

Susanne K. Langer

(20 December 1895 – 17 July 1985)

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BOOKS: *The Cruise of the Little Dipper and Other Fairy Tales*, illustrated by Helen Sewell (New York: Norcross, 1923; second edition, with new introduction by the author, Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphics Society, 1963);

The Practice of Philosophy (New York: Holt, 1930);

An Introduction to Symbolic Logic (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937; London: Allen & Unwin, 1937);

Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942; second edition, with new preface by the author, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1951; third edition, with new preface by the author, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957);

Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key (New York: Scribners, 1953; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953);

Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures (New York: Scribners, 1957; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957);

Philosophical Sketches (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962; London: Oxford University Press, 1962);

Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling, 3 volumes (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967–1982).

Edition: *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, abridged by Gary Van Den Heuvel, foreword by Arthur C. Danto (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

OTHER: Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, translated by Langer (New York: Harper, 1946);

“On Cassirer’s Theory of Language and Myth,” in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, The Library of Living Philosophers, volume 6 (Evanston, Ill.: Library of Living Philosophers, 1949), pp. 381–400;



Susanne K. Langer (photograph by Philip A. Biscuti; from the dust jacket for *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, volume 1, 1967)

Structure, Method, and Meaning: Essays in Honor of Henry M. Sheffer, edited by Langer, Paul Henle, and Horace M. Kallen (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1951);

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229;

“Form and Content: A Study in Paradox,” *Journal of
Philosophy*, 23 (1926): 435–438;

“A Logical Study of Verbs,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 24
(1927): 120–129;

“The Treadmill of Systematic Doubt,” *Journal of Philoso-
phy*, 26 (1929): 379–384;

“Facts: The Logical Perspectives of the World,” *Journal
of Philosophy*, 30 (1933): 178–187;

“On a Fallacy in ‘Scientific Fatalism,’” *International Jour-
nal of Ethics*, 46 (1936): 473–483;

“The Lord of Creation,” *Fortune*, 29 (January 1944):
127–154;

“Why Philosophy?” *Saturday Evening Post*, 234 (13 May
1961): 34–35, 54, 56;

“Henry M. Sheffer,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological
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Susanne K. Langer was one of the first women to pursue an academic career in philosophy in the United States and the first to receive both professional and popular recognition as an American philosopher. After writing one of the first introductory textbooks on symbolic logic, she turned her attention to a general study of symbolic forms—language, scientific knowledge, ritual, myth, and the arts—and their role in the formation of knowledge and experience under the influence of the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer. Her first book in that field, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*, was published in 1942 but became a best-seller when it was released in paperback six years later. It remains Langer’s best-known work, especially among readers outside professional philosophy.

Philosophy in a New Key included a chapter on music, which Langer developed into a systematic and comprehensive philosophy of art with the publication of *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key* in 1953, and within a few years she became known primarily as a philosopher of art. But she soon took on the more ambitious project of working out a naturalistic theory of mind to account for the uniquely human activities of language, dreaming, ritual, myth, and art within a broadly biological framework that she hoped would support an evolutionary account of the nature and origin of human mentality and human society. The results of this project are recorded in the three volumes of *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* (1967–1982), the last of which was published three years before her death. Although Langer considered this work her magnum opus, the book received a mixed critical response and failed to attract any significant attention

from professional philosophers in the years following its publication. There are indications, however, that Langer’s work may still have something valuable to contribute to the scientific study of consciousness, which has attracted a great deal of attention since the beginning of the 1990s in philosophy, psychology, and the biological sciences. Her theory of knowledge, for example, is based on what some researchers in cognitive science have described as the metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system.

Susanne Katherina Knauth was born in New York City on 20 December 1895 to Antonio Knauth, a prosperous corporation lawyer and partner in the banking firm of Knauth, Nachod and Kuehne, and Else M. Ulich Knauth. The parents had immigrated to the United States from Germany in the 1880s. Susanne Knauth had an older sister, Ilse; a younger sister, Ursula; and two younger brothers, Peter and Berthold. The father was an accomplished amateur musician who played both cello and piano; his friends included professional musicians, and he often joined them in informal musical performances in his home. Else Knauth, the daughter of a wealthy textile manufacturer, had strong literary interests. As a child Susanne Knauth learned to play the piano; wrote poetry and stories, which she illustrated; and put on plays with her brothers and sisters for family and friends. The family had a summer home, “Felseck,” on Lake George; because she spent hours exploring the nearby woods, Susanne was affectionately called “*Waldhexe*” (witch of the woods) by her family.

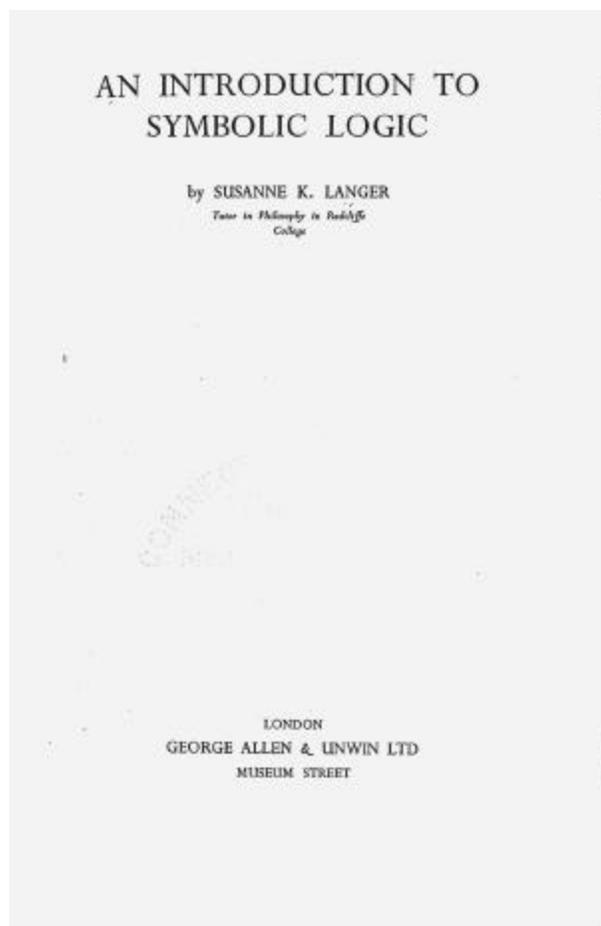
Knauth grew up speaking German at home and retained a slight German accent throughout her life. She attended the Veltin School for Girls, a private day school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where she learned to speak English and French. She also required frequent instruction at home as a result of chronic health problems stemming from cocaine poisoning she suffered in infancy when a pharmacist made an error in filling a prescription. As a girl she already showed serious philosophical interests, for she was reading Immanuel Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781; revised, 1787; translated as *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1855) in German—along with Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women; or, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy* (1868, 1869)—by the time she was twelve.

For reasons that are not clear, Knauth began her undergraduate studies relatively late: she entered Radcliffe College in the fall of 1916, when she was nearly twenty-one years old. In addition to her academic courses, she studied the cello and took courses in music theory and composition. She continued to play the cello throughout most of her life; it was one of the

few activities that she would allow to compete seriously with her work.

At Radcliffe, which had been chartered in 1894 to offer the equivalent of a Harvard University degree for women, Knauth came under the influence of the Harvard logician Henry M. Sheffer, who introduced her to the rapidly developing field of formal logic. Sheffer had inherited from his teacher, the American philosopher Josiah Royce, an expansive vision of logic as the science of order or of forms in general, which Royce had pursued as an alternative to the more restricted view held by many of his contemporaries—and most fully developed by the British philosophers Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead in their *Principia Mathematica* (1910–1913)—that treated logic as the study of the principles of inference. In “The Principles of Logic” (1913) Royce had defined logic as “the General Science of Order, the Theory of the Forms of any Orderly Realm of Objects, real or ideal,” and he believed that its study would lead to an understanding of more and more comprehensive systems of order that were prior to and inclusive of logic in the more restricted sense, and from which the more specialized order systems of the various branches of knowledge could be derived. Sheffer does not appear to have shared his teacher’s metaphysical interests, but he found in Royce’s logical investigations the means to pursue a study of relations, systems, and principles of order that went far beyond the confines of traditional logic. In Sheffer’s hands symbolic logic became a general theory of structure, form, or pattern; Whitehead later called this approach one of the great advances in modern logic. In an unpublished manuscript in Harvard’s Houghton Library, “Henry Sheffer’s Legacy to His Students,” Langer recalls that she was inspired by the power of Sheffer’s logical imagination “to see logic as a field for invention, and to learn that in this traditionally stiff and scholastic pursuit” there was “as much scope for originality as in metaphysics.” Under Sheffer’s tutelage she acquired confidence in her power to deal with difficult intellectual problems: “I remember the growing sense of mental power that came with following his expositions, expecting to understand, even before the end of a discourse, a whole intricate conceptual structure with the same clarity as its simplest initial statements.” Knauth’s abilities were evident to Sheffer, who wrote in a letter of recommendation on her graduation that she had “a firmer grasp of philosophy problems than many a Harvard Ph.D.”

Knauth received her B.A. in philosophy in 1920. On 3 September 1921 she married William L. Langer, who had been born in Boston to German immigrant parents and had received a master’s degree in history from Harvard in the spring. William Langer recalled in his autobiography, *In and Out of the Ivory Tower* (1977),



Dust jacket for Langer's 1937 work, one of the earliest textbooks on its subject (Connecticut College Library)

that when they had met during her senior year at Radcliffe, his future wife had impressed him as “by temperament a scholar, if there ever was one, deeply engrossed in philosophy and especially logic, as well as whole-heartedly devoted to music.” They had “many common interests,” he said, though he was “less addicted than she to long tramps in the woods and mountains.”

William had been awarded a fellowship to the University of Vienna to explore the alliances that had led up to World War I. The couple left for Europe soon after their wedding and spent the 1921–1922 academic year in Vienna. When they returned to Cambridge, William began writing his dissertation, and Susanne started graduate work in philosophy at Radcliffe. Their son Leonard Charles Rudolph Langer was born on 30 August 1922. In 1923 William received his doctorate from Harvard and joined the history department at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and Susanne published a book of her own fairy tales,

The Cruise of the Little Dipper and Other Fairy Tales, with illustrations by her childhood friend Helen Sewell.

Langer received her M.A. in philosophy from Radcliffe in June 1924 with a thesis titled “Eduard von Hartmann’s Notion of Unconscious Mind and Its Metaphysical Implications.” That same year Whitehead joined the Harvard philosophy department and became Langer’s dissertation adviser. Langer traveled the forty miles from Worcester to Cambridge by train each week to attend Whitehead’s graduate seminar on metaphysics and Sheffer’s lectures on modern logic; she met with Whitehead for an individual conference about once a month. On 6 May 1925 she gave birth to a second son, Bertrand Walter Langer. The following year she completed her dissertation, “A Logical Analysis of Meaning,” and was awarded the Ph.D. in philosophy from Radcliffe. That same year her first published article, “Confusion of Symbols and Confusion of Logical Types,” a criticism of the theory of types that Russell had developed in the first volume of the second edition of *Principia Mathematica* (1925), appeared in the British journal *Mind*, after Whitehead submitted it with his endorsement to the editor, G. E. Moore. Other articles on logic and epistemology, as well as many book reviews, soon followed in other journals.

In 1927 William Langer joined the history department at Harvard, and Susanne Langer became a part-time tutor in philosophy at Radcliffe. The Langers built a house at 72 Raymond Street in Cambridge; they had a live-in maid to help with the housework and care of the children. Susanne Langer’s *The Practice of Philosophy* appeared in 1930 with a prefatory note by Whitehead, who called it “an admirable exposition of the aims, methods, and actual achievements of philosophy.” William began to study the viola in 1930, and they reserved Friday evenings to play chamber music with friends or students they invited to dinner in their home. Throughout the 1930s the Langers spent their summers at the beach in Annisquam, a village on the western side of Cape Ann, about forty-five miles northeast of Boston.

In the mid 1930s Susanne Langer was one of the founders, along with the philosophers C. I. Lewis, Alonzo Church, W. V. Quine, and other pioneers in the development of formal logic in the United States, of the Association for Symbolic Logic. She served as a consulting editor for the association’s *Journal of Symbolic Logic* from its first issue in 1936 until the end of 1939, contributing regular reviews of the German, French, and Italian literature in the field. In 1937 she published her own *Introduction to Symbolic Logic*, one of the earliest textbooks on the subject; the third edition, published in 1953, was still in print in 2002.

Langer is best known for her contributions to the philosophy of culture, and in particular to the philosophy of art. Readers are often puzzled, therefore, by her early preoccupation with symbolic logic and her frequent use of logical concepts in her theory of artistic meaning, as when she calls art the “logical expression” of feelings or describes music as offering “a ‘logical picture’ of sentient, responsive life” in *Philosophy in a New Key*. Langer’s conception of logic, however, was the wide one inherited from Sheffer and modified in the light of her concern with the epistemological significance of the arts. In Langer’s view logic is not limited to the principles of inference but includes a study of the structures, forms, or patterns exhibited by objects, events, and processes of all kinds; the articulation of logical patterns in this wider sense can be achieved in any medium that can be manipulated to exhibit complex combinations of distinguishable elements—the tonal materials in a musical composition or the pigments in a painting as well as the words or mathematical symbols in a piece of discursive reasoning.

Langer follows Sheffer in using the term *form* in its most general sense to mean a complex relational structure. In *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic* she points out that in this wider sense, “anything may be said to have form that follows a pattern of any sort, exhibits order, internal connection.” On this view it is the business of logic, which is the science of forms or patterns, to study the “types and relations among abstracted forms, or concepts.” Everything exemplifies some form, and any given form might also be exemplified by some other thing. When two things are put together in the same way, they are “analogous”—they exemplify the same relational structure or logical form. “The value of analogy is that a thing which has a certain logical form may be *represented* by another which has the same structure, i.e. which is analogous to it.” When two things exhibit a common logical form, one may serve as a “logical picture” of the other. One may attend only to the form, pattern, configuration, or complex relational structure that various objects, events, or situations have in common, thereby “consciously, deliberately abstracting the form from all things which have it.” Scientific concepts “are forms which are exemplified in some general and important part of reality”; but beyond the patterns that are the objects of scientific study is a “great storehouse of forms which may be interpretable physically, psychically, or for any realm of experience whatever.” Logic is concerned with “abstracted patterns as such—the orders in which any things whatever may be arranged, the modes under which anything whatever may present itself to our understanding.” In this sense, “logic applies to everything in the world.” The study of logic, therefore, includes but is not restricted to the study of the

Susanne K. Langer
[Project for a philosophy of mind]

The aim of philosophy is to clarify, ~~and~~ develop, and interconnect our ideas, so that the ~~most~~ ^{great} general, ^{ones} and the ~~most special~~ small immediate ones shall somehow belong together, and no matter how far we carry reflection on any serious subject it shall not end in self-contradiction or ~~hopeless~~ ~~unpleasant~~ confusion.

The value of philosophy is ^{not} that it provides a comforting faith, but that it gives mental security, ~~confidence in one's own mind~~ and makes for mental freedom and daring.

Philosophy might be called the process of making sense out of ~~our own~~ ~~of our own~~ ~~of our own~~ experience of our own ideas. It deals with ideas, not facts. Facts cannot contradict each other; only our ~~conceptions of them, and the ways we~~ ~~ways of~~ ways of breaking them down and stating them, can be incoherent or contradictory. ~~Philosophy is the critique, and often the reconstruction, of~~ ~~basic ideas.~~ ~~Our way of~~ ~~of~~ Certain basic ideas ^{are} always implicit in our descriptions, and even our observations, of fact.

The direct purpose of philosophizing is not, ~~to achieve an ultimate world-view,~~ ~~to achieve an ultimate world-view,~~ to achieve an ultimate world-view, ^{that is} ~~not~~ a rare reward of ^{the} intellectual ^{life} ~~work~~, but to construe concepts in terms of which some important but elusive problems ~~problems~~ may be stated so they become ~~more~~ amenable to solution. Every philosophy has a particular orientation, because every philosophy starts from some central problem.

My own work started ^{from} ~~from~~ semantic problems, ~~that~~ ~~was~~ ~~not~~ ~~in~~ ~~my~~ ~~youth.~~ Training in logic and music, and a natural penchant for poetry, ^{convinced me} ~~and~~ ~~for~~ ~~the~~ ~~logical~~ ~~but~~ ~~scientific~~ made the contrast of two kinds of ~~thought and expression~~ ~~thought and expression~~ patent. ~~At the same time~~ ~~deepened~~ the realization that both discursive and artistic activity were essentially expressive of ideas. Ernst Cassirer's work offered a clue to their difference: a

Page from a manuscript by Langer, probably written around 1959 for a symposium. The title is not Langer's but was added by a person who was inventorying her papers. A typescript that is nearly identical to the manuscript is titled "Art, Feeling, and Mind." The work has not been published (Houghton Library, Harvard University).

forms of discourse—of logical inference and the structure of propositions—“logic” in the common understanding of the term.

In *The Practice of Philosophy* Langer uses these conceptions of logic and logical patterns as a basis for her theory of knowledge, at the center of which is the capacity of the human mind to apprehend forms or patterns in the material furnished by experience. “By the recognition of forms we find *analogies*, and come to understand one thing in terms of another.” Ideally, she believes, some symbolic medium could be devised for the apprehension of every sort of configuration that is the object of a possible experience. “There is no knowledge without form, and probably no form is unique; therefore all knowledge can find symbolic expression.” Although the elements of spoken and written language are the most familiar symbolic materials, the human mind is capable of apprehending configurations that are too intricate to be adequately expressed in the medium of language. In a painting, for example, “the balance of values, line and color and light, and . . . other elements, is so highly adjusted that no verbal proposition could hope to embody its pattern”; and the patterns found in music might correspond to “the endlessly intricate yet universal pattern of emotional life.” People who are responsive to the arts live “through the eye, the musical hearing, the bodily senses,” and “see more meaning in artistic wholes, i.e. in things, situations, feelings, etc., than they can ever find in propositions.” There is no reason, Langer argues, to suppose that the apprehension of artistic significance is any more “irrational” or “allogical” than the process of understanding propositional knowledge, provided that reason and logical insight are defined in the broadest possible sense as the appreciation of patterns. Langer’s belief that the general power of “seeing” one thing in terms of another is the key to understanding human mentality reappears as a central theme in her later writings and forms the basis for her claim that each of the products of human culture—language, myth, ritual, and the arts—makes a unique and indispensable contribution to the achievement of knowledge.

Toward the end of the 1930s strains began to appear in the Langers’ marriage. In the fall of 1939 William took a sabbatical and traveled alone to Mexico and Central America. In 1942 he requested a divorce, and Susanne did not contest it. She traveled to Reno with their son Bertrand that summer of 1942, spending the six weeks required to establish residency in Nevada to expedite the divorce, which became final in August.

The publication of *Philosophy in a New Key* that same year marked a major shift in Langer’s interests from formal logic to a more general theory of the human capacity for what she called “symbolic transfor-

mation,” a concept that was influenced by the German neo-Kantian philosopher Cassirer, whose three-volume *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (1923–1929) Langer had read in the 1920s, long before its translation into English as *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1953). With the development of the theory of symbolic transformation, Langer was able to treat the discursive uses of language as only one among a wide variety of cultural resources—including myth, ritual, and the arts—that were central to the constitution of human experience.

Cassirer’s work suggested that abstractions, and the patterns they make available to the human understanding, are dependent on the symbolic materials that are used to formulate them, and that the possibilities for the appreciation of patterns must include far more than what is available through the resources of language alone—even if language is broadly defined to include the notational systems of formal logic and mathematics. Under Cassirer’s influence, and in response to her own literary and artistic sensibilities, Langer expands the definitions of *knowledge* and *reason* in *Philosophy in a New Key* to encompass nondiscursive formulations of experience embodied in the spontaneous activity of dreaming and in the cultural productions of myth, ritual, and the arts.

Symbolic transformation is “a natural activity, a high form of nervous response” that is “characteristic of man among the animals” and is an expression of “the impulse toward symbolic formulation, expression, and understanding of experience” that ultimately serves the fundamental human need for orientation within the natural and social worlds that are the setting for human life. The human mind “is constantly carrying on a process of symbolic transformation of the experiential data that come to it,” causing it to be “a veritable fountain of more or less spontaneous ideas”; but only some of the products of the symbol-making brain figure in the discursive uses of language. There is also an enormous output of other symbolic materials that are constantly being produced but are put to different uses. These essentially nondiscursive formulations furnish the material for dreaming, myth, ritual, and the arts.

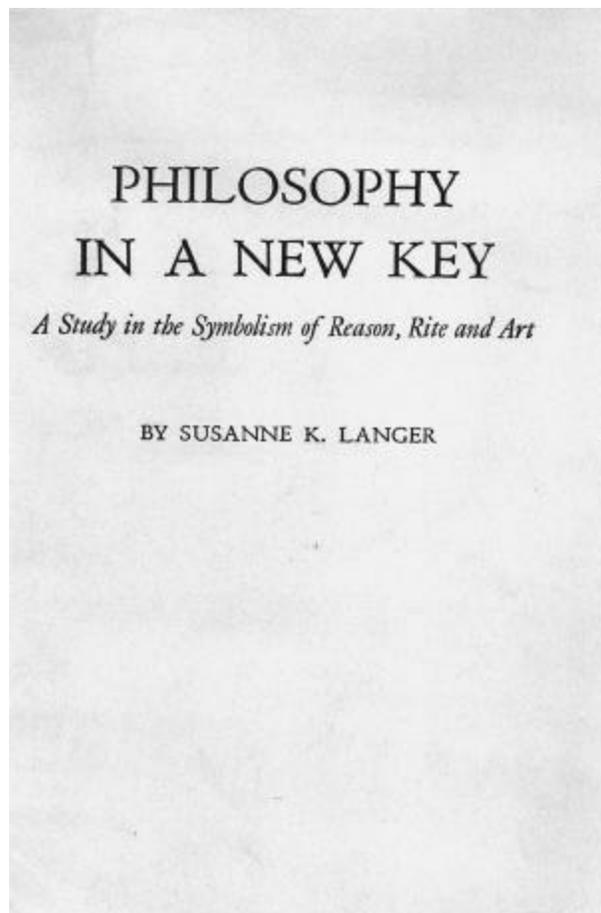
The most primitive expression of the fundamental human need for conception is found in the spontaneous activity of dreaming. Langer says that “the riotous symbolism of dreams” provides the most elementary conceptions of objects of desire and of the personal drama of their frustration and gratification. Behavioral acts, and the gestures that are their abbreviated forms, provide the symbolic materials for ritual, which formulates and records the responses of a human group to “the basic facts of human existence, the forces of generation and achievement and death.” The ultimate product of ritual is “a complex, permanent *attitude* . . . toward ‘first and last things’” that serves “man’s cease-

less quest for conception and orientation." A further domain for the production and elaboration of symbolic material is myth, which provides an "organized and permanent envisagement of a world-drama" and a "serious envisagement of its fundamental truths." Myth presents, "however metaphorically, a world-picture, an insight into life generally," and, therefore, it tends to become systematized. Because myth can be considered "the primitive phase of metaphysical thought, the first embodiment of general ideas," its thrust is ultimately philosophical; and together with ritual, myth is ultimately taken up in the service of religion, whose purpose is to provide "a gradual envisagement of the essential pattern of human life."

The remaining product of symbolic transformation that Langer considers in *Philosophy in a New Key* is music. She rejects theories that treat music as either a stimulus to feeling or a symptomatic expression of emotion: "Music is not self-expression, but formulation and representation of emotions, mood, mental tensions and resolutions—a 'logical picture' of sentient, responsive life," and therefore, like all symbolic presentations, a source of insight and understanding, albeit by means other than language. For "the limits of language are not the last limits of experience, and things inaccessible to language may have their own forms of conception, that is to say, their own symbolic devices." Music may be said, with certain reservations, to be "about" feeling; and the recognition that such nondiscursive forms may be "charged with logical possibilities of meaning . . . broadens our epistemology to the point of including not only the semantics of science, but a serious philosophy of art."

Philosophy in a New Key made publishing history. It became one of the first books written for a major academic press to be picked up by a mass-market publisher when Penguin Books released a thirty-five-cent paperback edition in 1948. By 1951 it had sold more than 110,000 copies, and by the mid-1980s sales had reached almost 450,000. The book was translated into eleven languages and used as a text for courses in a wide variety of academic disciplines. In 1971 Harvard University Press brought out its own paperback edition, which was still in print in 2002. Total sales for *Philosophy in a New Key*, in all of its editions, have probably been close to 570,000 copies.

At the end of the fall term of 1942 Langer resigned from her position at Radcliffe and took the first of a series of temporary appointments that supported her over the next twelve years. In the winter and spring terms of 1943 she taught in the philosophy department at the University of Delaware. In the fall of 1944 she moved to New York City, where she maintained an apartment at 112 East Thirty-first Street until



Dust jacket for Langer's best-known work, in which she develops her philosophy of symbolic forms. Published in 1942, it became a best-seller when it appeared in paperback six years later (Brucoli Clark Layman Archives).

1954. She was a lecturer in philosophy at the Dalton School in 1944–1945, a visiting assistant professor at New York University in 1945–1946, a lecturer in philosophy at Columbia University from 1945 to 1950, a lecturer on the teaching of English and foreign languages at Teachers College of Columbia University in 1949–1950, and a visiting professor at the New School of Social Research in 1950.

Many of the ideas in *Feeling and Form* were worked out during her years in New York City. Langer had met Cassirer in the winter of 1941, soon after his emigration from Sweden to assume a professorship at Yale. Recognizing a common ground between them, Cassirer took an interest in Langer's work, and they remained in close contact until his death in 1945, less than a year after he had moved to New York City to teach at Columbia University. For nearly four years beginning in 1946 Langer held a research grant from the Rockefeller Foundation that allowed her to devote much of her time to the research that went into the writing of

Feeling and Form. The grant also enabled her to hire a research assistant, Eugene T. Gadol, whose contribution she acknowledged in the introduction to the book.

Langer spent the winter term of 1951 at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and in the spring she taught philosophy and literature at Ohio State University. After taking a year off to finish *Feeling and Form*, she spent the academic year 1952–1953 in the philosophy department at the University of Washington in Seattle. After another break she taught at the University of Michigan during the spring of 1954. In the fall of that year she accepted her first permanent academic appointment, in the philosophy department at Connecticut College. Although Langer received a grant two years later that freed her from her teaching responsibilities, she remained affiliated with the department. In 1962 she assumed the title Professor of Philosophy Emeritus and Research Scholar.

With the publication in 1953 of *Feeling and Form*, a systematic and comprehensive theory of the arts, Langer achieved widespread recognition in the field of aesthetics. Her mature philosophy of art is developed in that book, *Problems of Art* (1957), and *Philosophical Sketches* (1962). The expanded concept of logical form, which she had acquired from Sheffer and transformed under Cassirer's influence into a general concept of symbolic form, is further developed in these works as the concept of "expressive form." The analogy of form, or correspondence of configuration between relational structures, which she had first proposed as the fundamental pattern of all meaning situations in her dissertation and had continued to regard as the indispensable condition for symbolization, remains the basis for what she defines as the "expressiveness" of works of art. And the theory that she proposed in *Philosophy in a New Key* to explain the significance of music is generalized to apply to all the arts, which she defines in *Philosophical Sketches* to include "painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, literature, drama, and film."

In *Philosophical Sketches* Langer defines works of art as "forms expressive of human feeling" and defines *form* to include "a permanent form like a building or a vase or a picture, or a transient, dynamic form like a melody or a dance, or even a form given to imagination, like the passage of purely imaginary, apparent events that constitutes a literary work." A work of art is a complex relational structure—that is, as she writes in *Feeling and Form*, "a much more intricate thing than we usually think of as a form, because it involves *all* the relationships of its elements to one another, all similarities and differences of quality, not only geometric or other familiar relations." In *Problems of Art* she uses the example of a painting, in which "a visible, individual form" is

produced by "the interaction of colors, lines, surfaces, lights and shadows."

As a physical object, the work of art is just an arrangement of materials—pigments on a canvas in the case of a painting, gestures and other movements in a dance, words in a literary work, or tonal materials in a musical composition. What emerges from the arrangement of colors, gestures, words, or tones, however, is a complex array of qualities that seems to be charged with life and feeling, an object that appears to have a kind of substantial reality, although it is given primarily to only one of the senses or even to the imagination alone. Such an object Langer calls a "virtual entity"—it exists only for perception or imagination, like a rainbow or an image in a mirror, and plays no ordinary part in the physical world as common objects do.

Langer notes that what is most compelling about works of art is often described, by critics and artists alike, with metaphors drawn from the realm of life and feeling. "Every artist," she observes in *Problems of Art*, "finds 'life,' 'vitality,' or 'livingness' in a good work of art. He refers to the 'spirit' of a picture, not meaning the spirit in which it was painted, but its own quality; and his first task is to 'animate' his canvas. An unsuccessful work is 'dead.' Even a fairly good one may have 'dead spots.'" Similarly, in a musical composition "melodies move and harmonies grow and rhythms prevail, with the logic of an organic living structure." In music one hears, with apparent immediacy, "a flow of life, feeling, and emotion in audible passage." The virtual image created by the arrangement of tonal materials in music is a powerful illusion of movement that seems in some way to be charged with life and feeling.

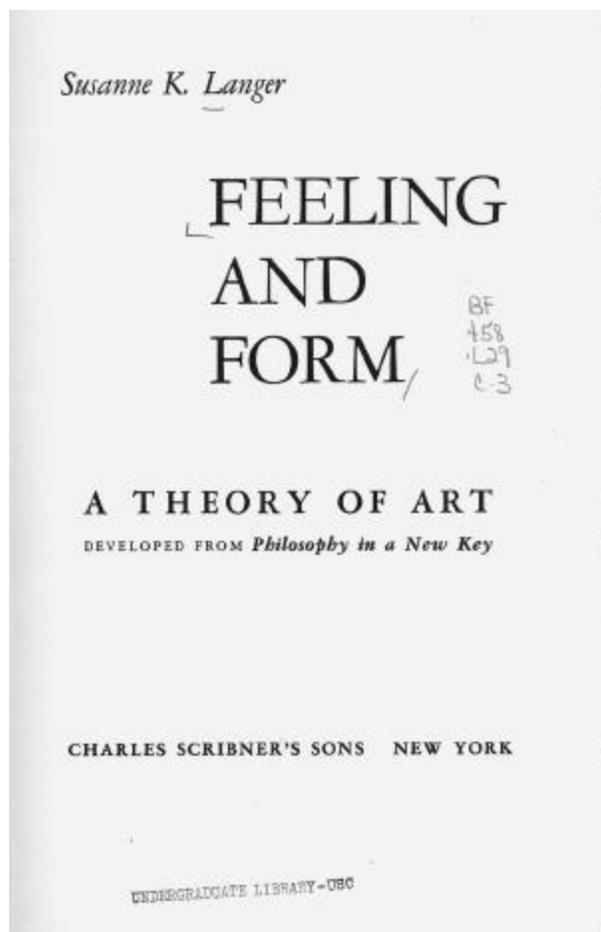
In Langer's theory a work of art formulates an idea of feeling, which Langer defines quite broadly in *Problems of Art* as "inner life," "subjective reality," or "consciousness." "Feeling" for Langer is thus a generic term for conscious experiences, or what William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) calls "mental states at large, irrespective of their kind." What a work of art expresses, or formulates for one's conception, is not actual feeling, she argues in *Feeling and Form*, "but ideas of feeling; as language does not express actual things and events but ideas about them." Art serves an indispensable function in human life, because language is poorly suited to articulate what she calls in *Problems of Art* "the subjective aspect of experience, the direct feeling of it." In *Philosophical Sketches* she argues that the "inward life" of human beings "is something language as such—as discursive symbolism—cannot render." What defies verbal expression, however, "may nevertheless be known—objectively set forth, publicly known" by means of other symbolic materials. The products of artistic creation, she argues in *Problems of*

Art, are “congruent with the dynamic forms of our direct sensuous, mental, and emotional life; works of art are projections of ‘felt life,’ as Henry James called it, into spatial, temporal, and poetic structures. They are images of feeling, that formulate it for our cognition.”

Langer’s interests had begun to shift significantly within a few years of the publication of *Feeling and Form*, as some of her correspondence indicates. She began to suspect connections between the studies in the philosophy of art that had occupied her for more than a decade and problems in the nature and evolution of the mind; and although she was nearly sixty years old, she began reading widely in evolutionary biology, developmental biology, and the neurosciences and audited courses from her colleagues in the biology department at Connecticut College.

Probably in the early 1950s Langer had met the man who played a major role in supporting the culminating work of her philosophical career. Edgar Kaufmann Jr. was the heir to a Pittsburgh department-store fortune who became one of the country’s leading scholars of architecture and design, as well as an art collector and philanthropist. Kaufmann, who never attended college, spent several years studying painting in Europe before returning to the United States, where, at twenty-four, he became an apprentice to the architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Kaufmann’s father met Wright during his son’s apprenticeship, and in 1935 he commissioned Wright to build the house that came to be known as Fallingwater in the woods near Bear Run, Pennsylvania. In 1946 Kaufmann Jr. settled in New York City and became director of the Museum of Modern Art’s department of industrial design and later an adjunct professor of architecture and art history at Columbia University. In 1956 Kaufmann, who by then had become one of Langer’s closest friends and an admirer of her work, arranged for her to become the recipient of a grant from the philanthropic foundation that had been endowed by his father. The grant, which supported her for the next twenty-five years, enabled her to give up teaching and devote all of her time to research and writing; and her last work, the three volumes of *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, began to take shape.

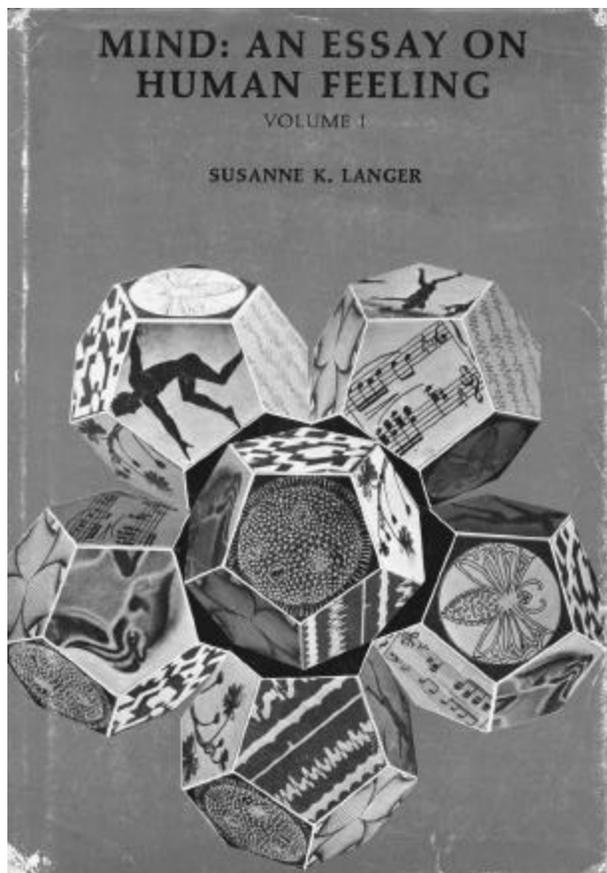
By the time Langer wrote the introductory essay to *Philosophical Sketches*, the overall plan of *Mind* and her reasons for undertaking the project had fallen into place. Consciousness, or subjectivity, she argues in that essay, is the proper subject matter of psychology. The difficulties of dealing with mental phenomena, however, had forced psychology to divert its attention to other things, such as overt behavior or the activity of the brain and nervous system, which were thought to be more amenable to scientific investigation. Although



Title page for the 1953 work in which Langer presents her systematic and comprehensive aesthetic theory (Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina)

“the most pressing need of our day,” she writes, is “to bring mental phenomena into the compass of natural fact,” psychology has been unable to deal conceptually with its own essential subject matter.

In the introduction to the first volume of *Mind* Langer argues that “our basic philosophical concepts are inadequate to the problems of life and mind in nature,” including what she considers “the central problem of . . . the nature and origin of the veritable gulf that divides human from animal mentality, in a perfectly continuous course of development of life on earth that has no breaks.” The most serious problem facing a naturalistic study of the mind, Langer believes, is the lack of suitable images of the objects of biology and psychology. Images borrowed from the physical sciences, although suitable to the realm of inorganic nature, do “not fit the forms of life very far above the level of their organic chemistry.” Works of art, however, can provide “images of the forms of feeling” that “can rise to the presentation of all aspects



Dust jacket for the first volume (1967) of the work Langer considered her magnum opus, in which she attempted to elaborate a naturalistic theory of mind to account for the uniquely human activities of language, dreaming, ritual, myth, and art. The third and final volume was published in 1982, three years before her death (Bruccoli Clark Layman Archives).

of mind and human personality” and are, therefore, an invaluable source of insight into the dynamics of subjective experience that can serve as a measure of the adequacy of theories and “a touchstone to test the scope of our intellectual constructions.”

One of the outstanding intellectual challenges of the late twentieth century, in Langer’s view, is the construction of “a conceptual framework for the empirical study of mind” that will be grounded in the biological sciences. Given the right working concepts, she believes, the study of mind should lead “down into biological structure and process . . . and upward to the purely human sphere known as ‘culture.’” Drawing on Whitehead’s metaphysics and on her extensive reading in the biological sciences, Langer offers a reconstruction of the conceptual framework of biological thought that she hopes will provide the basis for an evolutionary

account of the nature and origin of human mentality and human society that will, in turn, support advances in psychology, the social sciences, and the humanities, including ethics and political philosophy.

The critical response to the publication of the first volume of *Mind* was mixed. Reviewers were unable to agree on what Langer was trying to do. Richard M. Liddy, writing in the *International Philosophical Quarterly* (1970) saw the work as evidence of Langer’s commitment to the reduction of psychology and the biological sciences to physics, while an unidentified reviewer for the *Yale Review* (Summer 1968) saw it as the work of a romantic holist with a commitment to “an arbitrary indeterminism” and “a philosophical antagonism to scientific analysis.”

The work received its most sympathetic reading from some members of the scientific community. The reviewer for *Science* (29 September 1967), Robert B. MacLeod, saw the book as exhibiting “the kind of careful and reflective observation which the scientist admires,” while calling at the same time for “a radically revised conception of the nature of the reality which all sciences are trying to describe.” Langer was invited by the biologist C. H. Waddington to join fifteen other biologists, physicists, and mathematicians in an interdisciplinary symposium on the theoretical foundations of biology held in 1968 in Bellagio, Italy.

Langer herself understood *Mind* primarily as a contribution to psychology and the biological sciences. In a review of the first volume of *Mind* in the *Saturday Review* (15 July 1967) the English philosopher Sir Herbert Read referred to the book as “a metaphysical system”; and according to an unpublished manuscript by her friend Wes Wehr, Langer was incensed. “I should think,” she told him, “that by now Sir Herbert would know the difference between ‘a metaphysical system’ and a scientific line of inquiry.”

In the second volume of *Mind*, published in 1972, Langer develops a theory of instinct and argues for a radical departure—which she calls “the great shift”—in the evolution of the human mind from the instinctual basis of animal behavior. Work on the third volume went even more slowly, as Langer struggled with diabetes and failing eyesight. After laboring for several years to develop a theory of the evolution of human society, she realized that she would be unable to write the chapters on epistemology with which she had planned to conclude the work. With the help of a research assistant, Linda Legassie, Langer managed to write the essay dealing with “the new intellectual standard, the concept of fact, and its impact on a human age which has but lately opened with the brilliant rise of mathematics” and the physical sciences that serves as the final chapter of the book. The Kaufmann Foundation continued to support

her until 1982, when the final volume appeared. Susanne K. Langer died on 17 July 1985 at her home in Old Lyme, Connecticut. Her ashes were scattered in the woods near the cabin in the Catskills that had been her favorite retreat for many years.

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A collection of Susanne K. Langer's manuscripts and correspondence is in the Houghton Library of Harvard University.