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Susanne K. Langer and the Definition of Art

Abstract:

This essay aims to analyze the conception of a work of art in the thought of Susanne K. Langer. The author offers us a definition of art, grounded on the idea that art is the “creation of symbolic forms of human feeling”. This thesis is, in turn, constructed from a robust theory of the symbolic function of the human mind.

Keywords:

Susanne K. Langer, art, symbol, sign, expressiveness

Susanne K. Langer’s proposal about “what art is” is unfortunately not well-known. The reason for this neglect is primarily related to the impact of Nelson Goodman’s symbolic theory, mainly when the author argued that we could not say what art is, but only answer the question: “when is art?” In this article, we will show that Langer presents a definition of art that cannot be ignored in the context of the contemporary discussion of this philosophical problem.

The concept of the symbol as the hermeneutical key to the understanding of art was one of the most fruitful tendencies in aesthetic studies. The American philosopher Susanne K. Langer (1895–1985) was undoubtedly one of the pioneers on this view. She develops contributions from both philosophy (Kant, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Cassirer) and cultural anthropology (Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict). After all, art is part of culture, and we hardly understand the cultural experience of humanity without the presence of “patterns” or, if one prefers, the

presence of the “symbolic function.” This intuition was first formulated by Benedict¹ but was clarified by Joy Hendry. As this last anthropologist has shown us, the concept of culture gains clarity if we see it as an expression of the categorization of reality through the human mind.² However, of course, a symbolic theory of art has to clarify the specific way symbols function in artistic creation; otherwise, we are thinking about culture as a whole and not about the nature of the work of art.

The roots of the symbolic theory of art are romantic, and they trace back to Schelling’s courses on the philosophy of art in the early nineteenth century. The main idea was to see in the symbol the point of fusion and identity between signification and sensibility, as indeed one German word for symbol – “*Sinnbild*” – suggests. The term “*der Sinn*” indicates the idea of “meaning” while “*das Bild*” translates the notion of “image”. Now, the work of art arose precisely at this point of coincidence between signification and the sensible image, showing an alternative to the dualistic thought of contraposition between the subject and the object. Hence in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling does not hesitate to point to art as a model of philosophical reflection and the very idea of philosophy as a system.³ The work of art would unconsciously consecrate the conscious desideratum of philosophy itself.

In the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (3, vols., 1923–29), Cassirer adopted some of Schelling’s insights, particularly the critique of allegorical interpretations of cultural productions. However, his analysis focused on issues relating to language, myth, and science. The key idea was to see the symbol as a function of the human mind and allow it to overcome the often linear stimulus-response scheme just as it transcended the rationalist view of human nature.

After Cassirer, it became common to present the human being as an *animal symbolicum*.

Man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. ... No longer can man confront reality immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face. Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as the man’s symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium. ... Reason is a very inadequate term with which to comprehend the forms of man’s cultural life in all their richness and variety. But all these forms are symbolic forms. Hence, instead of defining man as an *animal rationale*, we should define him as an *animal symbolicum*. By so doing we can designate his specific difference, and we can understand the new way open to man – the way to civilization.⁴

Susanne Langer, the author of *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942), widely applied this new concept of the symbol to the artistic experience. The “new key” is, of course, the symbol.

1) “A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action.” Ruth Benedict *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), 46.

2) Joy Hendry, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds* (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 18–20.

3) Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. by Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 230. German edition: *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (Stuttgarter und Augsburg: J.G. Cotta’scher Verlag, 1859), 626.

4) Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 43–44.

In the fundamental notion of symbolization – mystical, practical, or mathematical, it makes no difference – we have the keynote of all humanistic problems. In it lies a new conception of “mentality,” that may illumine questions of life and consciousness, instead of obscuring them as traditional “scientific methods” have done. If it is indeed a generative idea, it will beget tangible methods of its own, to free the deadlocked paradoxes of mind and body, reason and impulse, autonomy and law, and will overcome the checkmated arguments of an earlier age by discarding their very idiom and shaping their equivalents in more significant phrase. The philosophical study of symbols is not a technique borrowed from other disciplines, not even from mathematics; it has arisen in the fields that the great advance of learning has left fallow. Perhaps it holds the seed of a new intellectual harvest, to be reaped in the next season of the human understanding.⁵

As in Cassirer, the applicability of the symbol does not exhaust itself in a single sphere, but it encompasses the fundamental questions of philosophical thought. However, the originality of this author is, in our view, to have grasped in the symbol the crucial concept for understanding artistic creativity.

In philosophical theories about art, we can surmise two core attitudes: the first considers the possibility of defining what a work of art is; the second refuses a strict definition, arguing that the maximum we can achieve is to detect a familiar similarity between artistic objects.

Langer subscribes to those who consider that it is possible to define what art is, that is, it is part of that circle of authors for whom it is feasible to find common traits in works of art. Several theories have been proposed such as those of Leo Tolstoy, Clive Bell, Benedetto Croce, R. G. Collingwood or Arthur C. Danto.⁶ However, within this posture, it is possible, in turn, to decipher two very distinct positions that either take up the defense of, or profess unwillingness to defend the intrinsic properties perceptible in works of art, that is properties that transform a mere artefact into a work of art. Here, we offer the principle of distinction between institutional theories, that is cultural, centered on extrinsic properties, and those which consider it possible to discover, in works of art, elements that are common to it. In the context of institutional theories, the most relevant proposal is George Dickie.⁷ We will argue in this essay that Susanne Langer considers it possible to define the concept of art through the notion of the symbol, without, however, appealing to extrinsic properties.

Langer defines the nature of the work of art in her 1953 book, *Feeling and Form*:

I will make bold to offer a definition of art, which serves to distinguish “work of art” from anything else in the world, and at the same time to show why, and how, a utilitarian object may also be a work of art.... Here is the tentative of definition ...: Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling.⁸

5) Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 19–20.

6) For example, consider these short passages: “On this capacity of people to be infected by the feelings of other people, the activity of art is based.” (Leo Tolstoy *What is Art?* trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky [London: Penguin 1995], 38); “‘Significant Form’ is the one quality common to all works of visual art.” (Clive Bell, *Art* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1949], 8); “L’art è intuizione” [“art is intuition”]. (Benedetto Croce, *Breviario di estetica – Aesthetica in nuce* [Milano: Adelphi Ed., 1990], 35); “He [the artist] is trying to find out what these emotions are.” (Collingwood *The Principles of Art* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938], 111); “Works of art are embodied meanings.” (Arthur C. Danto, *What Art Is* [New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2013], 37).

7) George Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics: an Analytic Approach* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 82–93.

8) Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in New Key* (London/Oxford: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 40.

The idea that works of art are inscribed in the sphere of the symbolic universe is by no means uncontroversial. This is so by three orders of reason: (1) some naive interpreters may think that the definition of art in symbolic terms privileges a specific aesthetic school, known as Symbolism; (2) on the other hand, some will say it is overly representational because it indicates a conception of the artistic work as pointing to a significance of the work extrinsic to it – for example, when we maintain that a specific painting of Munch, known as *The Scream*, symbolizes the existential situation of the human being; (3) such a definition seems to point to a minimization of art concerning the fundamental symbols of a culture.

Langer's conception of the symbol, and she sees this idea as the master tool of a new philosophical view of the world, has little to do with these three perspectives. For Langer, *any work of art is symbolic*, and as such, "Symbolism" as a school of art is only a stylistic example among many.⁹ To be a work of art it is not necessary to reflect the symbolist ideology, for instance the idea that melancholy, the "black sun," using the famous expression of Julia Kristeva, hides the longing of pure and inaccessible beauty.¹⁰

Nor does it seem correct to say that the concept of a symbol in Langer is grounded in a concept of art based on interpretations extrinsic to works. Indeed, one of Langer's main challenges lies in showing how the symbolic universe does not convey a conception based on the idea that, for example, a work of art is the sign of something else.

Finally, for this New York philosopher of German origin, *culture itself* is symbolic, the specific symbols of a given culture being merely the reflection of this broader horizon. We must not, therefore, misread Langer's central idea as an interpretation of the cultural symbols present in works of art. Langer does something completely different. Her account analyses the different types of symbols, distinguishing them from the signs, trying to understand how they work in the different planes of expression of the human mind.

Symbols are not substantial entities for Langer, but instead are operative functions that reshape experience. As Cassirer tells us, symbols have only functional value insofar as they belong to the human universe of meaning: "Signals and symbols belong to two different universes of discourse: a signal is a part of the physical world of being, and a symbol is a part of the human world of meaning. ... Symbols have only a functional value."¹¹

Langer deepens this intuition. More than a distinction between the physical (signals) and semantic (symbols) universes of meaning, what is at issue is how the symbol works beyond any sign, whether material or not. It is essential to distinguish clearly two concepts: sign and symbol. Actually, the sign does not constitute the universal principle of all language, in her view. So for her, it was crucial to distinguish between sign from the symbol.

According to Langer, a sign is anything that indicates the presence of something or the imminence of any event.

All intelligent animals use signs; so do we. To them as well as to us sounds and smells and motions are signs of food, danger, the presence of other beings, or of rain or storm. ... We use signs just as animals, though with considerably more elaboration. We stop at red lights and go on green; we answer calls and bells, watch the sky for coming storms, read trouble or promise or anger in each other's eyes. ... There are signs of the weather, signs of danger, signs of future good or evil, signs of what the past has been. In every case, a sign is closely bound up with something to be noted or expected in lively experience. It is always a part of the situation to which it refers, although the reference may be remote in space and time. In so far as we are led to note or expect the signified

9) See: Susanne K. Langer, "The Art Symbol and the Symbol in Art," 1957.

10) Julia Kristeva *Soleil noir. Dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

11) Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, 51.

event we are making correct use of a sign. This is the essence of rational behavior, which animals show in varying degrees.¹²

So, we can maintain that the world of signs translates the whole set of symptoms that give rise to a coherent response on our part. Now, the universe of symbols, present in both language and art, reveals, according to Langer, not so much a response to a situation but rather presupposes a mental image of a specific state of things.

Let us look at the question of language. The semiotic school – as in Saussure’s view – usually understands a sign as an arbitrary relation between a significant imprint, for instance a physical marking, and the meaningful unity associated with it, that is, the intelligible interpretation of it. According to Langer, the semiotic proposal is seductive but erroneous. Seductive because it seems to point to an integrative view of all forms of language, regardless of the specific nature of each. Verbal language becomes one of the many forms of communication, and in this view, the root common to all of them is the presence of the sign. This idea was Saussure’s initial project, which consisted of integration of linguistic theory into a broader universe, which the author calls the “general science of signs.” Now a sign is no more than the result of an act of interpretation, that is, a sign consists in the apprehension, according to a specific code of intelligibility, of a physical stimulus. Langer does not dispute the existence of this dimension but denies that the whole universe of meaning is semiotic.

Within the realm of meaning Langer detects two quite distinct functions. The first of these, as we have seen, is the sign defined as the indication or reference of “existence – past, present or future – of a thing or event.” However, can this schema be extended to the whole sphere of signification? The semiotics community is convinced that is possible, but Langer is not.

One can thus observe Langer’s counter-argument. The same sound can work either as a sign or as a symbol.

If I say: “Napoleon,” you do not bow to the conqueror of Europe as though I had introduced him, but merely think of him. If I mention a Mr. Smith of our common acquaintance, you may be led to tell me something about him “behind his back,” which is just what you would *not* do in his presence. Thus the symbol for Mr. Smith – his name – may very well initiate an act appropriate peculiarly to his absence. Raised eyebrows and a look at the door, interpreted as a sign that he is coming, would stop you in the midst of your narrative. ... In talking about things we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves. If you say “James” to a dog whose master bears that name, the dog will interpret the sound as a sign, and look for James. Say it to a person who knows someone called thus, and he will ask: “What about James?”¹³

As a symbol, “the name evokes the *conception* of a certain man so called, and prepares the mind for further conceptions in which the notion of that man figures; therefore the human being naturally asks: ‘What about James?’”¹⁴

Langer then establishes the distinction between two large sets of symbols, the discursive symbols and the presentational symbols. As she points out, this intuition has its root in Wittgenstein’s work, *Tractatus*, where the Austrian philosopher establishes the difference between what can be said and shown.¹⁵

12) Susanne K. Langer, “Language and Thought,” in *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers*, ed. Paul Eschholz, Alfred Rosa, and Virginia Clark (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 96.

13) Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 48–50.

14) *Ibid.*, 50.

15) *Ibid.*, 63.

For there is an unexplored possibility of genuine semantic beyond the limits of discursive language. This logical “beyond,” which Wittgenstein calls the “unspeakable,” both Russell and Carnap regard as the sphere-of subjective experience, emotion, feeling, and wish, from which only symptoms come to us in the form of metaphysical and artistic fancies. The study of such products they relegate to psychology, not semantics. And here is the point of my radical divergence from them.¹⁶

This distinction is crucial to our purpose since art is essentially the irruption of presentational symbols. Discursive symbols are proper to language while the presentational symbols are the expression of art itself. “Words have a linear, discrete, successive order; they are strung one after another like beads on a rosary.”¹⁷

Using a metaphor, Langer compares language, that is, discursive symbolization, to a wardrobe of clothes in which each piece of clothing, used sequentially, is placed side by side on the clothesline. Artistic symbols – which are presentational symbols – imply a remarkable complexity of patterns, but are apprehended as an organic whole and not so much as a series.

The meanings given through language are successively understood, and gathered into a whole by the process called discourse; the meanings of all other symbolic elements that compose a larger, articulate symbol are understood only through the meaning of the whole, through their relations within the total structure. Their very functioning as symbols depends on the fact that they are involved in a simultaneous, integral presentation. This kind of semantic may be called “presentational symbolism,” to characterize its essential distinction from discursive symbolism, or “language” proper.¹⁸

To exemplify this new type of non-discursive symbols – presentational symbols – Langer refers to the examples of painting and photography. The *Gestalt* of an image becomes crucial in capturing the global meaning of elements that are presented in it. The idea that there is a dictionary of painting in which it is possible to detect the equivalent of “words” for each detail in the image is no longer viable. However, there is a meaning that is given to us by the *Gestalt*.

This idea is evident in “significant forms” – Langer accepts Clive Bell’s terminology, despite some reservations about his thesis – significant forms associated with the plastic arts.

Visual forms – lines, colors, proportions, etc. – are just as capable of articulation, i.e. of complex combination, as words. But the laws that govern this sort of articulation are altogether different from the laws of syntax that govern language. The most radical difference is that visual forms are not discursive. They do not present their constituents successively, but simultaneously, so the relations determining a visual structure are grasped in one act of vision.¹⁹

Following Louis A. Reid’s interpretation of Clive Bell’s and Roger Fry’s “significant form,”²⁰ she maintains that an image or painting has *expressiveness*. Hence, Langer will pose this question:

16) Ibid.,70.

17) Ibid.,50.

18) Ibid.,78–79.

19) Ibid.,77.

20) Louis A. Reid, *A Study in Aesthetics* (London: The Macmillan Co, 1931) 43/197.

But if forms in and of themselves be significant, and indeed must be so to be classed as artistic, then certainly the kind of significance that belongs to them constitutes a very special problem in semantics. What is artistic significance? What sort of meaning do “expressive forms” express?²¹

How, then, should we interpret the problem of expressiveness in music, for example (so often presented by Langer as the paradigm of all artistic creation)? As we know music do not express any particular idea, but has in itself “*expressiveness*.” Although music is an art of the organization of time, it doesn’t follow that is a version of discursive symbolism. If a presentational symbol is a *Gestalt*, we have support for the idea that music creates *expressiveness* through the movement of sounds inside a whole that has meaning by itself. “What, then, is the essence of *all* music? The creation of virtual time, and its complete determination by the movement of audible forms.”²² What, for Langer, is virtual time? It is, in the case of music, the experience of time in which the different musical forms follow each other – “*nebeneinander*,” one after another, as James Joyce²³ would certainly say – *without there being anything more than the flow of pure sound*.

Music operates at a radically different level from verbal language; its only common point being the existence of sounds temporarily processed in symbolic terms. However, while in discursive language, sounds combine in sequential symbols, in musical creation, symbols are presentational.

How to understand the distinction between representative and presentational symbols in music? The German language gives us a good clue when distinguishing two types of representation: (1) “*Vorstellung*”; (2) “*Darstellung*”. These terms are distinguished in Kant, Cassirer and many other post-Kantian philosophers, although they are usually translated into English with the same term.²⁴ In simple terms, representation (1) signals a state of things without presenting it, while (2), the second type of “representation,” exhibits the very properties it wants to display. We can say that it *exemplifies* them. Music theorists often designate these types of symbols as self-expressive, insofar as the form is not indifferent to the content.

Even before we ask ourselves about what is present in artistic symbols, it is important to underline that it is part of the presentational nature of art to create an appearance of its objects. According to Langer, such intuition about the nature of artistic objects goes back to Cassirer and Schiller and their concept of appearance (*Schein*).

Schiller was the first thinker who saw what really makes “*Schein*”, or semblance, important for art: the fact that it liberates perception – and with it, the power of conception – from all practical purposes, and lets the mind dwell on the sheer appearance of things. The function of artistic illusion is not “make-believe”, as many philosophers and psychologists assume, but the very opposite, disagreement from belief – the contemplation of sensory qualities without their usual meanings of “Here’s that chair”, “That’s my telephone”, “These figures ought to add up to the bank’s statement,” etc. The knowledge that what is before us has no practical significance and in the world is what enables us to give attention to its appearance as such.²⁵

21) Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 167.

22) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 125.

23) Joyce *Ulysses* (London: The Bodley Head, 1960), 45.

24) The American translator of Kant’s three *Critiques*, Werner Pluhar, says in his extensive translator’s notes, that the term “presentation” is best for *Vorstellung*, while “exhibition” is the best choice for *Darstellung*. If so, “representation” is not the rendering of either term. But recalling that Langer was raised in a German-speaking household (and spoke with a detectable German accent her entire life), she knew very well the difference between *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung*. Cassirer makes a great matter of it.

25) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 49.

To explain this intuition, Langer relies on the analogy with the dream world. In this way, her thesis is similar to that which, later, her student Arthur C. Danto announced in his last work about “What Art Is.” According to Danto, art not only incorporates meaning but it is also the strange experience of dreaming or lucid dreaming. “Thanks to Descartes and Plato, I will define art as ‘wakeful dreams.’ Dreams are made up of appearances, but they have the appearance of things in their world.”²⁶

The question of appearance, or “apparition,” as she often calls it, is central to Langer, which leads her to defend “abstraction” (in a very distinct sense) as a decisive element in artistic creation. “All forms in art, then, are abstracted forms; their content is only semblance, a pure appearance.”²⁷ This abstraction aims, above all, to elevate the symbolic representation beyond the immediate and pragmatic interests of life. Her closeness to Clive Bell is in this stark point, insofar as the English philosopher finds on the “significant form” of the work of art the subtraction from daily concerns:

The emotion that the artist felt in his moment of inspiration he did not feel for objects seen as means, but for objects seen as pure forms – that is, as ends in themselves. He did not feel emotion for a chair as a means to physical well-being, nor as an object associated with the intimate life of a family, nor as the place where someone sat saying things unforgettable, nor yet as a thing bound to the lives of hundreds of men and women, dead or alive, by a hundred subtle ties; doubtless an artist often feels emotions such as these for the things that he sees, but in the moment of aesthetic vision he sees objects, not as means shrouded in associations, but as pure forms. It is for, or at any rate through, pure form that he feels his inspired emotion. Now to see objects as pure forms are to see them as ends in themselves.²⁸

Langer distances herself, however, from Bell on two fundamental points: on the one hand, Langer is not much interested in the question about the emotions felt by the artist, but rather in the emotions that the work of art reveals. Secondly, the art form is, as we have seen, symbolic – something that Bell cannot accept insofar as he confuses the artistic representational plane with the mere act of representing something, not having the idea of symbolic function as crucial to Langer.

Let us try to systematize Langer’s thesis on the nature of the work of art. In our view, the point of departure is to overcome the tension, established by Wittgenstein, between what can be said and what, on the contrary, can only be shown. As is well known, Wittgenstein considers only propositions that are likely to be true or false as capable of being enunciated by human language. Everything else, however relevant, can only be, in the limit, shown but not stated.

Logical positivism, in the early decades of the twentieth century, understood this distinction to be the assertion that only science is likely to be true, all else being the domain of subjectivism, in itself uninteresting for philosophical reflection. Langer refutes this dichotomy and argues that art has precisely the function of making us think in a way different from that which is provided by language. Art exhibits symbolically what cannot be enunciated, namely, the experience of feeling. Symbolic forms, meaningful forms,²⁹ created by artists

26) Danto, *What Art Is*, 48–49.

27) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 50.

28) Bell, *Art*, 52.

29) “Langer ... used the term ‘form’ in its most general sense, to mean a ‘complex relational structure’ – a ‘whole resulting from the relation of mutually dependent factors, or more precisely, the way the whole is put together’. In a painting, for example, ‘a visible, individual form [is] produced by the interaction of colors, lines, surfaces, lights and shadows’ (*Problems of Art*), or whatever else enters

aim to express the palette of human feeling, allowing us to achieve something that always seemed impossible: the objectification of the experience of feeling.

Indeed, in one of Langer's most famous quotes, with a particular romantic timbre, the author tells us: "art is the objectification of feeling, and the subjectification of nature."³⁰ Objectification here is not so much the reduction of a feeling to the plane of objects but rather the power of art to *show us* our feelings. The feeling is not necessarily only subjective and as such can be shown through works of art. Hence, music, for example, offers us a similar expression, in tonal terms, of the experience of feeling, and does so in such a way that its distinct forms rhythmically express the changing multiples of human emotions.

The tonal structures we call "music" bear a logical similarity to the forms of human feeling-forms of growth and attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm ... – the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt. Such is the pattern, or logical form, of sentience; and the pattern of music is that same form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. Music is a tonal analogue of emotive life.... The essence of all composition-tonal or atonal, vocal or instrumental, even purely percussive, if you will – is the semblance of the organic movement, the illusion of an indivisible whole.... The most essential principle of vital activity is rhythm. All life is rhythmic; under difficult circumstances, its rhythms may become very complex, but when they are really lost life cannot long endure. This rhythmic character of organism permeates music, because music is a symbolic presentation of the highest organic response, the emotional life of human beings. ... The great office of music is to organise our conception of feeling into more than an occasional awareness of emotional storm, i.e. to give us an insight into what may truly be called the "life of feeling," or "or subjective unity of experience."³¹

How to understand this "life of feeling"? It is not the feeling experienced exclusively by the artist, the interpreter or the auditor. Langer's thesis on art transcends the main deadlocks of the emotivism on art. It is a matter of maintaining that symbols – or, if one prefers, artistic forms – present to us the variations of mental activity. Hence the author speaks, in the Kantian way, of the "subjective unity of experience." For Langer, the mind cannot be dissociated from both sensory and affective contents that run through it. However, this "life of feeling" is exhibited through art as if it was an object and one which we, as authors and receivers, can observe and analyze. Art is not, as in Collingwood, the expression of emotions, but rather "expressiveness" that we can scrutinize.

The conception of art, advocated by Langer, accepts the notion of representation but does not reduce it to a mimetic plane or to a discursive meaning-reference pairing; she maintains, rather, that art is expressiveness, but does not cling to the emotional expression of its creator; finally, she accepts the notion of a "significant form" but refuses pure formalism. In presenting the work of art as the synthesis of form and feeling, as the creation of symbolic forms of human feeling, her view includes one of the most integrative definitions of art

into the specific work. We can also talk about forms made by motion Among the arts, music and dance are characterized by such transient and dynamics forms. And in literary works, the form is given to imagination rather than perception, as a 'passage of purely imaginary, apparent events.' Donald Dryden, "Susanne K. Langer," in *Key Writers on Art. The Twentieth Century*, ed. C.Murray (Oxford: Routledge,2003), 182).

30) Langer, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press 1967), 87.

31) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 27/126.

that philosophy can offer us. The work of art is thus the symbolic image – read “form” – of the human mind – read “feeling.” “Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling.”³² One might object by saying that Langer only gives us a set of criteria for the recognition of works of art, namely, forms, feelings, symbols, and not so much the necessary conditions that together are sufficient to identify something as being a work of art. However, as Aristotle has shown in *Poetics*, one can also define something – for instance, what we call now an “open concept” – by listing the fundamental properties that are recognized in an “object” (e.g. tragedy).

32) *Ibid.*, 40.

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