

Feeling, Form, Mind: A Conference on the Thought of Susanne K. Langer

in cooperation with the Susanne K. Langer Circle

S. K. Langer

June 22–24, 2022

Feeling, Form, Mind: A Conference on the Thought of Susanne K. Langer

Susanne K. Langer (*1895; † 1985) is widely known for her contributions to a variety of fields ranging from the philosophy of art to mathematical logic. Her thought continues to be felt across diverse traditions, in theory as well as in artistic practice.

Langer's genuinely interdisciplinary and undogmatic approach inspires research across the globe today precisely because it challenges disciplinary and methodological boundaries. Her work, often associated with Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ernst Cassirer and Alfred North Whitehead, transforms the fundamental problems of philosophy into a unique research program that culminates in a fully fledged philosophy of the human mind that combines empirical insights with philosophical reasoning.

This is the first international conference organized by the newly formed Susanne K. Langer Circle in cooperation with the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics in Frankfurt. It brings together international researchers from various disciplines who will discuss Langer's work in all its different aspects.

Program committee:

Randall Auxier
Lona Gaikis
Christian Grüny
Adam Nocek

Day 1 Wednesday, June 22, 2022

09:00 Arrival and Registration**10:00 Introduction**

Christian Grüny and Adrienne
Dengerink Chaplin

10:30 Keynote Lecture 1: Donald Dryden

Duke University, Durham, NC, USA
**Susanne K. Langer and the
Project of a Process Ontology
for the Biological Sciences**

11:30 Coffee Break

**Session 1: Langer and her Times:
Culture and Politics**

Chair: Sander Verhaegh

11:35 Anne Pollok

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität
Mainz, Germany

**A New Essay on Enlightenment:
How Langer's Theory of Culture
Contributes to a Long-Lived Discussion**

12:10 Carolyn Bergonzo

Brown University, Watertown, MA, USA
**Public/Private Mind: On Susanne K.
Langer's Political "Departures"**

12:45 Lunch

Session 2: From Symbol to Mind

Chair: Adam Nocek

14:00 Eldritch Priest

Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada
Thinking Non/Humanly

14:35 Iris van der Tuin

Universiteit Utrecht, Netherlands
**Extending the Invitation of the
International Center for Integrative
Studies: Susanne K. Langer
and Interdisciplinarity**

15:10 Coffee Break**Session 3: Development of the Symbol**

Chair: Sander Verhaegh

15:20 Susanne Scheierling

Universität Wien, Austria
**From Symbolic Logic to a General
Theory of Symbolic Forms:
Susanne K. Langer's Use of Water
for Illustrating Key Concepts**

15:55 Danka Radjenović

Universität Koblenz Landau, Germany
**Langer and Goodman on Art
as Symbolic System**

16:30 Coffee Break**Session 4: Eine kleine (Nacht-) Musik**

Chair: Eldritch Priest

17:00 Joddy Murray

Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, USA
**Meaning, Virtual Space, and Affect:
Susanne Langer's Dream Text**

17:35 Christopher Brody

University of Louisville, USA
**Langer's Comic and Tragic Rhythms
and the Aesthetics of Musical Form**

18:15 Reception**19:15 Concert****Lucas Fels (Cello):**

Roger Sessions: Six Pieces for Cello (1966)
Helmut Lachenmann: Pression (1970)

Nicola Hein (Electric Guitar, Electronics):
Improvisation

Day 2 Thursday, June 23, 2022

09:00 Keynote Lecture 2

Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin
King's College, London, UK and Margaret
Beaufort Institute, Cambridge, UK
**Seeing Otherwise: The Liberated Logical
Imagination of Susanne K. Langer**

10:00 Coffee Break

Session 5: Whitehead and Friends
Chair: Randall Auxier

10:15 **Agáta Košičanová**
Prešovská Univerzita, Prešov, Slovakia
**Everydayness as a Current Possibility
– Along the Lines with Langer's
Philosophy of Art**

10:50 **Martin Kaplický**
Univerzita Karlova, Prague, Czech Republic
**Rhythm, Life and Art in Whitehead's
and Langer's Thought**

11:25 Coffee Break

Session 6: Literature
Chair: Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin

11:35 **Lennart Posch**
Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf,
Germany
On Aesthetic and Discursive Knowledge

12:10 **Ravi Chakraborty**
Indian Institute of Technology,
New Delhi, India
**A Society of Living Forms:
Langer and World Literature**

12:45 Lunch

Session 7: Logic and Symbol
Chair: Adam Nocek

14:00 **Sander Verhaegh**
Tilburg University, Netherlands
**Intellectual context: Abstract Forms
and the Method of Logical Analysis**

14:35 **Giulia Felappi**
University of Southampton, UK
**"The inverted commas have a function
similar to that of the symbol 'q' of
musical notation." Langer on Saving
Logic from a Metaphysical Limbo**

15:10 Coffee Break

Session 8: The Limits of Form
Chair: Lona Gaikis

15:20 **Peter Windle**
University of Kent, Canterbury, UK
Are There Inexpressive Artworks?

15:55 **Tereza Hadravová**
Univerzita Karlova, Prague, Czech Republic
Beyond the Order of Art

16:30 Coffee Break

Session 9: Dance and Choreography
Chair: Lona Gaikis

17:00 **Renate Bräuninger**
Independent scholar
**The Application of Langer's Theories
to Choreomusical Relationships**

20:00 Public Lecture

Lydia Goehr
Columbia University, New York, USA
**Errors, Mistakes, and Accidents: New
and Old Keys to Analysis in Philosophy
and the Arts**

Day 3 Friday, June 24, 2022

- 09:00 **Keynote Lecture 3**
Randall Auxier
Southern Illinois University,
Carbondale, USA
The Virtues in the Virtual: Langer's Projections and the Digital World
- 10:00 **Coffee Break**
- Session 10: Psychology and Symbol**
Chair: Donald Dryden
- 10:15 **Anne Boissière**
Université de Lille, France
Living Movement in Art
- 10:50 **Margaret Browning**
Independent researcher
Conceptualizing Consciousness as Feeling to Facilitate Understanding
- 11:25 **Coffee Break**
- Session 11: Psychoanalysis**
Chair: Eldritch Priest
- 11:35 **Reinhold Göring**
International Psychoanalytic University
Berlin, Germany
Aesthetic Truth: Susanne K. Langer and the Postkleinian Theory
- 12:10 **Karl Mätzler**
Psychoanalyst, independent researcher,
Austria
Linking the Thought of Susanne Langer with a Contemporary Psychoanalytic Understanding of Symbolism Including an Excursion into the World of Primary Significant Forms
- 12:45 **Lunch**
- Session 12: Mind and its Science**
Chair: Donald Dryden
- 14:00 **Clovis Salgado Gontijo**
Faculdade Jesuíta de Filosofia e Teologia,
Belo Horizonte, Brazil
Susanne K. Langer and Nise da Silveira: The Role of the Arts in the Composition of our Humanity
- 14:35 **Adam Nocek**
Arizona State University, Phoenix, USA
A Feeling For Biological Concepts
- 15:10 **Coffee Break**
- Session 13: From Image to Imagination**
Chair: Iris van der Tuin
- 15:20 **Veronica Dakota**
The New School for Social Research,
New York, USA
Reimagining the Image: A Dialogical Engagement with Langer
- 15:55 **Filippo Marani Tassinari**
Università degli studi di Milano Statale, Italy
Can Feelings Have a Form? Susanne Langer's Theory of Imagination and its Implications in the "Morphology of Feeling"
- 16:30 **Coffee Break**
- Session 14: The Metaphysics of Music**
Chair: Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin
- 17:00 **Brian Keegan**
Composer, Ireland
Audible Time – How Susanne K. Langer's Concept of 'Psychological Time' Relates to Music Composition
- 17:35 **Lona Gaikis**
Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien,
Austria
Music as the DNA of Feeling – Speculations on the Whiteheadian Influence in Susanne K. Langer's Philosophy
- 19:30 **Conference Dinner**
*Ristorante Gregorellis
Meisengasse 12
60313 Frankfurt am Main*

Day 4 Saturday, June 25, 2022

- 10:00 **Susanne K. Langer Circle Meeting**

Errors, Mistakes, and Accidents: New and Old Keys to Analysis in Philosophy and the Arts

Lydia Goehr (Columbia University, New York, USA)

My lecture explores three modes of analysis that emerged around 1900: philosophical, musical, and psychological (as in psychoanalysis).

Susanne Langer addressed the formal, logical, and discursive aspects of each to outline her method of philosophy in a new key: a philosophy of symbolic transformation. My lecture picks up on what she and others around her marked out as the problem of error. She concluded her book of 1942: "If there is any virtue in the theory of what I have called 'symbolic transformation,' then this theory should elucidate not only the achievements of that function, but also its miscarriages, its limitations, and its by-products

of illusion and error. Freedom of thought cannot be reborn without throes; language, art, morality, and science have all given us pain as well as power. For, as Professor Whitehead has frankly and humbly declared: 'Error is the price we pay for progress.'" My lecture pursues the space and place for error, mistakes, and accidents in the pursuit of freedom. Contrary to the thought of errors being a necessary price paid, there is at least one kind of error which we do not want to be without. Without error, where would be the comedy? The question then is whether the error is better called a mistake or an accident?

Susanne K. Langer and the Project of a Process Ontology for the Biological Sciences

Donald Dryden (Duke University, Durham, NC, USA)

What Alfred North Whitehead called "scientific materialism" originated as a consequence of fundamental changes in the understanding of matter, motion, body, and nature worked out in opposition to the long-dominant Aristotelian tradition in natural philosophy by thinkers in the 16th and 17th centuries. By the end of the 17th century, an overwhelming majority of natural philosophers, inspired by a revival of classical atomic theories of matter, had come to accept some version of what became known as "the mechanical philosophy" as an explanatory

framework for natural phenomena. The result was a revolution in the sciences—a radical and pervasive conceptual shift, "which altered the foundations of natural philosophy as practiced for nearly the preceding two thousand years" (Lindberg, David C. 2007. *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 365).

Like the natural philosophers of the 16th and 17th centuries, Whitehead realized that the scientific advances in his own time entailed, once again, a new conception of the nature

of things. “The old foundations of scientific thought are becoming unintelligible,” he wrote in *Science and the Modern World* (1925). “Time, space, matter, material, ether, electricity, mechanism, organism, configuration, structure, pattern, function, all require reinterpretation” (Alfred North Whitehead. 1925. *Science and the Modern World*, 16). The development of quantum theory in the 1920s, for example, was forcing thinkers “to revise all our notions of the ultimate character of material existence” (ibid., 35). But Whitehead believed that the need to move beyond the limitations of current scientific thought had become “especially urgent in the biological sciences” (ibid., 66) and in psychology (ibid., 16).

Whitehead’s *Science and the Modern World* played an important role in the emergence of a community of biologists in Great Britain, Germany and Austria, and the United States, who saw themselves as attempting to transcend the traditional conflict between mechanism and vitalism by steering a middle course, or third way, that came to be known as organicism. Organicism reached its peak in the period between the First and Second World Wars but began to lose momentum in the late 1930s, although a few representatives of the organicist movement—such as Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Paul Weiss, and C.H. Waddington—remained

active into the 1960s. Their work, however, was largely eclipsed by the achievements of molecular biology, which dominated the biological sciences during the second half of the 20th century.

I will argue that Susanne Langer’s three-volume work, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, which occupied the last thirty years of her life, should be seen as a Janus-faced achievement—looking back, with one face, to the largely-forgotten organicist tradition of the early 20th century, while anticipating, with the other, the early-21st-century rise of systems biology, and a growing interest in developing a process ontology for the biological sciences, as represented by the recent work of philosophers of biology John Dupré and Daniel J. Nicholson, who issued “A Manifesto for a Processual Philosophy of Biology” in 2018, and by earlier work of historian of biology Evelyn Fox Keller, who, in 2005, called for “an entire new lexicon” in the biological sciences—“one that has the capacity for representing the dynamic interactivity of living systems, and for describing the kinds of inherently relational entities that can emerge from those dynamics. . . . For too long we have tried to build a biology out of nouns, a science constructed around entities. Perhaps it is time for a biology built out of verbs, a science constructed around processes” (Evelyn Fox Keller. 2005. “The Century Beyond the Gene,” 9).

Seeing Otherwise: The Liberated Logical Imagination of Susanne K. Langer

Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin (*King's College, London, UK and Margaret Beaufort Institute, Cambridge, UK*)

A key element in Langer's work is her recognition that the world can be seen through a range of different prisms or 'symbolic forms,' each abstracting and highlighting a different aspect of reality. These various forms are conceptual abstractions that are rooted in human perception and the subject's embodied engagement with their environment. One of Langer's recurrent claims was that there is no such thing as the form of the real world. Data and facts are formulated events that are always seen under some aspect. While profoundly

'relational,' this pluralistic ontology/epistemology does not imply postmodern 'relativism' or a world of post-truth 'alternative facts.' Instead, it seeks to do justice to the world's multifacetedness and the concomitant depth and breadth of human experience and practices, from logic and science to myth and art. After highlighting some of Langer's seminal sources I will explore how this ontology/epistemology might help illuminate some enduring dilemmas in our culture today.

The Virtues in the Virtual: Langer's Projections and the Digital World

Randall Auxier (*Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA*)

Susanne Langer developed a sophisticated theory regarding the human power to create, transport, and project symbols, using bodily feeling as the medium. This activity can be guided and formed into art, such that our way of feeling the world, which virtualizes it, is done in a way that facilitates later projections. We can call it "artistic synthesis." In a way, the computer has become a medium that mirrors and facilitates the externalization of such processes.

With the virtual world of computers we have a "canvas" that will receive the semblance of artistic synthesis. In this paper I will adapt Langer's theory of semblance/primary illusion to the medium of computer art, explaining some criteria for what would make for excellence in the creation of it. In particular I will examine video games, computer generated movie images, animation, and how the poetic arts are changed by writing on a computer.

Public/Private Mind: On Susanne K. Langer's Political "Departures"

Bergonzo, Carolyn (*Brown University, Watertown, MA, USA*)

"The only antidote to ideology is active, purposive, confident ideation; that is the philosopher's work."

—*Susanne K. Langer, "The Growing Center of Knowledge" (1956)*

Scholarship on Langer largely overlooks her contributions to public discourse. Although private in temperament, Langer ventured into the public sphere to address political themes for much of her life. Some topics of interest to her were the need for supranational law to counter threats of militant nationalism and nuclear armament; the role of philosophy in bolstering the democratic ideal of freedom of thought; and the social responsibilities of scientists. As early as 1922, Langer reflected in *The New Republic* on the plight of Eastern European refugees in the wake of the First World War, and by mid-century, she was a self-described "consulting philosopher" for *Fortune* magazine expounding on the moral imperatives of big business.

Drawing on articles featured in these general interest publications, as well as unpublished archival materials, I aim to illuminate this underacknowledged through-line in Langer's thought. Contextualizing her ideas within twentieth-century political and intellectual history, I will argue that these "departures" from her main philosophical writings were actually central to Langer's conception of the work of philosophy. For Langer, philosophers should be called upon to create new concepts to confront the global economic and political transformations of the twentieth century, and to counter the potent and destructive symbols of the modern age.

I will also touch on those topics – namely, race and gender equity – that Langer did not opine on publicly and speculate on the biographical and philosophical influences that may have informed her political perspectives.

Living Movement in Art

Boissière, Anne (*Université de Lille, France*)

In the domain of aesthetics and philosophy of art, the reception of Susanne Langer is virtually nonexistent today. The thinking of this American philosopher has been obliterated by the dominant tendencies: pragmatism which she herself combatted, and also analytic philosophy.

Her symbolic approach, however, does not lack resources, and it might even find an unexpected relevance with respect to the remarkable attention it pays to what is alive. Susanne Langer is not satisfied solely with a symbolic conception of feeling; she renews the understanding of

feeling itself, which she envisages as a dynamic rather than a state of mind. Therefore one should emphasize the way in which she moves feeling away from the sphere of inwardness, ego and subjectivity, to bring it nearer to physiological life at its most concrete and complex.

To elaborate this orientation, it is proposed to take up a distinction made by the American psychologist and psychoanalyst, Daniel N. Stern (1934-2012), incidentally a reader of Susanne Langer, between a categorial and a dynamic conception of feeling, which latter he presents in terms of "vitality affects": The idea of vitality affects concerns the "what" just as well as the "how": there exist, for instance, a thousand and one ways of manifesting fury. Those are expressed in vitality affects, thus giving them a proximity to what is alive. Thus dance and, more generally, living movement can be enlightened by such a conception of feeling which breaks with modern subject philosophy.

This strong orientation of Susanne Langer's thought, source of its theoretical richness, may be further determined by observing the

reception she has had in British psychoanalytical circles: with "The Middle Group", with authors like John Bowlby, Charles Rycroft and Marion Milner who was close to Donald W. Winnicott. We shall talk in particular about Marion Milner (1900-1998), and her approach to spontaneous drawings.

In those drawings, which present themselves as a free playing, there is above all living movement: through the bodily movement also through the lines drawn. Referring to the Langerian conception of the symbolic, Marion Milner can see in those movements an opening to creativity, synonymous with a "feeling alive", and thereby a quite different thing from representations or identifiable forms according to a conventional theory of drawing. Here the movement of lines is indeed envisaged as a rhythmical form, capable of symbolizing the sentience of psycho-organic life. Thus, and following Susanne Langer, art is recognized in its unique, irreducible function which no other human activity can attain, i.e. of symbolizing the dynamic of what is alive and its rhythms, a dynamic which escapes verbal language.

The Application of Langer's Theories to Choreomusical Relationships

Bräuninger, Renate (*Independent Researcher of Northampton*)

Susanne K. Langer had remarkable insights into the nature and characteristics of the different art forms. She is one of the very few philosophers who theorises dance; looking at it as an independent art form on equal terms with the other arts, neither always linked to music nor being a moving sculpture. When she tries to explain the relationship between different art forms, she finds the concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk

nowhere successfully realised. For her "there are no happy marriages in art – only successful rape" *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures*. New York: Charles Scribner's, 1957, 86). For her, different media rarely complement each other in an artwork, for example, in a song or a piece of choreography. In the context of an analytical approach to choreomusical relationships it seems important to revisit her

statement. In general, her discussion of art forms challenges 20th century structuralist/post-structuralist models of analysis, particularly those based on the concept of text and intertext. Instead, she sees art making and perception not based on the same logic as language, rather grounded in an emotive and hence intuitive understanding. Regarding dance an acknowledgement of the gestural and virtual powers allows to aesthetically appreciate dance. Her acknowledgement of virtual powers seems to predict the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and his followers, like Brian Massumi. What she rightly discovers is that there is no match or translation for one medium into the other nor perfect assimilations. Therefore, I would like to propose to take Langer's approach further and show how

choreographers who have taken music as their inspiration for dance create links between the two art forms in which one is not submissive to the other. How does the intuitive knowledge and logic of arts partitioners operate to make decisions about formal concepts? Where does the choreography originating in the music needs to have a life of its own to match perfectly with the music without submitting to it? How is gesture generated to expand pure formalism?

My examples will mainly drive from the oeuvres of ballet choreographer George Balanchine and contemporary choreographer Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker; both have used music as the source of their choreographic creation but operate in different genres at different times.

Langer's Comic and Tragic Rhythms and the Aesthetics of Musical Form

Brody, Christopher (University of Louisville, USA)

Among the most noted aspects of the sonata first-movement form that crystallized in Viennese instrumental music of the 1770s and 1780s is its newly teleological nature. Whether from a philosophical angle or a technical one, critics have zeroed in on the importance of this music's directedness toward generically determined goals. My dual purposes in this paper are, first, to recast this aspect of musical form in terms of Susanne Langer's comic and tragic rhythms, and second, thereby to shed new light on the aesthetic motivations of the many changes in formal process in instrumental music during the nineteenth century.

In a pair of chapters in *Feeling and Form*, Langer distinguishes the comic and tragic rhythms of drama, between which she identifies a

distinction that is "*structural and radical*." Comic rhythms are fundamentally circular, ritualistic, and impersonal, whereas tragic rhythms are teleological, interested in novelty, and highly personalized. In this light, the late eighteenth-century multimovement sonata form enacted a trajectory from tragic to comic: the teleologically conceived first movement giving way to the dances and formally circular rondos of later movements.

From this moment of relative balance between Langerian tragic and comic rhythms, the broad trend of nineteenth-century instrumental music was an effort to make tragic rhythms the controlling force at all levels of structure, mirroring the Romantic aesthetic of interior experience. This effort takes place in two distinct domains: first-movement form and

the multimovement cycle. Nineteenth-century composers seemed to feel that the punctuated surface of the eighteenth-century sonata, with its frequent small-scale goal arrivals, made for, in effect, “too comic” a tragic rhythm. They sought to intensify the Langerian tragic through a family of techniques involving the blurring of structural points of arrival and departure.

Nineteenth-century composers also sought to imbue the multimovement sonata with a Langerian tragic rhythm, shifting the work’s

center of expressive gravity away from the first movement and as close to the end as possible. The “grand finale” is one device for this purpose; others include techniques of “cyclical form,” in which music from earlier in the work is brought back near the end, and its most extreme manifestation in “two-dimensional sonata form.” Appropriately to the highly individualized tragic aesthetic, an aspect of this trend is the diminishing importance of genre: no two such works are alike.

Conceptualizing Consciousness as Feeling to Facilitate Understanding

Browning, Margaret (*Independent Researcher*)

This paper will claim that conceptualizing consciousness as feeling facilitates its study. To support this argument, the author will paint a developmental picture of changes in consciousness using this conceptualization. Feeling is the hallmark of Susanne Langer’s philosophy of mind and the author will draw on Langer’s work and the work of other scholars to substantiate the developmental picture she paints. In comparison to the word “consciousness,” “feeling,” as in “to feel,” connotes active agency with the idea of “feeling one’s way” in the world over the lifespan. Feeling is palpable and organic, so claiming it as a conceptualization of consciousness renders a greater focus on the living body and places consciousness in ecological thinking about the development of mind. The newborn’s primal, felt state of consciousness drives all perception and action as the child develops. Using Langer’s image of mind, perception is understood as *felt experience* supported by the child’s maturing sensory capacities. While her sensorimotor

cognition is evolving unconsciously, her self-regulated state of feeling, her conscious experience, is both motivating and mediating her process of learning. A great transition in this developmental picture takes place as children learn to *project their felt experience* into explicitly communicative formulations, notably the words of the symbolic language of their caregivers. Although children’s ongoing felt lives, their conscious lives, become qualitatively transformed as they begin to render them into language and learn to reflect on their experience, consciousness will remain grounded in ongoing organic feeling. Though as symbol users children become members of a society that imaginatively creates and recreates itself in a symbolic theatre – explicitly characterizing a shared external world and encouraging the explicit exploration of internal worlds – these worlds are produced and reproduced by individuals anchored in their bodies with their capacity to feel, to be conscious. Symbolic actions are always an ongoing process of projected feeling. Moving from pre-reflective to

reflective self-consciousness as a symbol user, adults (and older children) gain a capacity to make and remake their individual selves using symbolic means to investigate their subjective

worlds. Over time, with help from other people or the arts or life itself, they may change how they are conscious, finding and allowing themselves new ways to “feel their way in the world.”

A Society of Living Forms: Langer and World Literature

Chakraborty, Ravi (*Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, India*)

Susanne Langer is well-known for extensively and creatively employing Whitehead’s thought in the domain of art. However, Langer’s emphasis on music to develop a philosophy of art leaves the scope for properly extending her theory to the domain of literature. Even within her limited emphasis on literature, there is disproportionate attention towards poetry.

As a deviation from this line of thought, I argue that Langer outlines the nascent contours of a novel approach to literary texts and especially, the relation between them. To set the context, I introduce Franco Moretti’s reading of the phenomenon of world literature. Moretti considers the dynamics of world literature to be following Wallerstein’s world-system in which the constituent literary forms evolve as per Darwin-like evolutionary laws. However, there lacks an argument to explain the consistency between world-system theory and evolutionary theory.

In order to resolve this issue, I propose that the world literary system is a way of capturing forms of feeling that persist over history and geography, thereby giving a fresh understanding of what it means for forms to have ‘life’. Forms interact with other forms with the subjectivity that mirrors the interaction between communities and individuals. This ‘organic’ understanding of the literary work of art is markedly

different from Nicholas Gaskill’s appropriation of Whitehead and Susanne Langer to look at close reading as a way of thinking together the poetic form.

This proposition is inspired by Nirvana Tanoukhi’s critique of Moretti. Nirvana Tanoukhi (2008) provides the necessary inflection to Moretti’s totalitarian ambition of deriving global laws of literature to show that the world-scale of literature is implicated in sustaining the forms of feeling that define literary texts. Literary texts embody those forms of feeling which are constituted by their relation to other texts. For instance, some postcolonial novels are manifestations of the feeling of the compromise they make in absorbing the influence of western forms. This is the way, following Langer, there is a salient congruence between the forms of world-historical feelings and the forms of literature making it thus possible to conceive of world literature as a society of living forms. Indeed, these living forms evolve but do not evolve through struggle and competition as the only modes of interaction. Indeed, the total cosmology of world literature is implicated in sustaining these interactions but there are no totalitarian laws of literary motion that could subsume the evolution of the world literary system. It is in this way that we creatively extend Langer’s philosophy of art to think of the constitutive role that other art-works play in the

construction of a single art work, specifically in the domain of literature.

Selected Essential Bibliography

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Moretti, Franco. "World-Systems Analysis, Evolutionary Theory, Weltliteratur." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* (2005): 217–228.

Tanoukhi, Nirvana. "The scale of world literature." *New Literary History* 39.3 (2008): 599–617.

Reimagining the Image: A Dialogical Engagement with Langer

Dakota, Veronica (*The New School for Social Research, New York, USA*)

The concept of the image is central to Susanne K. Langer's oeuvre. By her final work, Langer articulates this centrality when, in *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, she asserts that images and only images "originally made us aware of the wholeness and over-all form of entities, acts, and facts in the world; and little though we may know it, only an image can hold us to a conception of a total phenomenon, against which we can measure the adequacy of scientific terms wherewith we describe it. We are actually suffering today from the lack of suitable images of the phenomena that are currently receiving our most ardent scientific attention, the objects of biology and psychology" (xviii). And yet, a robust interrogation of the concept of the image in Langer's work has not been undertaken. Thus, we do not have an adequate understanding of Langer's treatment

of image nor its significance. In this paper, I propose to provide a sustained analysis of "image" within Langer's work and to reflect upon the significance of the structure and function of images more generally. The working thesis that I seek to defend is that the image is essential for cognition and the construction of the self. Bringing into view an understanding of the image as such also provides an avenue for critical inventions into ongoing debates about the nature of mental images, the role of emotions, the structure of perception, and the significance of aesthetic experience. For, as Langer claims, our current lack of images – to which I add, our current lack of understanding of the image as such – is "blocking the progress of scientifically oriented thought toward systematic insight into the nature of life and especially of mind."

“The inverted commas have a function similar to that of the symbol ‘ q ’ of musical notation.”

Langer on Saving Logic from a Metaphysical Limbo

Felappi, Giulia (University of Southampton, UK)

In my paper, I will discuss Langer’s notion of logic. The purpose will be two-fold.

First, I will show how wide-ranging, inter-disciplinary and unusual for her times Langer’s view of logic was:

“The extra-systematic function of verbs seems thus to account for many of the supposed ‘alogical’ features of logic. ... The alogical factors of meaning, truth, assertion, etc., which early beset Mr. Russell and recently drove Mr. Wittgenstein to Mysticism, appear to me to have sprung from the error of treating logic as essentially a study of propositional forms. But the logic which concerns itself with all sorts of forms allows for an analysis of structures including propositional forms, and promises to save some important logical relations from their present metaphysical limbo.” (1927, p. 129)

Thanks to her more ecumenical view of what logic is, and to her extensive readings from authors in very different traditions, she could rely on reflections from natural languages and the philosophy of art and music.

Second, I will show how fruitful her approach to logic is, as compared to the more restricted

approach of Russell and the first Wittgenstein. I will argue that by relying on considerations from disciplines usually considered alogical, she could solve problems that were unsolvable from the lens of a more restricted notion of logic. I will show this by using, as example, the so-called problem of the unity of the proposition, which Russell himself explicitly stated as an unsolvable difficulty from the point of view of the logic of his Principles. I will discuss the theoretical import of Langer’s approach by focusing on two claims of hers within the debate on the problem of the unity of the proposition.

I will first work on quotation. I will show that Langer’s ability, thanks to her ecumenical notion of logic, to compare logical symbols such as quotation marks to the symbol “ q ” of musical notation, provides us logicians with reasons to think that quotation works differently from how it is usually accounted for.

I will also discuss the content/force distinction as detected in the Fregean tradition, well-known to Langer. I will show that Langer provided us with reasons to hold that, contrary to what many maintain, the content/force distinction is a genuine one.

Music as the DNA of Feeling – Speculations on the Whiteheadian Influence in Susanne K. Langer’s Philosophy

Gaikis, Lona (*Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien, Austria*)

This presentation will focus on Susanne K. Langer’s emphasis of a tonal, “new key” in philosophy that grounds meaning making in musical form, conceived by her as a matrix of dynamic sound-patterns. By tracing back Langer’s theory of the art symbol to its very early germination in the *Practice of Philosophy* (1930), and by looking into her notes from Whitehead’s course on the philosophy of nature, which she attended as a graduate student in 1928-1929, I conjecture the possible influence—the speculative import—of his process metaphysics on her

concept of ‘feeling’. This investigation follows the evolution of Langer’s concept of music and gives a deeper analysis of her functional understanding of symbols. It highlights in which ways Langer—devoted to understanding the intricate weaving of internal and external sensations that induce symbolization in humans—resonates with process philosophy, but also diverts from Whitehead’s metaphysical speculation. It addresses Langer’s inclination towards empirical research.

Aesthetic Truth: Susanne K. Langer and the Postkleinian Theory

Görling, Reinhold (*International Psychoanalytic University Berlin, Germany*)

The list of research fields for this symposium misses to mention psychoanalysis. But Langer dedicates a whole chapter of her *Feeling and Form* to the question of symbolism in Freud’s writing. In the core of her argument we find a concept which Freud uses several times in his *Traumdeutung* and which became crucial for psychoanalytic debates in the last decades: “*Rücksicht auf die Darstellbarkeit*”. This is partly due to its non-translatability, but above all to the complexity of the process Freud addresses with it. *Darstellbarkeit* means the transformation of an unconscious affect or phantasy into something that can be experienced and remembered by the subject, a transformation into a thought which waits for a thinker, as Wilfred R. Bion argues in his *Theory of Thinking*. There is a French

discussion whether *Darstellbarkeit* which initially was translated with *représentation* shouldn’t better be called *figurabilité*. Langer proposes the concept of the “exhibitible” instead of the mostly used “presentable.” Because of the dream symbol’s over-determination, there can never be a final interpretation. Therefore, as Langer argues, it is to be understood as “product of imagination – be it the intelligently organised work of an artist, or the spontaneous fabrication of a dreamer – (that) comes to the percipient as an experience, a qualitative direct datum.” Following Whitehead’s idea of the aesthetic subject (in *Adventure of Ideas*), the presentative symbol (or figuration) is able to hold or express a contrast, which Langer directly links to Freud’s concept of ambivalence. In contrast

to “any symbol bound to the logic of discourse”, the “poetic mind” has the capacity to articulate ambivalences like “joy and grief, desire and fear, and so forth.”

There are two psychoanalytic traditions that refer to Langer. The German one, which was developed by Alfred Lorenzer in the 1970s, refers to the distinction between presentative and discursive symbols in “Philosophy in a New Key” and uses it to broaden the concept of hermeneutics. More important is an earlier one that is linked to the postkleinianian psychoanalysts Wilfred R. Bion, Donald Meltzer, and Adrian Strokes. They were members of the Imago Group founded in London in the 1950s to discuss the application of psychoanalysis to art and culture. Ernst Gombrich, who personally knew Langer, was part of the group. Meltzer and Strokes explicitly quote Langer’s *Feeling and Form*.

Bion, Meltzer and Strokes shared the interest to understand and describe the work of the psychoanalytic couple (of analysand and analytic) as conjoint process of aesthetic experience. The presentative symbolism of the dream is an important link. Bion understands dreaming as a poetic mode of thinking that produces thoughts for a thinker, images that can be experienced. In the clinical situation it is the analytic who dreams for and with the analysand. This reconceptualisation of dreaming involves a kind of triangulation of the ambivalence between Love and Hate by a drive in its own right. Bion calls it Knowledge, James Grotstein, one of his followers, even truth-drive. Prior to any discursive construction and independent from it, symbolisation is a transformation of the ambivalence between Love and Hate into qualitative direct data.

Beyond the Order of Art

Hadravová, Tereza (*Univerzita Karlova, Prague, Czech Republic*)

The focal point of my talk is a question of how Susanne Langer’s philosophy of art squares with (some forms of) contemporary art. In particular, I am interested in those artistic works and projects that, on the face of it, do not seem to fit neatly into any of the art forms that tradition, as well as Langer, distinguishes, i.e., painting, sculpture, architecture, dance, music, literature, poetry, drama, and film. In the first part, I offer a bird’s eye view of current aesthetic or critical responses to these works. I argue that they fall into three basic kinds, which I coin as a “new art”, “intermedial art”, and “no-category art” arguments. In the second part, I explore these three strategies from Langerian perspective,

arguing that her philosophy enables a critical reconsideration of these philosophical moves, sharpening them, and making them, as theoretical constructs, more fecund. I first ponder on what is at stake, in Langer’s terms, when one inaugurates a new art form, taking her own notes on film as a paradigmatic example. I argue that, while not impossible, occurrences of new art forms are extremely rare and tentatively explain why. Second, I explore the idea of intermedia art by introducing Langer’s concepts of primary and secondary illusion and presenting the dynamic relationship between them. I argue that, contrary to the first strategy, intermediality, re-interpreted in Langer’s terms,

is extremely common. I draw consequences of such re-interpretation for the theory of works whose intermediality is, supposedly, emphasized. Finally, I turn to a critical response labeled as “no-category art”. I reject a literal reading of the response arguing that it forces art not only beyond some specific categories of art, but also beyond the art as such. Using Langer’s terms, I formulate what I take to be a more

viable alternative to the response, proposing a hypothesis that some instances of contemporary art could be understood in terms of secondary illusion ungrounded by a specific primary illusion. The overall objective of the talk is to illustrate the usability of conceptual tools proposed by Langer for taking an uneven and diversified landscape of contemporary art theory in the view.

Rhythm, Life and Art in Whitehead’s and Langer’s Thought

Kaplický, Martin (*Univerzita Karlova, Prague, Czech Republic*)

It is well known that Alfred North Whitehead’s philosophy did influence the thinking of Susanne Langer in many respects. As far as I know, there are not many attempts to relate and compare the meaning and use of the concept of rhythm in the oeuvre of both philosophers. The aim of the proposed paper is to contribute to this task.

Both philosophers emphasised the rhythmic character of experience. Rhythm is not conceived only as a repetition of a given pattern but as becoming of that pattern. Whitehead considered rhythm as “fusion of sameness and novelty” (Whitehead, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge*, 1919, p. 198) and Langer states that “a rhythmic pattern arises whenever the completion of one distinct event appears as the beginning of another” (Langer, *Problems of Art*, 1957, p. 51). For both thinkers is therefore rhythm one of the most important elements in reality and the principle of life. Whitehead describes a rhythmic creative process also as a ‘contrast under identity’. He introduces this term in his book *Religion in the Making* in connection with the ontological and

aesthetic relationship between an already constituted event (or complex of events), which he calls ‘ground’ and a newly arising event, which he calls ‘consequent’.

I would like to show in the proposed paper that Whitehead’s idea of “contrast under identity” as an ontological and aesthetic principle strongly influenced the thinking of Susanne Langer, although she developed the idea in her own way. Moreover, Whitehead, unfortunately, did not develop the idea of rhythm in connection with the problems of art. I would like to show that Langer was able to do it and that in this respect she did fill one of the theoretical “gaps” of Whitehead’s philosophy.

The proposed paper will (1) try to show how the concept of rhythm is employed in Dewey’s and Langer’s philosophies respectively; (2) demonstrate the connections of the notion “rhythm” and the notion of “life” in both philosophical systems and (3) consider how both thinkers use (or do not use) the concept of rhythm when they speak on aesthetic experience and art.

Audible Time – How Susanne K. Langer’s Concept of ‘Psychological Time’ Relates to Music Composition

Keegan, Brian (composer, Ireland)

Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity sensible (Feeling and Form: 110)

This presentation looks at how Susanne K. Langer’s concepts of ‘experiential’ or ‘psychological time’ relate to music composition. While ‘clock time’ is simple and observable, experiential time is messy. Nonetheless, Langer points out that experiential time is fundamentally, “the business of music” (The Primary Illusions and the Great Orders of Art: 223)

Langer tells us that, “The purpose of all musical labor, in thought or in physical activity, is to create and develop the illusion of flowing time in its passage, an audible passage filled with motion that is just as illusory as the time it is measuring.” (F&F: 120)

How far can illusory motion and illusory measurement in music be taken? After all, strict measurement and regulated motion have been cornerstones of Western art music for centuries. In the 20th century, however, the distinction between clock time and experiential time became a fruitful compositional tool for composers.

Highlighting the usefulness of psychological time to the composer, Stravinsky writes, ‘It is not self-contained in each momentary tonal unit. It

dislocates the centers of attraction and gravity and sets itself up in the unstable; and this fact makes it particularly adaptable to the translation of the composer’s emotive impulses.’ (*Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons 1970: 31*).

The flexibility afforded by psychological time is noted by Xenakis, “When a composer writes music he uses time. That means that he has the possibility of creating time in his own way. In some cases it goes very slowly, and in other cases it is very complex, and time can be full of ‘things’, multiple layers, for example.” (Beyer and Christensen 2000: 297). Of course, this notion of time being relative grounds us in Time Dilation and in Einstein’s theory of Special Relativity.

The task of making truly ‘audible time’ through music raises practical issues around the creation, notation and performance of music. In my own compositional practice, I have accepted Langer’s invitation to explore experiential time. I have approached this in a number of ways, including the use of echoes to sustain temporal moments, blurs of fast notes to create apparently endless movement and in the case of my string quartet, *After the Rain*, layers of held string harmonics create music without metre or sense of pulse.

Everydayness as a Current Possibility – Along the Lines with S. Langer’s Philosophy of Art

Košičanová, Agáta (Prešovská Univerzita, Prešov, Slovakia)

There are three options of how to look at the work of the American neo-Kantian philosopher Susanne Langer – the work of the past, present, and future. None of them springs without being interwoven with the next two and the only way how to penetrate into her thoughts is to have a look at them one by one. Along the same lines, there are several options of how to look at the current philosophical spectrum of rather inclusive thoughts about art, aesthetics, and even neuroscience and some other more biologically-based disciplines. As for the past, using Dewey’s interdisciplinary non-reductive aesthetics of art – inspired also by W. James’s philosophy – in order to overcome S. Zeki’s reductive naturalism in neuroaesthetics meant an inspiration for current, lately established, non-western originated everyday aesthetics that has provided us with a wider perspective of environmental aesthetics, negative aesthetics, ambient aesthetics, social aesthetics, and action-oriented aesthetics. Lately published reflection of dr. Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin of a “hint of [Langer’s work ‘bridging’ of] Western and non-Western modes of thinking... worthy of further exploration” (2021, p. 260) seem to be adjustable to this wide realm because it’s somewhere within (or maybe even

over) these lines where a position of S. Langer’s work and its influence on what is these days labeled both as philosophy and aesthetics or (neuro)science/aesthetics and biological fields of study exists. This paper will present an analysis of how also current Whiteheadian and Wittgensteinian references in the iconic book *Everyday Aesthetics* (Kvokačka, Giombini, 2021) offer maybe a possibility to understand a turn within a current concept of everydayness that has become a source of many theoretical questions, hence causing its philosophical reflections to be natural. Through the editors’ focus on “pervasive presence of aesthetics in various spheres of daily life” (Ibid. p. 20) a possibility to look upon individual contributions in comparing and contrasting with S. Langer’s philosophy of art appears. It, partially, raises also the next issue up for discussion about an aesthetic dimension operating in our mind, what both Langer and modern neuroscience(aesthetics) have paid attention to. Therefore, this paper will try to provide analyses of how seemingly different views (of various fields) proceed S. Langer’s philosophy of art forward towards (in)exhaustible perspective.

Linking the Thought of Susanne Langer with a Contemporary Psychoanalytic Understanding of Symbolism Including an Excursion into the World of Primary Significant Forms

Mätzler, Karl (*Psychoanalyst, independent researcher, Austria*)

In her writings, Susanne Langer repeatedly dealt with Freudian psychoanalysis. However, as far as I know, she never discussed its later further developments. This is astonishing insofar as the process of symbolization, at the latest from the 1950s, has played a central role in various movements of contemporary psychoanalysis, both in their fundamental understanding of the psyche and in questions of treatment technique. The post-Kleinian psychoanalysis around Wilfred Bion and Donald Meltzer in Great Britain even demonstrates clear indications of a direct influence of Langer's book *Philosophy in a New Key*. In my lecture I connect Langer's concept of symbolic transformation as a fundamental act in the development of the human mind with the contemporary psychoanalytic understanding of the psyche as a "symbol incubator". The question of the beginnings of symbolization arises for both Langer and psychoanalysis. In her later work, Langer formulated the emergence of the symbolic function as a dialectical process

between the projection of subjective feeling of physical states of tension onto the outside world and the subjectification of the protosymbolic object thus created. The psychoanalytic concept of "projective identification" deals with the dialectical relationship between the internal and external world in their various stages of development. I would like to show how, above all, the psychoanalytic research into autistic and psychotic personality disorders in children has led to a better understanding of the origins of the symbolic function. The first "primary symbolizations" could hardly be progressively transformed because the ability to symbolize in these children was poorly developed in the first months of life. Rather, they manifest in the form of puzzling fears or ostensibly bizarre behaviours. In the therapeutic treatment of such children, the developmental process of significant symbolic forms can be examined more closely in its earliest stages. This is discussed on the basis of specific case studies.

Meaning, Virtual Space, and Affect: Susanne Langer's Dream Text

Murray, Joddy (Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, USA)

Susanne Langer's appendix on film in *Feeling and Form* proposes that what was then a fairly recent mode becomes a "new poetic mode," one that has as its "primary illusion" a kind of "virtual history" built from non-discursive forms: kinematic text "creates a virtual present, an order of direct apparition" similar to dreams (411–12). Virtual space is important to Langer as a way to characterize how the plastic arts come to make meaning. By labeling film as a poetic mode, she sidesteps the plasticity of the virtual kinematic image, although her connection to the dream state is often noted by film critics and philosophers.⁸ For her part, though, Langer also attributes "immediacy and experience" as the most basic abstraction in filmic texts, topics covered more thoroughly later in this book.

Importantly, Langer focuses on virtual space as "the primary illusion of all plastic art" (71).

Though she characterizes virtual space as "only visual," it is clear that she may also imply that its primary characteristic is to be "intangible space," like the surface of a mirror (71). It is boundless space separate from the space we occupy. That is to say, Langer's virtual space is its own assemblage and as such has its own relation to time. It's not a division from practical space because it is completely independent of it. It is illusion, but its purpose is affective: "This [perceptual] form is a semblance of things, and the planes of vision, staggered one behind the other opposite the perceiving eye, are a semblance of space" because "[t]hey belong to that virtual space which is, I believe [...] created symbols for the expression of feeling and emotion (73). This virtual space, this dream text, exists primarily for, and is informed by, our affective world.

A Feeling For Biological Concepts

Nocek, Adam (Arizona State University, Phoenix, USA)

Susanne K. Langer's work on the philosophy of science has received precious little attention. This is not to say that her work on aesthetics and symbolism, for which she is better known, has gained the recognition it deserves either, though she has a modest following in American pragmatism, the philosophy of art and aesthetics, and to a lesser extent process philosophy. Nevertheless, her contribution to the philosophy of science, and the philosophy of biology in particular, has been met with little to no

recognition. This talk aims to find those elements in Langer's "*philosophical biology*" set out in her first volume of the Mind trilogy that are relevant to the biological sciences today.

To do so, the piece examines Langer's attempt to develop a concept of mind that can be understood in terms of the "highest physiological processes," and thus fully "rooted" in organic activities, without resorting to reductive materialism or metaphysical dualism. To avoid

these dead ends, which have plagued the history of philosophy and modern science for centuries, the talk pays special attention to Langer's use of art to construct an organic theory of mind, and in particular, examine how the symbolic function of art is essential to building concepts of biochemically rooted feeling/mind that do depend on psychic additions or theories of mechanism.

And while this may seem like a far cry from the data-intensive landscape of theoretical biology in the twenty-first century, the paper concludes by showing how Langer's arts-based method of biological research responds to problems in the conceptualization of organismic development that theoretical biologists are just beginning to grapple with.

A New Essay on Enlightenment: How Langer's Theory of Culture Contributes to a Long-Lived Discussion

Pollok, Anne (*Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Germany*)

In my paper, I discuss one idea that Langer had relatively late in her philosophical career: the stabilizing function of mind in culture.

Towards the concluding chapters in her magnum opus, *Mind*, Langer utilizes the results of her analysis concerning the difference between humans and animals to explain the human development in cultures. In contrast to animals, human beings exhibit not mere mentality, but mind in its more complex form. Through symbolic formation, memory, and imagination, human beings form their shared world and infuse it with meaning. Human beings are capable of planning, of overlooking and anticipating events in time, and develop a feeling for loss and longing. The givens of life: birth and death, become events infused with a fundamental significance; they can be understood by integrating them into a bigger picture. A lacking culture, so Langer, has lost its grip on its "life-symbols" and will hence be in danger of internal collapse or external influence. (Her example in *Mind* are the Incas and Aztecs in particular, both of which went down in inner turmoil, assisted by the Spanish Occupation).

In the background of this analysis stands Langer's differentiation of human forms of interaction into civilization and culture (see "Scientific Civilization and Cultural Crisis", in *Philosophical Sketches*, 1962). Ultimately, mind needs to be balanced between the pragmatic requirements of civilization and the humanistic requirements of culture. With this, Langer takes up an old discussion about the implementation of Enlightenment. In 1784, not only Immanuel Kant develops his famous definition of Enlightenment as the "human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority" (AA 8:35), but also his colleague Moses Mendelssohn subsumes 'enlightenment' as the counterpart to 'culture' which together form human 'Bildung' (self-formation, JA 6.1:115). Only in Bildung, theoretical finesse (enlightenment) and practical wisdom (culture) together form the whole human being in its existence as a thinking and feeling entity among a multitude of similar beings. How we navigate the development of our knowledge is then not purely reliant on our cognitive faculty of abstraction, but also on our emotive capacity for sharing thoughts and emotion. In a similar vein, Ernst Cassirer, one of Langer's philosophical

teachers, takes up this view on Enlightenment in his argument against the harmful developments in modern society, such as the dawning of Nazi ideology. (We could also argue that we are at a similar position today). With Langer, we are in a better position to explicate these ideas in contemporary terms. In my talk, I will discuss

the main functions of stabilization through ritual, artistic imagination, and contemplation which are supposed to bring together rational knowledge of our possibilities and limitations with a practically oriented means to involve the human emotive and intersubjective dimension.

On Aesthetic and Discursive Knowledge

Posch, Lennart (*Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, Germany*)

This paper discusses a Langerian/Whiteheadian theory of knowledge in complex enduring objects on the basis of Whitehead's theory of perception and symbolism. A combination of the Organismic Philosophy and Susanne Langer's semiotics is used to provide an understanding of aesthetic and intellectual knowledge and the relationship between the two. A close reading of Whitehead's symbol theory and a discussion of his modes of perception reveals the fundamentally aesthetic nature of human experience. And a critical review of Langer's semiotics allows to reframe her distinction between presentational and discursive symbolism in favor of a more nuanced understanding of human knowledge, which is argued to be the result of an integrative process of sense perception. Both, artistic appreciation and discursive understanding are closely tied together, mutually intensifying or inhibiting each other. Just like knowledge and consciousness, both eventually emerge in higher stages of concrescence within more

sophisticated nexūs and can be understood as complex forms of symbolic activity within an enduring entity. It must be first and foremost be clarified what is meant by knowledge in order to be able to talk about the relationship between aesthetic and discursive knowledge. Since understanding and knowledge are always understanding and knowledge of something, one has to point out what this something is. It will be argued, that symbols dominate the higher forms of human experience and that both, aesthetic and intellectual knowledge, are activities which emerge as a result of the symbolic functioning of the mind. The omnipresence of symbolism in human experience is a shared conviction of A.N. Whitehead and his student Susanne Langer. Although their main theoretical attention and elaboration took different directions, there are striking similarities between both of them. This might offer a comprehensive account on the nature and function of symbolism and its role in the construction of knowledge.

Thinking Non/Humanly

Priest, Eldritch (Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada)

Whenever Langer's name is invoked it's often with respect to her theory of symbolism and philosophy of art. And not without good reason. *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) and *Feeling and Form* (1953) are impressive works. They show an erudite and original thinker carrying out an assault on logocentrism in a way that not only presages the concerns that would preoccupy post-structuralist thinkers during the second half of the twentieth century, but also anticipates certain feminist interests in the importance of experience, the polyvocality of meaning, and the centrality of feeling in thought and life. But Langer's philosophy has always been a philosophy of mind. In fact, she herself made this clear when she undertook her decadeslong project to write the multi-volume *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*. In this brief essay I want to consider Langer's characterization as crucial to our understanding of her work, but not for the reasons one might think. As typically

understood, Langer's concern for the status of mind is a concern for the status of human being. For her, "mind" is the exclusive remit of homo sapiens. But to arrive at this position Langer has to conscript the nonhuman animal in a way that makes the latter integral to her thinking about mind. In other words, animals are foundational to Langer's philosophy of mind, and in this respect, there is something to be said about her untold contribution to thinking nonhuman mentality. However, her contribution has its limits and it is in the way Langer construes animal mentality as largely the feeling of actionable lures with practical effects that she overlooks the way non-human animals might be said to think when they play, when they exhibit an "impractical enthusiasm." But to grasp this it's first necessary to lay out Langer's reasoning that shows mind as an aspect of feeling to which human beings have developed a species defining attitude.

Langer and Goodman on Art as Symbolic System

Radjenović, Danka (Universität Koblenz Landau, Germany)

In my talk Susanne K. Langer's philosophy, as put forward in her work *Philosophy in a New Key*, is related to Nelson Goodman's theses from his book *Languages of Art*. Even though Goodman acknowledges Langer's overall contributions to symbol theory, he does not recognize her work as having any direct influence on his philosophy of art. There are, however, many parallels between the works of the two philosophers, as I will strive to show. At first I will focus on the

common intellectual traditions that they draw from – such as philosophy of language and the insights from Gestalt psychology. The purpose of this exploration is to show in what ways they appropriate these traditions and how they take them further in their respective works. In the second step my talk will focus on the core ideas of their philosophies of art, as presented in the two works mentioned. Both philosophers take up to draw an analogy between language and

art, as specific symbolic systems. For Langer this leads to the distinction that she introduces between discursive symbolism and presentational symbolism. While natural language is an example of discursive symbolism, the usage of presentational symbolism is what characterizes art, as is shown by Langer in detailed manner for the visual arts and music. Similar to Langer, Goodman starts off from the modes of symbolization characteristic of language, and

then goes on to show in what ways the modes of symbolization that pertain to art differ from those of language. One result of Goodman's complex analysis is an account of the way in which symbolization pertaining to art is related to emotions – a topic of great importance also to Langer. In the final part of my talk, I maintain that Langer's account offers a more sophisticated view of the relation between art and emotions, than Goodman's account.

Susanne K. Langer and Nise da Silveira: The Role of the Arts in the Composition of our Humanity

Salgado Gontijo, Clovis (*Faculdade Jesuíta de Filosofia e Teologia, Belo Horizonte, Brazil*)

This presentation will address the possible intersections between the work of two women thinkers: the American philosopher Susanne K. Langer (1895-1985) and the Brazilian psychiatrist Nise da Silveira (1905-1999). In addition to their common admiration for the thought of Ernst Cassirer, Langer and Silveira had, from an early age, an acute sensibility for the arts, a field that became a special focus of their work. While the former developed a comprehensive philosophy of art and an understanding of human mentality that included our specific capacity for formulating and perceiving art symbols, the latter developed an unusual approach to her psychiatric patients' inner world through art therapy.

As a reader of *Cassirer* and of *Philosophy in a New Key*, Silveira shares with Langer some perspectives and conclusions concerning the role, the features, and the possibilities of the arts, adopted and observed in her daily professional practice. Among the views held in common, the following points will be highlighted in this presentation: the anthropologic emphasis

on the study of the arts, the understanding of the arts as a relevant symbolic form, the cognitive dimension of the art creation and appreciation, the attribution of a rich significance to non-discursive symbols, the recognition of forms in the "felt life," the ineffability of the works of art, and finally the identification of symbols in art and of art symbols. In addition to these points of convergence, the presentation will mention eventual points of divergence between both authors, such as the self-expressive potential of the arts, admitted to some extent by Silveira, as well as the Jungian interpretation of the symbols in art, also endorsed by the Brazilian psychiatrist.

This analysis shows how Langer's thought could offer an enlarged comprehension of human reason, one capable of including and valuing those individuals who, despite their verbal impairment, can still make use of other refined symbolic forms. In addition, it will be shown how the dissolution of our capacity of symbolic transformation, caused by some types of atrocious psychiatric treatments, can lead into the

degradation of one's mind and dignity. Therefore, it will be possible to demonstrate how, on one hand, Langer's thought may lay a foundation

for Silveira's work, and how, on the other hand, many of Silveira's conclusions can confirm Langer's points of view.

From Symbolic Logic to a General Theory of Symbolic Forms: Susanne K. Langer's Use of Water for Illustrating Key Concepts

Scheierling, Susanne (*Universität Wien, Austria*)

Towards the end of the 1930s, Susanne K. Langer appears to have gone through a deep intellectual reorientation—transitioning from a phase with a focus on the latest strands in symbolic logic in *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic* (1937) to a phase dedicated to the development of a general theory of symbolic forms in *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942). This transition can be viewed as the deepening of a 'symbolic turn' that had begun with Ludwig Wittgenstein, Alfred North Whitehead and Ernst Cassirer whose works had inspired her.

In the earlier phase, Langer regarded symbolic logic as the central instrument of philosophy. She emphasizes the importance of "form" as an elemental concept; since the same thing can appear in different forms, it is the appreciation of the different forms as different forms of one thing that allows to relate them to each other. According to Langer, logic is the study of such forms, and the study of patterns. This notion opened the opportunity for applying logic beyond the narrow confines of mathematics and language.

In the later phase, Langer emphasized that symbolism underlies all human knowing and understanding, and should therefore be the central concern of philosophy. She abolished

the attempt of relying on symbolic logic, and presented a new theory of symbolic forms. Key concepts are "sign" and "symbol": the former indicates the existence of a thing or an event, whereas the latter is a vehicle for the conception of a thing or an event. A word, thing or event can be a sign or symbol and, in either function, meaning is conveyed. With a further distinction between discursive symbolization that arranges elements with stable meanings into a new meaning, and presentational symbolization that operates independently of elements with stable meanings, Langer is able to delineate the sciences from art, ritual, and myth.

It is remarkable that Langer uses water to illustrate key concepts in both phases, including "form," "signal" and "symbol"—with the deepening of the symbolic turn reflected in the choice of examples. This raises the question whether, analogously to Langer's use of the multifaceted aspects of water for conveying her philosophy, it would be conducive to derive insights from her evolving thinking on symbolism for a turn toward a more integrated approach to water.

Can Feelings have a Form? Susanne Langer's theory of Imagination and its Implications in the "Morphology of Feeling"

Tassinari, Filippo Marani (*Università degli studi di Milano Statale, Italy*)

Despite the obvious importance of imagination to any aesthetical theory of symbols, no systematic attempt has been made so far to offer a satisfying account of Langer's concept of imagination and its role both in artistic activity and aesthetic fruition. This is partly due to Langer's own lack of a systematic account on the functioning of this faculty, and partly to the focus of commentators on the more appealing and problematic notion of isomorphic symbol.

My aim is to reconstruct a coherent account for Langerian concept of aesthetic imagination both utilizing the abundant yet sparse references that Langer provides in her work and analyzing the theoretical framework in which she operates, namely the influence of Philippe and Whitehead. According to Langer, the activity of imagination manifests itself in the production of "significant forms"; which are intended as a plastic manifestation of mental states through the rational selection and organization of sensorial stimulus. This concept traces back to Vischer, according to whom the activity of phantasie expresses itself in modulation of formal patterns. Form is therefore intended as a device able to give structure to perceptual flow and mental activity, favoring the emergence of imaginative qualities ("illusions"). The Langerian "organic" conception of form as a living being, often criticized as naïve vitalism, is therefore to be intended as a condition for expressiveness, and not as a self-sufficient purpose of the form.

I argue that a stronger emphasis on the role of imagination allows to solve many problems related to so-called Langerian isomorphism. I

tackle a first set of criticisms that commentators have posed against it, particularly regarding the reduction of feeling to its pure temporal development (Piana, 1986, 1981) and the possibility itself of a "form" of feeling (Levinson, 1990). I respond that symbols, according to Lager, don't aim to reconstruct a fixed form of feeling, but rather to present a possible configuration of it through the arousal of imaginative associations that leave room to a high degree of subjectivation.

Secondly, I tackle another set of criticism that interpret Langerian symbols as purely denotative representations of feeling, therefore implying an intellectualistic interpretation of aesthetic fruition (Scruton, 1974). These critics don't account for the unconsummated nature of aesthetical symbols, giving a far stronger interpretation of Langerian isomorphism than Langer herself did, and don't account for the processual character of experience. As Braga (2019) claims, it is the imperfect and partial nature of the form/feeling isomorphism to enable a dynamic process of interpretation in which "the active role of imagination is fostered".

Giving primacy to the role of imagination, I hope to solve some problems of Langer's philosophy of arts and, possibly, to find a more convincing ground for an eventual "Langerian" philosophy of symbols.

Extending the Invitation of the International Center for Integrative Studies: Susanne K. Langer and Interdisciplinarity

van der Tuin, Iris (*Universiteit Utrecht, Netherlands*)

In 1972 (presumably) and in 1973 (confirmed) Susanne K. Langer was invited by the International Center for Integrative Studies (ICIS) to participate in what the Center called a 'multilogue'. Formally titled Forum for Correspondence and Contact and published by the Center from January 1968 onward, first on a bi-monthly basis and later annually, the multilogue materialized as a written exchange across the disciplines on broad topics. Langer was asked to contribute specifically, but not exclusively, to the theme of religion as one of the few women that ICIS had invited as part of an attempt to expand their program. (Most invited participants, on both the theme of religion and on the other themes of man, education, society, world affairs, and environment, were in fact male scholars or male authors based in the USA.) She declined for reasons of lack of time, writing on a note to probably the assistant who was supposed to type up the return letter: "altho people very interesting". The actual return letter dated March 16, 1973 explains her reasons more in full: "My work schedule on the third volume of *Mind* is extremely heavy, and I am no longer able to do any teaching, lecturing, or extra correspondence." This conference paper takes ICIS's invitation to contribute to interdisciplinary exchange as the starting point for a reflection on Langer's interdisciplinarity in both theoretical and in practical terms. Langer can be said to be one of the great "conceptual interdisciplinarians" before

that label even came up (cf. Latucca 2003). After all, the three hefty volumes of *Mind*, when taken together, form a more comprehensive understanding of 'mind' by using 'human feeling' as the common ground from which to integrate knowledge and insights from a great many disciplines and fields of study covering the full academic spectrum (cf. Repko & Szostak 2021). In the paper I will zoom in on the volumes of *Mind* specifically but also, and at the same time, on the material on 'integration' from Langer's card index system that I am in the process of researching extensively. On one of the undated cards, Langer writes: "A process of integration may be something we feel. This presupposes a previous differentiation into relatively distinct units. We feel the mutual touch of our hands when we fold them quite differently from the touch of objects when we explore their form + texture." A cross-examination of Langer's work and work published in the Forum is part of the paper as well.

NB: ICIS's letter is to be found in box 2 of the Susanne Langer Papers, 1895-1985 (MS Am 3110), Houghton Library, Harvard University. The card index system is stored in boxes 20-27.

Intellectual context: Abstract Forms and the Method of Logical Analysis

Verhaegh, Sander (Tilburg University, Netherlands)

Susanne Langer was a student at Radcliffe College between 1916 and 1926 – a highly transitional period in the history of American philosophy. Intellectual generalists such as William James, John Dewey, and Josiah Royce had dominated philosophical debates at the turn of the century but the academic landscape gradually started to shift in the years after World War I. Many scholars of the new generation adopted a more piecemeal approach to philosophy – solving clearly delineated, technical puzzles using the so-called “method of logical analysis” (Langer 1926, 2). Especially at Harvard, the intellectual climate rapidly changed. The department hired several philosophers who had contributed to the development of symbolic logic – H. M. Sheffer, C. I. Lewis, and A. N. Whitehead – and Harvard quickly began to be viewed as a central hub for analytic philosophy in the United States. A study of Harvard philosophy doctorates up until 1930 reveals that the proportion of dissertations on technical subjects (logic, methodology, epistemology, and philosophy of science) increased from 0% in the 1890s to a stunning 54,8% in the 1920s.

This paper will read Langer’s earliest work – her dissertation, her first articles, and *The Practice of Philosophy* – through the lens of this shifting academic environment. Though Harvard did not allow women to take its courses until 1943, Langer is one of the most significant fruits of this period. At Radcliffe, she was taught by Sheffer,

Lewis, and Whitehead and she was a strong advocate of the method of logical analysis. Unpublished lecture notes of Sheffer’s 1924 seminar on “philosophic methods” mention “Mrs. Langer’s dictum that the analytic is the only method in philosophy” and she explicitly adopted the approach in her dissertation “A Logical Analysis of Meaning.” By exploring the increased focus on the logical-analytic method and Langer’s attempts to expand the new approach to what she later called “non-discursive” symbolisms (1942, 75), I situate her publications in the intellectual context of the 1920s.

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Are There Inexpressive Artworks?

Windle, Peter (*University of Kent, Canterbury, UK*)

Susanne Langer's theory of art claims that artworks are symbols expressive of human feeling. However, contemporary aestheticians, such as Dominic Lopes, Jenefer Robinson and Gordon Graham, have claimed the existence of both inexpressive artworks and traditions which make inexpressiveness the ideal, a claim which, if true, invalidates Langer's theory. One issue with these contemporary claims is their lack of detail, either not naming particular artworks or not explaining the way in which the works are said to be inexpressive. This talk takes up these claims, looking at some likely candidates for inexpressive artworks and considering their status. In particular, the stripe paintings of Frank Stella and the sculptures of Carl Andre pose a challenge to the Langerean account due to being explicitly presented as literal presentations of their material constituents. A catalogue statement, written by Andre for Stella, claims that the stripe paintings are not symbols and, moreover, are not expressive. Sometimes known

as the literalists, Andre and Stella's work seems to provide a good opportunity to test Langer's claims – whilst Romantic work might be thought to fit Langer's ideas quite straightforwardly, if this literalist work associated with minimalism can also be understood within a Langerean framework then the theory might be thought to be more robust. This talk negotiates Stella and Andre's work through an approach that is informed by both art history and aesthetics, arguing that the work of the literalists can be incorporated under Langer's framework. I make the claim that Stella and Andre's works are best seen as being expressive of literality rather than as literal presentations of their materials. The talk ends with an argument that the burden of proof for producing inexpressive artworks, and explaining the sense in which they are inexpressive, falls on those who believe they exist, and that, in the absence of such evidence, Expressivist accounts ought to be more closely examined by contemporary aesthetics.

