in which criticism can be said to be "subjective," they leave "objective" to get crushed under the bus. This is the point where their argument requires an Objectivist anchor. As they argue, "faced with suspicion of the 'subjective' in criticism, [the key] is to point out that subjectivity is not an asocial, nebulous entity turned in on its own haphazard feelings, but is already related to the world, shaped by it and participating within it" (Clayton and Klevan 2011b: 4). As I have argued repeatedly throughout this thesis, this is the very definition of the objective; to recall Rand's critique of the false intrinsic/subjective dichotomy, intrinsicism alleges that there are "'universals' inherent in things … [which are] perceived by man directly, like any other kind of concrete existent, but perceived by some non-sensory or extra-sensory means," while subjectivism alleges that, far from any "things" with any inherent "essences," there are "mere 'names' or notions arbitrarily assigned to arbitrary groupings of concretes on the ground of vague, inexplicable resemblances … unrelated to the facts of reality" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 53). Objectivism, by contrast, maintains that concepts are "neither revealed nor invented"; rather, they are "mental integrations of factual data," or "products of a cognitive method of classification whose processes must be performed by man but whose content is dictated by reality" (Rand [1966-1967] 1990: 54). Applied to film criticism, intrinsicism would allege that the meaning and the value of films are inherent in the films and are (somehow via some non-sensory or extra-sensory process) "revealed" to scholars, while subjectivism would allege that the meaning and the value of films are arbitrarily "constructed" by scholars unrelated to the particular films to which

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[170] As Clayton and Klevan themselves elaborate, such a consciously (self-)critical (i.e., such an *objective* and *introspective*) mode of engagement with film is "essential for the understanding and appreciation of [the] art form. Without it we are far more isolated and insecure in our individual tastes and deprived of the encouragements of others to grasp works in ways we would not have foreseen" (Clayton and Klevan 2011b: 24).

meanings and values are arbitrarily assigned. Objectivism, by contrast, would – and does – allege that the meaning and the value of films are determined by individuals on the basis of the "factual data" provided by the films.

Clayton and Klevan are both rightly opposed to this false dichotomy. However, they conflate "intrinsic" and "objective," pit them both against "subjective," and reconceptualize "subjective" to mean "objective." Given this terminological confusion, it would be unfair to be too harsh on Warren Buckland, who took issue with *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* and charged Clayton and Klevan with, among other things, "slid[ing] towards a solipsistic form of film criticism" (Buckland 2012: 288-289). Granted, Buckland's operating procedure in his critique – charging an entire book made up of contributions from myriad scholars with sliding towards solipsism and alleging that the book as a whole was "let down by the editors" (Buckland 2012: 289) yet barely even acknowledging the ideas and arguments presented by the editors in their extensive joint introduction – is odd and misleading to say the least, but the impetus to his critique is understandable. And, as I have indicated, Objectivism can provide the necessary shoring-up of the concept of objectivity with respect to critical practice, thereby avoiding the confusion of Clayton and Klevan's argument and refuting the charges in Buckland's critique. Added to which, the emphasis on conceptual clarification and introspection, which, as I have discussed at length throughout this thesis, are crucial in Objectivism, can aid in equipping and preparing contemporary film scholars to appraise the qualities of films and to assess and elucidate how and why they do or do not work. If this is the goal of film criticism as well as the objective of the Objectivist aesthetics, then why not pursue the possibilities of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema?[171]

In addition to the quality component as discussed above, there is also, as I mentioned, a function component. The function component is best exemplified by the work of contemporary scholars in

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[171] This question takes as its reference point the closing question of Clayton and Klevan's introduction: "As academics, teachers, students, journalists – writers – we are relatively ill equipped and unprepared to appraise the qualities of a film or to assess and elucidate whether and why we think it works. What language should we use?" (Clayton and Klevan 2011b: 24). Sadly, film scholars are ill equipped and unprepared because there is not a long disciplinary history of conversations involving such questions. Save for a couple of film scholars here and there (e.g. Jarvie 1961, 1987; Perkins 1972; Carroll 2009), there is a disconcerting dearth of considerations of how scholars should equip and prepare themselves to objectively appraise the qualities of films. Interestingly, recent efforts in the related discipline of television studies have focused considerable attention on such considerations and are worth exploration (see, among others, McKee 2001, Jacobs 2001, Geraghty 2003, Butler 2009, Hills 2011, Mittell 2015, Nannicelli 2016).

the new tradition of film-philosophy. Closely related to traditional inquiries in philosophical ethics, that which is investigated by scholars interested in function rather than quality is less about whether or not a particular film is good (in the sense of well-made) and more about "the good of film." In his canonical *Theory of Film*, Siegfried Kracauer considered the question "What is the good of film experience?" to be "the most central of all," the issue which it is "possible and indeed necessary to come to grips with" (Kracauer [1960] 1997: 285). Nearly half a century later, Cavell took up this central question and gave it a perfectionist twist (Cavell 2000b). More recently, scholars such as William Rothman, D.N. Rodowick, and Robert Sinnerbrink have pushed film studies further along this track in their investigations of the good of film, and Rothman and Rodowick's emphasis on perfectionism (see Rothman 2014 and Rodowick 2015) and Sinnerbrink's emphasis on romanticism (see Sinnerbrink 2011b, 2012, 2013) provide unique and fruitful entryways for Objectivism into current discussions in film studies.

More often than not, when Rand concerned herself with aesthetic matters, she limited her focus to the world that she knew best, that meant the most to her, and of which she was a member, i.e. the world of literature. On occasion, though, she did consider alternative media, including film. As she saw it, film, by its very nature, was "suited exclusively to romanticism"; however, she believed that the emergence of film as an art form "came too late: The great day of romanticism was gone, and only its sunset rays reached a few exceptional movies" (Rand [1969] 1975: 104). Interestingly, while Rand's "romantic manifesto" offers a cohesive reconceptualization of romanticism whereas Sinnerbrink largely accepts uncritically the tenets of late-18th/early-19th Century German Romanticism, the extent of Sinnerbrink's engagement with film as a romantic art form reveals Rand's eulogy to have been premature. Deeper probing of these points of concordance and discordance between Rand and contemporary film scholars with respect to romanticism and film-philosophy promise myriad insights regarding, as well as challenges to, prevailing assumptions about cinematic romanticism.

Rothman and Rodowick, meanwhile, amplify arguments about conceiving of films as, in the Wittgensteinian register in which Cavell frequently wrote, "scenes of instruction" (Cavell 2000a: 320). Not only does this conception of film unite the Cavellian strands of perfectionism and romanticism that have come to prominence in recent film-philosophy efforts, it also speaks to the

possibilities of the Objectivist aesthetics vis-à-vis what I discussed in the previous chapter under the heading of aesthetic perfectionism. In the previous chapter, in the course of specifying the terms of what I conceived of as aesthetic perfectionism, I defined a perfectionist artist as an individual who has shaped his sense of life into an explicit and conscious philosophy of life and in whose work that philosophy is clearly manifest as the driving force of his art. However, in explicating the Objectivist ethics in the Introduction, I made the point that, while a baseline value for continued existence is a prerequisite for humanity, it is not the height to which a human can, or should, aspire. In a similar vein, while the possession and articulation of an explicit and conscious philosophy of life is a prerequisite for artistic perfectionism, it is not the height to which a perfectionist artist can, or should, aspire. For Rand, the height of aesthetic perfectionism necessarily brings one into the realm of romanticism, for it is only in romantic art that artists can offer "the emotional experience of *looking up* to a hero – a view of life motivated and dominated by values" (Rand [1969] 1975: 140).

The importance of having such aesthetic experiences in childhood cannot be overstated. Nor should it be overlooked that, given the lack of sophistication in the intellectual and moral frameworks of children, "what romantic art offers [children] is *not* moral rules, not an explicit didactic message, but the image of a moral *person* – i.e. the *concretized abstraction* of a moral ideal"; romantic art "offers a concrete, directly perceivable answer to the very abstract question which a child senses but cannot yet conceptualize: What kind of person is moral and what kind of life does he lead?" (Rand [1969] 1975: 139-140). It is in this sense that perfectionist artists "are *moralists* in the most profound sense of the word: Their concern is not merely with values, but specifically with *moral* values and with the power of moral values in shaping human character" (Rand [1969] 1975: 99). In Rand's estimation, there is for perfectionist artists an inextricable link between ethics and aesthetics; in what I have characterized in this thesis as an Aesthetics of Life, ethics represents "the engineering that provides the principles and blueprints" to a moral life while "art creates the final product. It builds the model" (Rand [1969] 1975: 163). As she elaborates:

> The motive and purpose of my [fiction] is *the projection of an ideal man*. The portrayal of a moral ideal, as my ultimate literary goal, as an end in itself – to which any didactic, intellectual, or philosophical values contained in a novel are only the means. Let me stress this: My purpose is *not*

the philosophical enlightenment of my readers, it is *not* the beneficial influence which my novels may have on people, it is *not* the fact that my novels may help a reader's intellectual development. All these matters are important, but they are secondary considerations, they are merely consequences and effects, not first causes or prime movers … Art does not *teach* – it shows, it displays the full, concretized reality of the final goal … Teaching is not the purpose of an artwork any more than it is the purpose of an airplane. Just as one can learn a great deal from an airplane by studying it or taking it apart, so one can learn a great deal from an artwork – about the nature of man, of his soul, of his existence. But these are merely fringe benefits. The primary purpose of an airplane is not to *teach* man how to fly but to give him the actual experience of flying. So is the primary purpose of an artwork (Rand [1969] 1975: 155, 163).

Given her love of literature and her stake in literature as a novelist, Rand may have bridled at this, but Rothman teases out the implication of Rand's emphasis on the intrinsic visual power of film vis-à-vis its suitedness to romanticism and asks, "if novels can teach … then how much better equipped to do so are films"? As Rothman argues, novels can *describe* perfectionist heroes – and none have done so more famously or explicitly than Rand's – but they cannot *show* them; "a novel can assert that a character is a hero … but when in *North by Northwest* Hitchcock's camera 'shines a lantern' on Cary Grant's face at the moment of his moral awakening, we see, and know, that this man *is* such a hero" (Rothman 2014: 284).[172] In a similar vein, Rodowick conceives of films (in step with Rand) not as opportunities for the dissemination of didactic messages, but rather, as opportunities for the assembling of reminders. As Rodowick usefully explains, assembling reminders à la Wittgenstein demonstrates a prudential wisdom with respect to perfectionism:

[Given] a certain philosophical absentmindedness that in every one of us provokes misfires of reason … [such as] to have overlooked, to be unaware, to be subject to misdirected "perceptions" or perspectives, to look in the wrong place, to be distracted, to have insufficiently accounted for conceptual connections, to have insufficiently valued or valued for the wrong reasons, to have insufficiently accounted for what one values, to have insufficiently thought through consequences,

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[172] To corroborate this argument, I offer the observation (in the spirit of the notion that "a picture is worth a thousand words") that, over and above the extraordinarily brilliant and insightful passages and pages written by Rand in her novel *The Fountainhead*, nothing in it is nearly as effective/affective in projecting her hero, Howard Roark, as the shot in King Vidor's film adaptation of *The Fountainhead* of Gary Cooper as Roark – following a cut on a line from Patricia Neal's character Dominique Francon to the effect that Roark "doesn't stand a chance" of successfully bringing his artistic/philosophical vision into the world – seated serenely, legs outstretched, dismissing as not even the measliest threat the portended apocalypse (cf. Rand [1943] 2007: 263-280, esp. 278).

to misunderstand or be misunderstood, to be confused or distracted, to have misapplied context or not found the right context for interpretation … [assembling reminders] is something like the making of [cognitive] maps … reminding us of expected and unexpected pathways of meaning, keeping us going in the right direction and avoiding navigational mishaps, and reminding us not to stray too far from an intended route (Rodowick 2015: 60-61).[173]

Of course, as is always the case in the realm of perfectionism, there is nothing automatic in this relationship between the perfectionist viewer and the perfectionist artist nor are there any "imperatives" or "commandments" according to which one *must* be a perfectionist viewer, *must* seek instruction from perfectionist art, *must* set out on a perfectionist journey at all. As Rand herself acknowledged:

A given individual may choose to move forward, to translate the meaning of [his experience of a perfectionist artwork] into the actual course of his own life; or he may fail to live up to it and spend the rest of his life betraying it. But whatever the case may be, the artwork remains intact, an entity complete in itself, an achieved, realized, immovable fact of reality – like a beacon raised over the dark crossroads of the world, saying: "*This* is possible" (Rand [1969] 1975: 163-164).

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[173] As for what can happen when, in the absence of such reminders, one strays from or is knocked off of one's intended route, both Emerson and Rand have lamented the potentially fatal consequences. After explaining that the timeless and universal interest in romantic stories featuring heroic protagonists comes from the realization that "all [of the hero's] great and transcendent properties are *ours*" – that, "if we dilate in beholding the Greek energy, the Roman pride, it is [because] we are already domesticating the same sentiment" – and encouraging people to "find room for this great guest in our small houses" (Emerson 1841c: 256, my emphasis), Emerson laments: "We have seen or heard of many extraordinary young men who never ripened, or whose performance in actual life was not extraordinary. When we see their air and mien, when we hear them speak of society, of books, of religion, we admire their superiority; they seem to throw contempt on our entire polity and social state. Theirs is the tone of a youthful giant who is sent to work revolutions. But they enter an active profession and the forming Colossus shrinks to the common size of man. The magic they used was the ideal tendencies, which always make the Actual ridiculous; but the tough world had its revenge the moment they put their horses of the sun to plough in its furrow. They found no example and no companion, and their heart fainted" (Emerson 1841c: 257). For her part, Rand illustrates the context in which one's heart may be made to faint: "It is easy to convince a child, and particularly an adolescent, that his desire to emulate Buck Rogers is ridiculous. He knows it isn't exactly Buck Rogers he has in mind, and yet, simultaneously, it *is* – he feels caught in an inner contradiction – and this confirms his desolately embarrassing feeling that he is being ridiculous. Thus, the adults – whose foremost moral obligation toward a child, at this stage of his development, is to help him understand that what he loves is an abstraction, to help him break through into the *conceptual* realm – accomplish the exact opposite. They stunt his conceptual capacity, they cripple his normative abstractions, they stifle his *moral ambition*, i.e. his desire for virtue … Of the many sins of adults toward children, *this* is the one for which they would deserve to burn in hell if such a place existed" (Rand [1969] 1975: 142, 141).

These points of intersection between Objectivism and contemporary film studies with respect to the (re)turn to the question of aesthetic value are merely choice examples. There are far more places where film scholars could/should incorporate Objectivist ideas and arguments than I could possibly list here in this Conclusion. However, as a final word with regards to the future of film studies and the possibilities of an Objectivist aesthetics of cinema, I think that it is interesting to note – recalling the point of Rand's that I brought up at the close of Chapter 1, that "it is impossible to predict the time of a philosophical Renaissance" (Rand [1969] 1975: 115) – the recent emergence in contemporary discussions of cinema not merely ideas and arguments consistent with or with relevance for Objectivism, but, more specifically, of ideas and arguments from Rand herself. From the efforts of Lisa Downing (2014, 2015), who has focused in her work on "selfish women" such as Rand and in particular on questions that arise from cinematic representations of gender in Rand's work, to those of Daniel Shaw (2017), who has studied Rand *avec* Nietzsche in an effort to delineate the (in)compatibilities between Rand and existentialism,[174] it would appear that Rand's prognosis for academia was, indeed, as I postulated, unduly pessimistic. In fact, this recent interest in Rand combined with the disciplinary shifts that I have discussed throughout this thesis and chronicled in detail in this Conclusion would seem to corroborate further my claims that there is a widespread and growing desire on the part of film scholars to overhaul the philosophical foundation on which film studies was originally built and to seek out new directions for the discipline. Perhaps the philosophical Renaissance is already underway and we are already approaching Atlantis.

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[174] Additionally, leading film-philosophy scholar David Sorfa this year opted to include King Vidor's adaptation of *The Fountainhead* and Shaw's existentialist take on it as part of his Spring 2018 MA Film-Philosophy course (https://www.facebook.com/groups/filmphilosophy/permalink/10156694531640752/).

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