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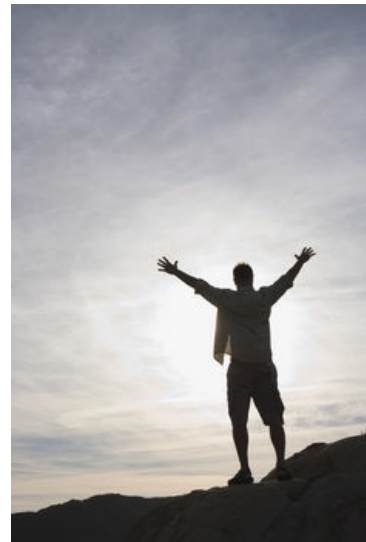
## Transhumanism Trips on a Ponzi Scheme?

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If this article had appeared in a newspaper less illustrious and authoritative than *The Wall Street Journal*, I would have assumed it to be a hoax. Evidently not. It seems that a couple of intrepid transhumanist artists have lost their funding, thanks to the fact that their investments had been managed by Bernard Madoff, the investor who just admitted to running what may well be the largest Ponzi scheme in history.

Transhumanism, you may recall, is the movement that is determined to reverse aging and to extend the human life span indefinitely. What does that have to do with art? Funny you should ask.

*The Wall Street Journal* reports that Arakawa and Madeline Gins are artists who have committed their energies and art to the quest to make human beings immortal. Arakawa (his entire name) and Madeline Gin base their artistic quest for immortality “on the idea that people degenerate and die in part because they live in spaces that are too comfortable.” Seriously. Their answer is to “construct abodes that leave people disoriented, challenged, and feeling anything but comfortable.”



Arakawa insists that living in these disorienting spaces can make one “become like a baby.” As the *Journal* reports, “They build buildings with no doors inside. They place rooms far apart. They put windows near the ceiling or near the floor. Between rooms are sloping, bumpy moonscape-like floors designed to throw occupants off balance.”

The whole idea throws me off balance. The world of modern “art” is littered with nonsense of limitless variety. These artists have built nine “reversible destiny” lofts in Japan at a cost of \$6 million. The lofts are shaped like spheres, tubes, or cubes and are marked by odd features, misshapen floors and walls, and uneven floors.

One Japanese loft tenant, Nobutaka Yamaoka, claims to have lost both weight and his hay fever after a couple years of living in the loft with his family. He admits that he isn’t sure that the loft had anything to do with these achievements. He can’t buy furniture for his loft because of the uneven floors and his wife complains that she hits her head trying to crawl to the outdoors through a window, but Mr. Yamaoka is undeterred. Ms. Gins told the *Journal* that crawling out of the low window in order to hang up the laundry is “one of the exercises.” Obviously.

Here is my favorite part of the article:

*“Their research is a milestone in the history of conceptual art,” says Alexandra Munroe, senior curator at the main Guggenheim Museum, on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, where the couple’s work is currently on display. She says many of their supporters don’t literally accept the couple’s message on immortality but appreciate it in a “metaphorical” way.*

*To the artists, eternal life is a real possibility. “This is a great chance for the human race,” says Ms. Gins.*

Well, this “great chance for the human race” is endangered by a lack of funding, given the fact that these artists lost their funding to Bernard Madoff’s scheme. “Here was someone we thought was a supporter of ours, and he pulled the rug

out from under us,” said Ms. Gins.

Other transhumanists were quick to distance themselves from the odd theory of age reversal advocated by this artistic couple. Ray Kurzweil, identified as “a leading transhumanist figure in the U.S.,” dismissed the theory of Arakawa and Ms. Gins and offered his own, presumably less odd theory of age reversal. Kurzweil told the *Journal* that future human beings will have small cell-regenerating robots in their bodies. He evidently thinks that robots inside our bodies would seem less odd than the idea that we are dying because our living spaces are too comfortable.

Just last week *TIME* magazine reported that “amortality” is one of the “[Ten Ideas Changing the World Right Now](#).” Meanwhile, the *Journal* cites a professor of aging who called the promotion of longevity “the second-oldest profession.”

The great quest of transhumanism is to defy death and to redefine what it means to be human. But death will not forever be defied and those who live in uncomfortable houses are not likely to live much longer than those who reside in (apparently) deadly comfort. God is not mocked.

This is an idea that ran out of sense long before it ran out of money.

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