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Film as a Dream of the Modern Man: Interpretation of Susanne Langer's "Note on the Film"

Abstract:

The paper concerns a "Note on the Film," a short appendix to *Feeling and Form* by Susanne Langer. The interpretation interweaves the Note into a larger context of Langer's philosophical work – primarily in terms of her understanding of the dream as a lower symbolic form, to which the film is compared – as well as in terms of her account of literary arts among which, she suggests, cinema belongs. Langer's references to Sergei Eisenstein are discussed and their respective concepts of cinema are compared. An implicit political dimension of Langer's writing on film is emphasized by relating her critique of modern civilization, as sketched in the last chapter of *Philosophy in a New Key*, to her film aesthetics. At the end of the paper I compare my interpretation of the Note with the one that was offered by Trisha Curran.

Keywords:

Susanne Langer, Sergei Eisenstein, film aesthetics, symbol, dream, modernity

In the short "Note on the Film," published as an Appendix to the book *Feeling and Form*,¹ Susanne Langer extensively refers to the writings of Sergei Eisenstein, who was three years her junior.² In Eisenstein's thoughts

1) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, Appendix.

2) The first version of the paper was written for the occasion of the International Philosophy of Culture Week, which took place in Warsaw in June 2019. I would like to thank the organizers – Randall Auxier, Przemysław Bursztyka, Eli Kramer and Marcin Rychter – for organizing this inspiring encounter of scholars, and one of the speakers at the event, Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, whose deep

she recognizes a similarity to her own understanding of the symbolic nature of art and, specifically, to what she calls a dream-like character of motion pictures. The detected affinity – strengthened by, quite unusually for Langer, lack of distance and direct criticism³ – may seem quite surprising since, at first sight, the differences prevail. While Eisenstein, famously, promoted montage as the key element of film language, Langer's interest in the art of film concentrates on the work of camera. Moreover, Eisenstein's film work is hardly separable from the political context, whereas for Langer the film – as every art – is an autonomous sphere. The aim of this essay is to find out how close relation between Langer and Eisenstein one can sustain and where do their respective lines of thought, potentially, intersect.

The idea that a man is essentially a symbolic creature, which Langer expresses throughout her former book; *Philosophy in a New Key*,⁴ has far-reaching consequences, one of them being a claim that the arts – as an intentional and self-conscious symbol-making activity – have power to deeply change the world one lives in. The idea that a man can be transformed via the arts also deeply resonates with Sergei Eisenstein's artistic hopes and commitments.

Although Langer's philosophical work is if not completely apolitical, then far less so than famous Eisenstein revolutionary manifestos – such as *Strike* (1925) or *Battleship Potemkin* (1926); one can register a tone of uneasiness at the modern society in her writing. She considers the society dangerously out of balance in terms of what precisely represents its most powerful achievement – the highly sophisticated use of symbols. The childhood of mankind; which she localizes in myth, rite, and dream; is gone, but the victory of reason, however successful it is in terms of power and knowledge, is to be short-lived since the man, bereft of dreams, would eventually lose the ability to think creatively. I will argue that the worry about the state of current society that Susanne Langer outlines in the final chapter of *Philosophy in a New Key* is, in a way, revisited in the appendix to *Feeling and Form*, where a remedy to the modern malaise is found.

In what follows, I first introduce some of the themes Langer develops in *Philosophy in a New Key*; especially those related to dreaming as a lower symbolic form. I introduce the distinction between sign-perception and symbol-perception and outline Langer's critique of modern civilization as lacking resources for symbol-perception. In the second part of the paper, I try to unpack the, rather inchoate, "Note on the Film" – a short essay of barely twenty paragraphs – in which Langer alludes to similarities between the experience of film and that of dreaming. Similarly to Langer I then, in the third part, use Eisenstein's writing as a mirror of her own approach. Differently from her, however, I also look at some of Eisenstein's thoughts that she has left unreflected; I am interested in similarities as well as differences between them. In the last part of the paper, I get back to her criticism of modernity and pose film as one of the means of making the modern man dream again. Finally, I compare my interpretation of Langer's Note to the first (and only) systematic study of Langer's film aesthetics by Trisha Curran.

acquaintance with Susanne Langer's philosophy I was happy to benefit from during personal conversations. Her newly published book *The Philosophy of Susanne Langer. Embodied Meaning in Logic, Art and Feeling* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020) would have been much more present in this essay, if I had chance to read it earlier than in the last stage of writing this paper. I am also grateful to the anonymous referees for *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* for their valuable comments and suggestions.

3) In her books, Langer often extensively quotes and interprets sources coming from various fields, including logic, philosophy, biology, and neuroscience; her writing style is dialogic. Rather than to corroborate her own view, she, however, usually looks for inadequacies and inaccuracies in the ideas of her dialogic partners.

4) Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, originally published in 1942. Hereafter referred to as PNK with page number(s).

I.

A great part of the *Philosophy in a New Key* is devoted to a vindication of the idea of the primitivity of symbolization. The human mind has a “profoundly symbolific character” (PNK, 127) and, unavoidably, resorts to a “perceiving as” mode as its basis. Man in Langer’s understanding has to relate things, abstract forms, and see connections. There is no primitive, animal-like stage; reality gives itself as a layered network of connections from the very beginning even prior to language in a phylogenetic or ontogenetic sense. There are no “sense-data”; no primary materials out of which the edification of human knowledge can be built and raised. At the beginning of the human mind there are, rather, “pure” symbols – synthetic and integral repositories of an open set of potential meanings. Rather than referring to a concrete entity in the world, their role consists in marking certain configurations as meaningful.

One of the simplest possible, thoroughly private materializations of what Langer calls a “symbolic instinct” is to be found in dreaming. This is how she describes the experience of dreaming:

In our most primitive presentations – the metaphorical imagery of dreams – it is the symbols, not its meaning, that seems to command our emotions. We do not know it as a symbol. In dream-experience we very often find some fairly commonplace object – a tree, a fish, a pointed head, a staircase – fraught with intense value or inspiring the greatest terror. We cannot tell what makes the thing so important. It simply seems to be so in the dream. (PNK, 131)

The perceptual experience that one encounters in dreams is thus purely symbolic; the objects one perceives in dreams are embodied values. This is what makes dreams so close to ritualistic and superstitious relationships to the world; they all belong to what she calls “the lower forms of symbolistic thinking” (PNK, 114) for which it is characteristic that things one encounters are enhanced, so to speak, with a radiating meaningfulness. While superstition and ritual are the ways of perceiving the world that are typically tied to “primitive societies,” dreaming seems to be the last available form of lower symbolistic thinking for the man who lives in a modern, technologically advanced, disenchanting civilization in which the only faith to sustain is “blind faith in the conquest of nature through science.”⁵

In a real life of the modern man a perceptual experience known from dreams does occur less often, although, as Langer notes, there are certain objects that do commonly induce it, such as a cross or a ship (PNK, 239–40). While dream-perception is replete with symbols, the ordinary perceptual experience is merged with what Langer calls a sign-perception. “Signs” are defined by Langer to mean signals or stimuli and, in the context of perception, can be understood as reaction prompts.⁶ This is even more emphasized in the perception of the modern man, whose thinking is almost purely instrumental.

5) This is how Langer and her co-author characterize an intellectual atmosphere of the United States before the World War II: “This unreflecting mood of what one can only call ‘wordly faith’ – blind faith in the conquest of nature through science – was even more marked in America than Europe ... partly because we had no established philosophical tradition to hold the balance against so much practical activity.” And they continue: “The blind faith in science has ended in disillusion and no faith at all. ... [H]owever great [nation’s] scientific achievements, the greatest are always for purposes of destruction.” Susanne Langer and Eugene T. Gadol, “The Deepening Mind: A Half-Century of American Philosophy”, *American Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1950): 118–32. Quoted from Chaplin, *The Philosophy of Susanne Langer*, 22.

6) I find the idea that perception is predominantly sign-perception strikingly similar to J. J. Gibson’s view of perception in terms of what he calls “affordances”. Cf. Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances.” For more on difference of signs and symbols, see Chaplin, “Langer’s Logic of Signs and Symbols.”

With some approximation, we can thus draw a continuum between a “sign-perception” and a “symbol-perception.” The pure sign-perception is considered by Langer mainly in relation to animals who are in her terms capable of thinking in these fairly limited ways; that is, in a short horizon of immediate affordances and dangers. Symbol-perception, on the other hand, is a peculiarly human way of understanding the world. Dreams represent symbol-perception at its extreme (or, more precisely, one form of it), while everyday practically-oriented perception is closer to the sign pole of the continuum, though not equivalent to it.⁷

Before I can proceed, one more conceptual clarification is necessary. In Langer’s terminology, there are two main types of symbolism which are characteristic for all kinds of human mental activities (from dreaming and believing, to perceiving, thinking, and art creation) – presentational and discursive symbolism. It is one of the key conceptual distinctions she coins and, for reasons of space, it cannot be properly discussed in this paper.⁸ Suffice it to say that while discursive symbolism, with its discrete elements and composite structure, is tailored “to describe the external, physical and empirically observable world;”⁹ presentational symbolism with its synthetical nature participates in formulation, and thus contributes to the development of the experience.¹⁰ The most refined form of discursive symbolism is to be found in the sciences, while the arts, according to Langer, incorporate presentational symbolism at its best.

For Langer, it is of utter importance to argue that both types of symbolism, that is discursive and presentational, are equal in their epistemological status and the good society acknowledges that. She claims that the arts are on the same footing with the sciences when it comes to what is to be counted as knowledge. Equality in importance does not mean that they do not, actually, compete for their status in society. The ideal society, so to speak, would hold both symbolisms as equal and help them to flourish with the same care. The society Langer lived in was, however, far from the ideal; it was marked by an acute dominance of discursive symbolism over presentational.¹¹

Both discursive and presentational symbolisms are primarily composed of symbols, not signs. Thus science, which is the most elaborated form of discursive symbolism, would not have been possible if a man’s interest in the world had been limited to its practical dimension and searched in nature “signs for behavior” only. Science is not, according to Langer, born from a practical need but rather from “the restless desire of an ever-imaginative mind to exploit the possibilities of the factual world as a field for constructive thought” (PNK, 229). It grew out of symbol-perception, rather than sign-perception.

However, once science had matured, the symbolic character and purely intellectual orientation of it had been corrupted by the technical progress which it had, almost coincidentally, brought about. This observation is elaborated, and the consequences are pursued, in the last chapter of *Philosophy in a New Key* titled “The Fabric of Meaning.” In the modern age the symbols of science are increasingly treated as signs, albeit very complicated ones; only their practical dimension is sought after. This conception of science and its dominion over presentational symbolisms eventually infiltrated all kinds of human mental engagements with the world. Ever

7) As Langer says: “If we have a literal conception of a house, we cannot merely think of a house, but *know one when we see it*; for a sensory sign stimulating practical action also answers to the image with which we think” (PNK, 225). Cf. Chaplin, *Philosophy of Susanne Langer*, 179.

8) An excellent discussion of discursive and non-discursive symbolisms can be found in *ibid.*, 167–173.

9) In this sense, presentational symbolism is “foundational to the development of the mind.” *Ibid.*, 170. More on formulative role of symbols in *ibid.*, 173–179.

10) *Ibid.*, 171.

11) The opposite disequilibrium, represented by the society which would foreground presentational symbolism at the expense of the discursive one, is to be found in “primitive societies”. Langer is quite careful in not looking down at these societies; in her analysis, hers is similarly flawed, though affected by the opposite problem (PNK, 131).

more complicated web of practically oriented knowledge and domination of discursive symbolism have caused a dangerous imbalance in the mental life of society – with severe consequences. To repeat, it is not simply the growth of scientific knowledge per se that Langer regards with suspicion but rather a certain attitude towards knowledge; a specific, highly instrumentalized conception of knowledge.

The original source of all knowledge, that is the ability to see connections and understand the reality as charged with meanings, has dried out. The modern man, “that mighty and rather terrible figure” (PNK, 232), becomes an unimportant part of his (or her) own system of facts and truths. “All old symbols are gone, and thousands of average lives offer no new materials to a creative imagination” (PNK, 245), Langer complains.

Most men never see the goods they produce, but stand by a traveling band and turn a million identical passing screws or close a million identical passing wrappers in a succession of hours, days, years. This sort of activity is too poor, too empty, for even the most ingenious mind to invest it with symbolic content. ... Most people have no home that is a symbol of their childhood. ... Many no longer know the language that was once their mother-tongue. (PNK, 245)

Since its reality has been relieved of symbols, such a society, Langer further argues, is liable to yield to cheap mysticism, nationalism, and propaganda. She suggestively describes the loss of orientation in the world of neutral facts and the anxiety as its natural follow-up. The *loose, half-baked ideas*, which the modern man often finds so seductive, are a poor replacement for the world replete with symbols which would provide him (or her) with a safe repository for his (or her) experience. The modern man, so to speak, is a man without dreams.

II.

Film, as Susanne Langer states in the appendix to *Feeling and Form* titled “A Note on the Film,” is derived from a dream. This is not the first time that she connects dreaming with creating expressive symbolic forms. In the previously published *Philosophy in a New Key*, the dream was characterized as providing material out of which two mutually different traditions arose. One resulting in supernatural narratives, such as fairy-tales or ghost stories, fills the public imagination with fragments that can be used to satisfy private fantasies of a wide scope; the other, call it the myth, has transformed the private material into the realm which is, eventually, inaccessible from a solely private perspective. Both the myth and the fairy-tale thus use the same symbolic material – primitive symbolism of human dreams – however, they build distinct worlds; the world built of private, although quite usual and thus shared fantasies on the one hand, and the world that transcends the individual and poses one to the perspective of a non-human subject on the other (PNK, Chapter 7).

The relation of the cinema and the dream Langer highlights in the Note is, however, different. Dreaming does not provide cinema with a material in a sense of the content; it is not a repository of images and structures of relationships available to filmmakers. What makes a film close to a dream is a mode of presentation, which – in films – is dream-like. This claim needs to be read against a backdrop of the theory of art developed in *Feeling and Form*.

According to Langer, film is one of the poetic arts. In the book, to which the “Note on the Film” is appended, she distinguishes two basic poetic arts – literature and drama. As poetic arts, they share what she calls the primary illusion – a virtual life – but, as different types of poetic arts, they deal with virtual life in

different perspectives. Whereas narrative (that is, fiction or literature) is essentially related to the past – the experience it re-presents has a past character. The drama presents its events in a future-oriented way; all that is happening or occurring on stage is related to the future, it has an air of the destiny. Drama and literature may thus contain the same characters, setting, and plot, and the same narrative content, so to speak; however, the content has quite different features in both of them. In the former case, the events narrated have past character even if set in the narrative present, the events are understood as consequences of the past, and the past itself is what the narration is about, so to speak. In drama, on the other hand, the mode of presentation inscribes the events a prescient character; they include signs of the events-to-come, and the focal point of drama thus resides in the future.

When Langer says that the film has a dream-like character, she speaks about the sense of the present that one encounters in a dream. There is no sense of the past, no sense of the future; a man is right now right here. Recall her description of the experience of dreaming referred to above: one is immersed in the world, which is thoroughly meaningful, but it does not refer to any specific meaning. Commonplace objects are, as she says, “fraught with intense value or inspiring the greatest terror,” but these emotions are not related to any past or future (un)happiness or a threat – we are not afraid of those objects because of what they have caused or what they might cause. “It is the symbol, not its meaning, that seems to command our emotions” (PNK, 131). In a film, one can encounter the same content as in a piece of drama or literature, but the film art form makes it seen anew: without a relation to the past, without a relation to future. The focal point of the film, what the film *is about*, is the present.

As a consequence, the film presents objects, as Langer says, as “equidistant” from the eye. This is difficult to understand since first, the camera, can of course present things in detail or in full frame as being literally more or less proximate to a viewer. Moreover, there are necessarily inner narrative emphases in the story of a film – some of the characters have leading roles, while others figure as supporting actors; some of the objects serve as props, while the other ones take up only a circumstantial part of the *mise-en-scene*. Thus, literally as well as metaphorically some elements of the film are closer to the eye whereas others are further away, at the periphery of vision or at the horizon. How thus can the claim about the equidistant character of the objects presented in the film be taken seriously?

In Langer’s understanding of cinema, however, no roles are minor and no part of the diegetic world is accidental. By saying that film presents its objects as equidistant from the eye Langer means that each and every part of the work is, potentially, meaningful – there are no insignificant elements. Everything bears a connection to everything else; everything is necessarily there, open to analysis, and meaningfully present. Films are thus, like dreams, replete with symbols.

The film experience is similar to the dream experience; in both of them, commonplace objects are “fraught with intense value and inspiring the greatest terror” (PNK, 131). The film offers the modern man a tool which he or she can use to carry out the symbolic function which the world they live in no longer sustains. In the context of the modern society, the ability to enrich the lived present by the virtual dimension might be an especially welcome consequence of the cinematic work of art.

III.

In the middle of the Note, Langer turns to Sergei Eisenstein. The common ground with Eisenstein she shares lies in the way they both understand the nature of the film image. Although based on pictorial representations, the film is essentially pictureless, as it is put by Eisenstein (and seconded by Langer); the film image is “objec-

tively unrepresentable – a new idea, a new conception, a new image.”¹² It has a power to “assimilate the most diverse materials, and transform them into non-pictorial elements.”¹³

This idea is, once again, difficult to grasp since it seems obvious that films are composed of individual frames and these, literally, are depictions, that is, images. But what Eisenstein makes clear in his writing is that what he as a director attempts at creating – via individual frames and their juxtapositions – is an image without picture; an impossible image, so to speak – an image of thought. Such an image is, as he says, a “psychological representation,”¹⁴ existing only in the mind of a spectator. And that is what the film as an art is built of; the basic structural element is, in Langer’s vocabulary, “virtual.” It transcends its original material; it “hovers,” as she says with Eisenstein, “in the mind of the spectator.”¹⁵

Eisenstein would thus also share Langer’s categorization of the film under the heading of the poetic arts. In spite of the fact that the literal material of film is an image and the leading sense modality used in its reception is sight, the film does not belong to the visual arts. The form that lies closest to the film is, according to Eisenstein, poetry. The cinematic structure in a compressed form is well captured by haiku – which is even more cinematic, Eisenstein says, than Japanese cinema of his days.¹⁶

Surprisingly, in spite of the fact that almost half of the “Note on the Film” is devoted to sympathetic references to Eisenstein’s insights, Langer does not mention *montage* which is the main subject matter of the essay she quotes, as well as the key cinematographic element in Eisenstein’s view. Instead, as she declares at the outset of the Note, it is camera movement that she regards as a basic cinematographic principle.

Such an omission is instructive since it suggests that all the mentioned similarities in their thinking about cinema notwithstanding, Langer and Eisenstein have, eventually, different foci. Langer is not interested in particular films but rather in the deep structure of the film as an art form – in its virtual dimension. Her claim that the world which the film represents is dream-like does not pertain to individual films and cannot be used to assess them as more or less cinematic (as Eisenstein did when he, ironically, glossed over Japanese cinema as less cinematic than Japanese haiku). Cinema in its virtual form represents an egocentric materialization of symbolic instinct which in real cinema can be developed in different ways.

Eisenstein, on the other hand, describes (and in his films illustrates) a specific development of the dream-like material Langer identifies in cinema. Interestingly enough, the elaboration he offers in the films he made has taken both of the forms mentioned above in the context of Langer’s description of a dream as a material for another symbolic form. Dream, Langer suggests in the seventh chapter of *Philosophy in a New Key*, can evolve into supernatural narratives such as fairy-tales, which aim at satisfying private fantasies, as well as into the myth which is saturated by impersonal, or even cosmological, values. In Eisenstein’s film work, and particularly in the way he uses montage, one can encounter both types of dream development.

In the former case, Eisenstein uses film montage to materialize *private* fantasies. The best example it to be found in his first film fragment (which was screened as a part of his theatre production of Ostrovskij’s play *Enough Stupidity of Every Wise Man*), *Glumov’s Diary*. In this work, montage is used to represent – literally

12) Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, 8. In a later essay, while speaking about hieroglyphs, which Eisenstein compares to the basic structural principle of the film image, he says: “By the combination of two ‘depictables’ is achieved the representation of something that is graphically undepictable.” Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 30.

13) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 414. Interestingly enough, several paragraphs ahead of the quoted sentence, she uses a similar wording with just slight differences saying that cinema “seems to be omnivorous, able to assimilate the most diverse materials and turn them into elements of its own”; see *ibid.*, 412.

14) Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 32.

15) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 414.

16) *Ibid.*

objectify – the secret objects of one’s dreams. The power of film, which Eisenstein satirically comments on in the fragment, is to give one what he or she desires.



Stills from *Glumov's Diary* (Wikimedia Commons)

In most of his films, however, Eisenstein uses montage in an opposite way; its main power consists in precisely *not* giving one what they want. The spectator is supposed to fill in the missing part. This, Eisenstein believes, can help one to leave his or her perspective and focus, instead, on the meaning itself – enter the world of ideas. Using Langer’s terminology, the dreaming that Eisenstein orchestrates in most of his moving pictures is supposed to build up a myth rather than a satisfying image of a fantasy we happen to share.

IV.

The main thread of this paper went from the last chapter of *Philosophy in a New Key* to the appendix of *Feeling and Form*. The crisis of modernity that Langer described almost eighty years ago was, in her analysis, characterized by the dominance of one symbolic activity over the other, discursive symbolism over

the presentational one. I argued that for Langer, the arts and the art of film above all may be understood as playing an important role in renovating non-discursive thinking and thus balancing out the deflected mental life of society.

In my reading of the “Note on the Film” I put an emphasis on two related ideas: first, Langer’s claim that cinema is like a dream, and second, her categorization of the film under the heading of poetic arts. Looking back to her description of a dream experience in *Philosophy in a New Key*, I argued that the mode of experience one is familiar with from dreaming is related to lower symbolic forms that the thought of a man took in “primitive” societies. I called this mode a “symbol-perception” and juxtaposed it to “sign-perception”; a purely instrumental “survival” mode that Langer associates with animals’ behavior.

Film is one of the poetic arts, Langer further claims in the Note. Such a claim makes film an important addition to the two poetic arts that Langer devotes much more attention to in her book: the art of literature, which is characteristic by past-oriented narration, and the art of drama, whose narration is future-oriented. Film is the missing third one, so to speak, since its characteristic dream-like mode of presentation makes one rooted in the present; “[T]he dream mode in an endless now.”¹⁷ I suggested that symbol-perception (as opposed to sign-perception) is similarly present-oriented in its understanding the experienced world as meaningful without assigning it any concrete meaning.

In the last chapter of *Philosophy in a New Key*, Langer describes her own modern society in terms of crisis. This crisis can be analyzed in two steps: First, science as the most refined form a discursive symbolism has become not only the predominant epistemic relationship to the world, but it has also soaked up an instrumental orientation towards an effective, powerful, and profitable engagement with the world. Second, the conception of knowledge as instrumentalized science, materialized in technology, has eventually infiltrated all mental attitudes a man takes up to the world as well as to himself (or herself). As a consequence, the opportunities for symbol-perception, as well as the very capacity for it, have been weakened.

I argued that Langer’s analysis of moving pictures as “dreamed reality” on the screen, which can “move forward and backward because it is really an eternal and ubiquitous virtual present,”¹⁸ makes film a particularly fitting tool for an initiation and preservation of symbol-perception in the modern man. It is important to say that this is not Langer’s explicit claim; she does not return to her critique of modern civilization, she outlined in 1942, while talking about what she, somewhat surprisingly, called “a new art” eleven years later. Her only suggestion in this context consists in her alluding to Sergei Eisenstein, who famously used his film to modify and liven up the thought of spectators. I argued, nevertheless, that there are more differences than similarities between their respective views of cinema.

Finally, let me compare my interpretation of the Note to the only work on Langer’s inchoate conception of cinema that is known to me: *A New Note on the Film* by Trisha Curran. Although my claim that the film is an apt means of making a modern man dream again can be criticized as too far-fetched and, ultimately, unverifiable, it seems to have one clear advantage. My interpretation is more faithful to Langer’s “Note on the Film” than Curran’s thorough reconstruction of Langerian film aesthetics.

In the book, Curran argues against Langer’s claim that films’ mode of presentation is the same as the one known from dreams:

Film images bear as little relation to dream images as stream of consciousness writing bears to stream of consciousness mental activity. Our dreams are no more Citizen Kane than our idle

17) Ibid., 415.

18) Ibid.

thought processes are Mrs. Dalloway. But our dreams are ours. We possess them, and we analyze them. The films we view are separate from us. We go to a film. Our subconscious is not in control, thus we view things we would never dream; our inner censor is free to concede to the Motion Picture Association.¹⁹

Although seemingly convincing, this critique is, in my view, based on a false presupposition. Curran conceives the dream as a private affair whose material is subject to psychoanalysis. For Langer, however, the dream is rather a lower symbolic form characteristic for a specific perceptual, emotional, and cognitive engagement with the world. I emphasized that the simile between dreams and films that Langer suggested did not concern the content of dreams but their form.

“She had seen far too few films,” Curran explains in her New Note: “Thus her observation that ‘the immediacy of everything in a dream is the same for film.’” And, Curran continues, “nor did [Langer] comprehend the nature of filmic space.”²⁰ Finally, Curran argues, film is not a poetic art at all, as Langer naively suggested, but rather a cinematic art. Thus basically all Langer’s claims about film, one by one, are turned down. Curran’s aim was to write a *new* note on the film and that is why, I suppose, she first needed to discard the old one.

Contrary to Trisha Curran, my intention in this paper is not to write a new note on the film that would replace the old one but rather to flesh the old one out and reinvigorate it by the means available in Langer’s philosophical work.

19) Curran, *A New Note on the Film*, 31.

20) *Ibid.*

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