

# Susanne K. Langer Circle

**Conference 2024**

## **Susanne K. Langer: Creativity and American Thought**

The 2nd International Conference of the Susanne K. Langer Circle  
hosted by the American Institute of Philosophical and Cultural Thought (AIPCT),  
Murphysboro, IL.



**Conference Committee:**

- Randall Auxier, Southern Illinois University Carbondale
- Lona Gaikis, University of Vienna
- Matthew Ingram, Dakota State University
- With assistance from Christian Grüny, State University of Music and the Performing Arts Stuttgart, and Joshua Daniel, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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## **Susanne K. Langer: Creativity and American Thought**

### **The 2nd International Conference of the Susanne K. Langer Circle**

The American Institute of Philosophical and Cultural Thought is pleased to announce an international conference exploring the thought of Susanne K. Langer. This conference combines our annual Spring Creativity Conference (June 24) and our summer Hahn Lectures (June 26) and is supplemented with two full days of presentations. The Creativity Conference is supported, as always, by the Foundation for the Philosophy of Creativity, while the Hahn Lectures are supported by the William and Galia Minor Chair in Creative Communication at SIU. The Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy supports the keynote speakers and other expenses.

**The Creativity Conference Thursday afternoon is fully described here:**

<http://creativityfoundation.org/sixth-annual-spring-creativity-conference-june-24-2024>

**The Hahn Lectures are fully described here:**

<http://creativityfoundation.org/hahn-lectures-robert-e-innis-june-26-2024>

**The AIPCT YouTube channel has past Creativity Conferences and Hahn Lectures, as well as many other programs here:**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ4Zx3xHG03WjiWiqdEoUIQ>

**The AIPCT gratefully acknowledges the work of Troy Brown Photography for videography, photography, and technical support during this and many programs at AIPCT. <https://www.troybrown.org/>**

## **Schedule**

All events are at AIPCT unless otherwise indicated.

**American Institute of Philosophical and Cultural Thought**  
**411 N. 9th Street, Murphysboro, IL, United States, Illinois**

### **Monday, June 24**

**Noon-2:00 PM Registration**

**CREATIVITY CONFERENCE 2:00-6:30 PM**

Sponsored by the Foundation for the Philosophy of Creativity

2:00-2:50 PM: **Born into Feeling: The Development of Subjectivity**

— Margaret M. Browning, Independent Scholar

2:55-3:45 PM: **Mimetic Embodiment and Gesture:**

**Unpacking Representational Semblance with Susanne K. Langer**

— Matthew Ingram, Dakota State University

**CREATIVITY KEYNOTE 4:00-5:30 PM**

**Susanne K. Langer's Act Concept and Systems Biology:**

**An Essay in the Philosophy of Science**

Donald Dryden, Duke University

**5:30-6:30 PM: Reception**

**Tuesday, June 25**

**SUSANNE K. LANGER CONFERENCE**

9:00-10:10 AM:

**Meaningful and Mythic Movement: Susanne K. Langer's Philosophy of Dance**

— Michael Trocchia, James Madison University

10:20-11:20 AM:

**Why Composers Should Read Langer to Understand Extraordinary Artistic Creativity**

— Wang Jie, CUNY Brooklyn College

11:30 AM-12:30 PM:

**On the sur-reality of Langer and Bachelard**

— Eldritch Priest, Simon Fraser University

**Lunch 12:30-1:30**

1:30-2:30 PM:

**Analytic Philosophy and Living Form:**

**The Entwining of Susanne K. Langer and Ernst Cassirer**

— Lona Gaikis, University of Vienna

2:40-3:40 PM:

**Film Feeling and Semblance: Advancing a Theory of Film from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "Temporal Gestalt" and Susanne K. Langer's "Dream Mode" of Cinema**

— Jonathan Judd, University of Louisville

3:50-4:50 PM:

**The Culture Hero Archetype: Modern Political Figures, Symbolism, and Myth**

— Leslie M. Murray, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

**5:00-6:30 PM: KEYNOTE**

**Langer's Symbolic Forms: From Logic to Life**

Juliet Floyd, Boston University

**Wednesday, June 26**

**9:00-9:50 AM: LEWIS HAHN LECTURES**

09:00-09:50 AM:

**Innis in Focus: Moving Toward a "Presentational Philosophy"**

— Jared Kemling, Rend Lake College

10:00 AM-10:50 AM:

**Follow the Footnotes; Connect the Dots; See the Gestalt:**

**Reflections on the Scholarship of Robert E. Innis**

— Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, University College London

11:00 AM-11:50 AM:

**A Trail of Linkages: Lingering with Langer**

— Robert E. Innis, University of Massachusetts, Lowell

**Lunch 12:30-1:30**

## **1:30-5:30 PM: OUTINGS**

### **Center for Virtual Expression and SIU Tour (Everyone)**

#### **Choice of:**

1. Winery and Forest Tour
2. Hike at Giant City

## **5:30-6:30 PM: Dinner on your own**

## **7:00-9:30 PM: RECEPTION AND MUSIC PROGRAM**

### **7:00 PM: Dennis Stroughmat (Illinois Creole Music Concert)**

Dennis Stroughmatt is a cultural preservationist, educator, speaker, folk musician, and long-time Road Scholar. He has entertained, educated, and captivated countless diverse audiences throughout Illinois with his live-music presentations on subjects ranging from Illinois French Creole music and culture and Old-Time Western Swing.



## **8:30-9:30 PM: Reception at the AIPCT**

**Thursday, June 27**

**9:00-10:30 AM: KEYNOTE**

**Integration in and of Susanne K. Langer's Card-Index System:  
Theory and Practice**

Iris Van der Tuin and Simon Dirks, University of Utrecht

**SUSANNE K. LANGER CONFERENCE**

10:35-11:35 AM:

**The Artist, the Critic, and the Philosopher:**

**On Susanne K. Langer and Midcentury American Art**

— Carolyn Bergonzo, Independent Scholar

11:40 AM-12:40 PM:

**Langer's Form and Feeling in Consumer Culture: The Virtual in Advertising**

— Colleen Dunagan, California State University Long Beach

**12:40-2:00 PM: Lunch**

2:00-3:00 PM:

**Image, Cinema, Dream: Langer on the Moving Pictures**

— Randall Auxier, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

3:05-4:05 PM:

**A Langerian Response to the Crisis of Meaning in the Age of  
Celebrity Religious Cults**

— Myron Jackson, Western Carolina University

4:10-5:10 PM:

**Revisiting the Life Symbol, Foundations for an Africana Philosophy of Myth**

— Darian Spearman, Gonzaga University

**6:45 PM: CONFERENCE DINNER**

**Hunan Restaurant Carbondale**

710 East Main Street, Carbondale, IL 62901

**Friday, June 28**

**SUSANNE K. LANGER CONFERENCE**

9:00-10:00 AM:

**'Say it with music!' Langer and Maaßen contra Wittgenstein:**

**On What May Be Symbolized When It Cannot Be Said.**

— George R. Lucas, Jr., United States Naval Academy

10:05-11:05 AM:

**Mexikanische Lieder (in memory of Helmut Maaßen)**

— Ignacio Castuera, Cobb Institute, Claremont, California

**LANGER CIRCLE BUSINESS MEETING 11:10 AM-12:00 PM**

See back of program.

## **Abstracts** (in order of program)

### **MONDAY: CREATIVITY CONFERENCE**

#### **Born Into Feeling: The Development of Subjectivity**

Margaret M. Browning, Independent Scholar

This paper argues that combining the thinking of philosopher Susanne K. Langer and neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp promotes an understanding of the development of subjectivity as the evolution of a life of feeling. Langer's philosophy of animalian mind posits consciousness as the capacity to feel, and Panksepp's neuroscientific model of what he refers to as the mammalian BrainMind with its primary emotional organization includes an ongoing concomitant affectivity, i.e., consciousness or feeling. Describing at some length Panksepp's model of BrainMind development from the innate primary organization of emotional systems through secondary emotional learning and on to tertiary cognitive functioning, the paper traces the development of the child's life of feeling. The early consciousness of the human child is non-reflective and difficult for us to understand as symbolically-reflective conscious agents, but it is nevertheless critical in mediating her early emotional learning (secondary functioning in Panksepp's model). With the advent of tertiary brain development and the acquisition of symbolic functioning, non-reflective consciousness becomes increasingly reflective. Langer understands this symbolic capacity, unique to the human species, as the capacity to project our animalian feeling into social forms, e.g., human language. This is the basis of the cultural society human children are born into with their capacity to feel, a profoundly intersubjective social environment that children become participating members of with the maturation of their symbolic, cognitive functioning. This membership enables a wide-open expansion of their subjectivity and the opportunity to begin to shape their own lives of feeling.

## **Mimetic Embodiment and Gesture:**

### **Unpacking Representational Semblance with Susan Langer**

Matthew Bruce Ingram, Dakota State University

In the field of gesture studies, there are three prevalent approaches to studying mimesis and the depictive practices and aspects of gesture: depicting by gesture (Streeck, 2009), techniques of depiction (Müller, 2014), and depiction as communication (Clark, 2016). Each of these, in their own way, draws off Peircean notions of semiosis (icon, index, and symbol), bolstered by art philosophies, psychologies, and sociologists of scholars like Nelson Goodman, Ernst Gombrich, Rudolf Arnheim, and Erving Goffman to tease out meanings of and richness in gestural artistic-like practices in everyday social interaction. What each of these studies illustrates is a need for a broader aesthetic theory and take on gestural meaning that forefronts artistic symbolism as its base approach. I argue, in this article, that Langer's notion of “semblance” (and her broader philosophies, especially her notion of “abstraction”) can be appropriately fitted to sharpen what we mean by mimetic performance in gestural studies. Its application can be seen in an interactional exploration of episodes from the highly popular live improvisational comedy show *Whose Line is it Anyway?* Specifically, I focus on a favored skit, *Let's Make a Date*, where the improvisational actors are given unique and quirky characteristics, actions, and scenes to act out as if they were on a dating show. Langer's (1953) notion of semblance and interlocking concepts (image, illusion, virtuality, and abstraction) help us make sense of embodied meanings that are forged through improvisational activities, as the improvisational crew pretends to be a gladiator shooting an arrow through the audience as the audience voluntarily falls in their seats playing a role or an actor pretends to fight against the pull of gravity of a black hole. Keeping with the microanalytic or interactional linguistic approach to studying gestures, I explore transcribed interactional snippets that illustrate the productivity and potentiality of a Langarian approach to gesture and collaborative semblance-making practices involved in artistic gesturality. Langer's work has transformational potential to provide a semiotic theory of gesture where artistic idea creation is forefront and center from the very start of thinking about gestural mimesis.

## **CREATIVITY KEYNOTE**

### **Susanne K. Langer's Act Concept and Systems Biology:**

#### **An Essay in the Philosophy of Science**

Donald Dryden, Duke University

In 2027, three years from now those of us who know of the work's existence and who admire its achievement will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the publication of the first volume of *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, which marked the unveiling of the first three parts of the project that would eventually occupy the second half of Susanne Langer's career as a professional philosopher, and would still remain unfinished at the time of her death in 1985. From the witness of her own testimony following the appearance of the first volume of *Mind* in 1967, Langer's ambition was to construct "a conceptual framework for the empirical study of mind"—one that would "break through" the limitations of "current forms of thought" in psychology and the biological sciences by providing basic concepts to connect a number of relevant disciplines, "from biochemistry to neuropsychology, in one scientific system," which would "naturally result in a theory of the human mind." With the hindsight of nearly six decades since its first appearance in printed form, what can we say today about the fate of Susanne Langer's vision for the biological sciences? What we cannot say, sadly, is that her writings have had any direct influence on the course of their development. As I hope to show, however, exciting things have been happening in some areas of the biological sciences since the turn of the 21st century—especially in what has become known as systems biology, where there has been a widespread recognition of the power of computational modelling to represent and explore the behavior of complex networks at the cellular and subcellular level—as well as in the philosophy of science which, when taken together, hold the promise of incorporating into the fabric of biological theory some of the defining characteristics of life and mind that Langer came to know in considerable detail through her long study of the arts and in turn sought to bring into the foreground of scientific understanding with her introduction of the act-conceptual framework.

## **TUESDAY: SUSANNE K. LANGER CONFERENCE**

### **Meaningful and Mythic Movement: Susanne K. Langer's Philosophy of Dance**

Michael Trocchia, James Madison University

What makes dance movement meaningful? In this talk, I will offer an overview of how Susanne Langer's philosophy of dance as "an apparition" of mythic forces addresses this question. This will involve a close look at several important distinctions she makes between signs and symbols, between actual and virtual gestures, and between what she calls discursive and presentational symbolisms. It will also require an understanding of her position that while dance is expressive movement (and artistically meaningful) it is not self-expressive, despite that it is quite susceptible, even more so than the other arts, to being confused as such.

### **Why Composers Should Read Langer to Understand Extraordinary Artistic Creativity**

Wang Jie, CUNY Brooklyn College

Philosophical investigations of art and working artists have co-evolved with occasional crosspollinations such as the collaboration between Friedrich Nietzsche and Richard Wagner. Absolute music as an artistic practice anchors Susanne K. Langer's theory of art. Yet few composers of classical music are aware of Langer's work. I argue that studying Langer's theory of art is essential for composers' creative training just as studying orchestration is essential for orchestral composition. Langer points out that behavior of symbols differs from behavior of languages in important ways. This paper explores two aspects of the creative process of composition that engage non-discursive approaches. First, for sound to become music, the composer must learn to engage musical notes as symbols of feelings rather than alphabets. Here I provide a musical example from my guitar solo piece "Thirteen Ways to Fly with a Blackbird," to show how

a few notes for classical guitar acquire symbolic meaning through a deepening of feelings in the revision process. Additional musical examples will illustrate my second point: the danger of composing with the eyes. Langer said: "Watusi drum, monotone voices, even conches and ram's horns can make music. But the construction of melodies in the framework of harmonically related tones is probably the most powerful principle of musical creation that has ever been found." What makes us alive is the fact we are biological rather than architectural. Our body communicates to us in feelings. Discursive approaches to composition such as serialism continue to depend on the eye to justify the "spelling" of the artistic material. I propose that a somatic process of folding feelings and motion into the creative process will open new possibilities for music aesthetics. The aim of my paper is to show that creativity can be taught, and Langer should be at the beginning of this process.

### **On the Sur-reality of Langer and Bachelard**

Eldritch Priest, Simon Fraser University

Langer is well known to argue that art, in a sense, "objectifies the subjective realm" (Langer 1957, 26). An artwork "formulates our ideas of inward experience, as discourse formulates our ideas of things and facts in the outside world" (1962, 90). To the extent that art's formulations are sharable, then, they make our ideas "apparent, objectively given" (1957, 73). But strangely, art, in a sense, also subjectifies the objective realm. Because a verbally ineffable image such as those which art works create, teaches us to sense what "defies discursive formulation," we become able to see or hear in our perceptions features expressive of a "subjective aspect of experience" (22). Thus, in a sense, the more fluent we become in grasping nondiscursive expressivity, the more we are able to "perceive" the subjective side of nature. Yet, where Langer conceives of this as an elaborate form of projection that assists human being's need to symbolize experience and thus abstract from the real, Gaston Bachelard develops a philosophy in which the subjectification of the objective realm is a way of returning to the real not as it is given but as it is imagined, as it is sur-realized. In this respect art is less an abstraction

than a “concretion” whose effects—what Langer aimed to capture with the concept of “semblance”—produce not an epistemology but what Bachelard called a “cosmo-analysis” (Bachelard 1969). In this paper, I consider certain of the similarities and differences between Langer’s and Bachelard’s take on what might be termed art’s “irreality function” and suggest how the latter is a condition for the wellbeing of human life.

## **Analytic Philosophy and Living Form:**

### **The Entwinning of Susanne K. Langer and Ernst Cassirer**

Lona Gaikis, University of Vienna

Bridging the Continental Divide, Susanne K. Langer’s role as a mediator and continuator of European thinkers in the US oscillates between the works of Ernst Cassirer (\*1874; †1945) and Alfred N. Whitehead (\*1861; †1947) in their pursuit of a broader symbolic paradigm. Proficient in both English and German, Langer played a significant role in introducing Cassirer’s comprehensive philosophy of symbolic forms, originally written in German, to the academic sphere of the United States. Notably, she translated his book *Sprache und Mythos* (1925), which was posthumously published in English in 1953. This translation expanded the accessibility of Cassirer’s philosophy, previously limited to anglophone readers to his work *Essay on Man* (1944). Cassirer’s influence is palpable throughout Langer’s oeuvre, evident in her differentiation between discursive and presentational forms in *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942), her phenomenological interpretation of the art symbol in *Feeling and Form* (1953), and her biological insights in *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* (1967; 1972; 1982). This paper explores how Langer assimilated Cassirer’s ideas into her analytical approach to the arts, positioning her as one of the few, alongside Arthur Pap and Nelson Goodman, to integrate elements from Cassirer’s *The Philosophy of Symbolic Form* (vols. I-III, 1955-57). It delves into Cassirer’s academic career in the US from 1941 to 1945, including his posthumously published *The Logic of the Humanities* [*The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*] (1961 [2000]) or notes on “Language and Art I+II” (1979). The paper also examines Cassirer’s final lecture, given

to the Linguistic Circle in New York just two months before his death. By discussing his approach to the linguistic turn, he notably addressed structuralism in linguistics and morphology in biology in an effort to bridge the nature-culture divide, and offered Gestalt (and ungestalt) as a potential solution. This discussion possibly reveals aspects of German idealism in Langer's philosophical framework.

### **Film Feeling and Semblance: Advancing a Theory of Film from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "Temporal Gestalt" and Susanne K. Langer's "Dream Mode" of Cinema**

Jonathan Judd, University of Louisville

For French Existentialist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the film, through its "temporal gestalt," moves beyond the plastic arts taking elements of the rhythmic and syntactical unfolding of a musical passage together with the indexical realism that photography provides to present an objectified image of our conscious processes at the level of perceptual experience. Overlapping in multiple ways with the approach German American philosopher of art Susanne K. Langer briefly develops in her "Note on Film" in *Feeling and Form*, I argue that these two largely under-developed theories stand to both extend and fill in the gaps left by the other. For Langer it is the immediacy of the ontologically displaced virtual present of the cinematic frame that presents an image (illusion) of the world (reality) in the poetic register; which is to say that the film, with a certain contrapuntal musicality, weaves together the fabric of experience in a significant, irreducible totality—a complex evental semblance unfolding in time. Both philosophers privilege the artwork as symbolic of the synthetic register of consciousness at which the world is felt and experienced, investing the art object with the cognitive power to heuristically present to the viewer-interpretant embodied knowledge of a world. My purpose, then, is to present a comparative philosophical sketch of these two phenomenologically oriented theories of film, weaving together the phenomenological and affect-sensation based paradigms that have taken precedent over other critical theory approaches in film-theory. I will use two Cold-War-Era films to help weave these theories together, *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962),

effecting a kind of short-cut to demonstrate how the film can be thought of as a matrix of feeling by resort to products of an intensely felt period of existential threat, anxiety and paranoia registered on a larger collective cultural register. Finally, exploring Langer's theory of film as operating within the "dream mode" of virtual (aesthetic) experience, defined as a mode of the "primary illusion" of the poetic genre, will show how film is able to present, for Merleau-Ponty, a "finer grained" reality precisely because it is a dreamt reality: a "significant apparition" of an "endless Now" that reinvests our experience of the dynamic interrelations between self, world and other with profound meaning.

### **The Culture Hero Archetype: Modern Political Figures, Symbolism, and Myth**

Leslie Murray, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Susan Langer's discussion of the culture hero archetype in *Philosophy in a New Key* provides a framework for understanding the symbolic facets of political leadership and she explains how the role of myth is active in shaping a collective identity and assigning political values. By examining modern political figures through this lens of myth and symbolism, we can develop some deeper insights into the forces that inform our ideas about the perceived role of politics in society and the struggle for power in America.

## **TUESDAY KEYNOTE**

### **Langer's Symbolic Forms: From Logic to Life**

Juliet Floyd, Boston University

Langer's Radcliffe dissertation "A Logical Analysis of Meaning" (1926) is the most ambitious and wide-ranging dissertation written in philosophy and logic at Harvard or Radcliffe from the beginning (1879, G. Stanley Hall) through 1932, when Quine handed in "The Logic of Sequences". Fluent in German, Langer was the first graduate student to read and respond to Husserl, Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein with her own point of view. She is also a most important source for our understanding of the logical project of H.M. Sheffer, which she explains and develops in novel directions in the dissertation, with fascinating asides on Whitehead, C.I. Lewis and Bergson, providing us a treasure trove for an historical understanding of the period. A student of James, Royce and Russell, Sheffer pioneered, not only a logical approach to James's "neutral monism", but also a conception of the logical as that which remains invariant under alteration of the domain of objects, thereby emphasizing the need to avoid a collapse of "form" into relativism about notations. Stressing throughout her life the limits of formalism, Langer developed the idea, shared by Whitehead, Russell, Sheffer and Wittgenstein, that the generality of symbols cannot be rendered verbally in straightforward propositions, and that a proper understanding of form lies at the foundations of logic and philosophy. Her conception of the communication of 'private' experience as necessitating form finds its roots in the dissertation, and, as I shall argue, the fundamental logical direction of her thinking in 1926 shapes and informs all her subsequent work.

## **WEDNESDAY LEWIS HAHN LECTURES**

### **Innis in Focus**

Jared Kemling, Rend Lake College

This presentation aims to celebrate Robert E. Innis's considerable contributions to Langer-studies (and Aesthetics, Semiotics, American Philosophy, and much else). The constant touchstone of the talk is Innis's authoritative text—Susanne Langer in Focus: The Symbolic Mind. I will seek to highlight the enduring themes of the book and to provide a forum for Innis to reflect on the importance and influence of the book, fifteen years after its publication. Ultimately, the presentation is a starting place for fruitful conversation and public discussion surrounding Innis's ongoing philosophical project. Inspired by Innis's work on Langer, the talk is largely meta-philosophical, reflecting on Langer's understanding of philosophy and how we can integrate Langer's insights into the practice of philosophy today. It covers three basic questions: (1) Has academic philosophy truly accomplished the transition to the “new key” that Langer heralded? My answer will be, briefly: no. (2) What must be done to accomplish such a transition? I will suggest that philosophy needs to be developed as an “art” and a “presentational form,” in Langer's terms. To put another way—philosophy needs to be developed further as a practice and a way of life, rather than a largely rational-historical enterprise. (3) What would the “primary illusion” and “basic abstraction” of such an art form be? In a very limited sketch, I will suggest that the primary illusion of what we might call “presentational philosophy” might be “Wisdom,” and the basic abstraction might be “Wonder.”

### **Follow the Footnotes; Connect the Dots; See the Gestalt:**

#### **Reflections on the Scholarship of Robert E. Innis**

Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, University College London

Starting with a look at Robert Innis' (impressive) curriculum vitae as a source 'text', this paper will reflect (somewhat speculatively!) on Innis' scholarly journey as an

exemplification of scholarship in general. It will identify three stages: first, the intuitive, associative process of gathering data guided by specific interests or questions; second, the experimental process of connecting data in particular configurations around specific themes; third, the seemingly passive 'waiting' for a unified Gestalt to emerge — to reveal itself — that makes sense of the connections and bestows on them disclosive meaning. Drawing on Karl Bühler's and Susanne Langer's notions of Gestalt, the paper suggests that the process of scholarship is not in principle different or less 'creative' than the process of making art. Moreover, as in the making art, it is impossible in scholarship to predict in advance how much time each stage will take and, indeed, if the third stage will ever be reached. That being so, it concludes that the current academic climate with its pressure on production of results is not typically conducive for genuinely explorative and meaningful scholarship.

### **A Trail of Linkages: Linger with Langer**

Robert E. Innis, University of Massachusetts Lowell

Susanne Langer's work has been for all of us a rich source of insights into the fundamental structures of the distinctiveness of the human form of life. About this distinctiveness, as Langer wrote in *Philosophy in a New Key*, "in the fundamental notion of symbolization ... we have the keynote of all humanistic problems." To understand symbolization, however, one must uncover its antecedent enabling conditions as well as its consequences, powers, and range, that make possible the open ambient and embodied meaning structures that make up the cultural frames in which we carry out our lives. Langer's intellectual journey, to practically her dying day, involved such an uncovering. Everyone here at this meeting has some original linkage, or linkage event, with Langer's work that has informed and continued to motivate their continual returns to it. Such returns make up a trail of linkages. But Langer's work is itself a trail of linkages, linkages to the rich empirical and conceptual sources upon which she relied and which she exploited in creative synthetic ways. In this lecture, I will chart my own trail of linkages with Langer's work, which began with my fortuitous purchase of *Philosophy in a New*

Key at the Lion Bookstore in Rome in 1963. Such a trail has led to linking Langer to parallel research projects in aesthetics, language theory, cultural psychology, and other fields. I want to illustrate, or indicate, some ways of how, since 1977, I have attempted to draw attention to aspects of the richness and stimulating power of Langer's work that link it to parallel and complementary projects of uncovering the nature, range, and scope of symbolization as the keynote of humanistic problems. Clearly, this is something everyone else here has also tried to do over long periods, as we have persistently lingered with Langer on our shared intellectual and life paths.

## **THURSDAY KEYNOTE**

### **Integration in and of Susanne K. Langer's Card-Index System:**

#### **Theory and Practice**

Iris van der Tuin and Simon Dirks

This keynote lecture works from within Susanne K. Langer's card-index system as to understand the system as an integrative device for Langer's own scholarship as well as to present the digitized system itself for integration in current-day Langer scholarship and beyond. In order to understand the system as an integrative device, immanently, it presents those cards that reflect on either integration/synthesis or on itself in the context of discussions of computerization that can also be found on cards. This discussion will touch upon the ontological impetus of integration (a discussion of the relation between parts and whole, a discussion of [the wrongs of] mechanicism) as well as the fitting epistemological outlook of non-reductive naturalism (Dryden 1997) or emergentism (Dengerink Chaplin 2020). In order to work towards a scholarly future in which the card-index system and its contents—both individual cards and the lines of connection that run through the cards (Van der Tuin 2024)—can be used in our own research on Langer, adjacent topics, and thematic debates per se, we will present a digitized version of the card-index system for personal use, sharing lessons learned, future plans, and how to access and contribute to the system's transcription and annotation.

## **THURSDAY: SUSANNE K. LANGER CONFERENCE**

### **The Artist, the Critic, and the Philosopher:**

#### **On Susanne K. Langer and Midcentury American Art**

Carolyn Bergonzo, Independent Scholar

This paper aims to deepen the historical context of Susanne K. Langer's reception within and influence on the midcentury American art world centered in New York City. Through archival research and analysis, I explore conflicting views of the roles of the artist, critic, and philosopher of art that came to the fore at the Fourth Annual Woodstock Art Conference in August 1952. There, and in critical commentary that followed, artists and philosophers debated longstanding conceptual distinctions between art and craft, feeling and rationality, and the abstract and the real, and tensions surfaced around how artworks and art practices were described, interpreted, and evaluated across professional identities. By analyzing the ways in which Langer's work was embraced and critiqued by artists and critics alike—among them, Clement Greenberg, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, and Harold Rosenberg—I aim to document the extent to which Langer's ideas were “in the mix” in this remarkable period of American art. I will also take brief biographical departures to call attention to the three artists that Langer acknowledges in *Feeling and Form* for their role in shaping her own understanding of artmaking: Kurt Appelbaum, Alice Dunbar, and Helen Sewell.

### **Langer's Form and Feeling in Consumer Culture: The Virtual in Advertising**

Colleen T. Dunagan, California State University Long Beach

In constructing one conceptual system applicable to all art, Susanne K. Langer carefully considers each medium's particularities, identifying the primary illusion of each. Distinguishing between primary and secondary illusions within the work allows Langer to accommodate and account for the presence of different types of artistic effects (illusions) within an artwork; for example, music serves to enhance dance's illusion of virtual power

with its own contribution of virtual time (Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 117). In my book, *Consuming Dance: Choreography and Advertising* (2018), I apply Langer's aesthetic theory to argue that commercials employ dance to create affect, tapping into "structures of feeling" to promote their product. However, in the book, I do not offer a comprehensive application of Langer's theory to commercials or what her work reveals about the relationship between advertising and art. In this paper, I apply Langer's theory of art and her distinction between primary and secondary illusions to commercials that foreground dance—these are filmic/televisual works that (at a minimum) typically employ a combination of dance, music, literature (i.e., copy and/or lyrics), and film to convey meaning. I consider what Langer's concepts of presentational symbolism (non-discursive symbolic forms) reveal about contemporary advertising's relationship to art and the primary illusions of each art form, exploring how these "dance-commercials" combine film's primary illusion of virtual present with dance's virtual power, literature's virtual memory, and music's virtual time to create meaning (i.e., advertising's commodity-sign). Correspondingly, I hope to show that a Langerian analysis of dance-commercials reveals how the all-consuming logic of capitalism taps into the cognitive and cultural dynamics of ritual and art.

### **Image, Cinema, Dream: Langer on the Moving Pictures**

Randall Auxier, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Susanne Langer said that the primary semblance of movies as an art form is that it is like dreaming. But in this case, someone else dreams for us, and our immobility in the theater chair, in the dark, simulating the sleep state, is the beginning of an education of eye and ear in which our generalized passivity is a condition for travels through lucid narration. A thousand tiny anticipations and rememberings are blended in our interpreting of what we see and hear. I will explore some of the analogies to dreaming we experience when we see a movie on the big screen at the cinema, especially the bending and shaping of time that moviemakers (such as Christopher Nolan and Quentin Tarantino) like to bring into our "waking dreams."

## **A Langerian Response to the Crisis of Meaning in the Age of Celebrity Religious Cults**

Myron Jackson, Western Carolina University

Using key ideas from Susanne Langer's aesthetics, I challenge Walter Benjamin's thesis that the mechanical age of reproduction resulted in the loss of aura and authenticity in "original" works of art. He did not grasp the myth-making power of electronic media and how virtual masks can spawn a kind of virtual aura establishing the celebrity religious cults prevalent today. Unlike Benjamin's cults, however, cults of celebrity bring about a crisis of meaning—a nihilism—for millions of their churchgoers and followers. When the symbols of art are divorced from entertainment—in Langer's sense—and reduced to cultish subjection, a depletion of meaning accompanied by value decay leads to widespread apatheia. As Whitehead remarks, fame is a "cold, hard notion" that consists in the "destruction of the audience." But Langer contends that entertainment need not be "frivolous, like amusement." More than being a coincidence, Langer argues that artisanship and entertainment share "some intimate relation." Through her ideas of semblance, vital import, and entertainment as "individual interest," Langer provides some important antidotes to these cultural dynamics and offers an aesthetic that helps us work on ourselves, encouraging us to create personal and cultural projects of meaning and value.

## **Revisiting the Life Symbol, Foundations for an Africana Philosophy of Myth**

Darian Spearman, Gonzaga University

Africana philosophies of myth reimagine the potential for world building and comprehension of the universe found in African and diasporic spiritual and traditional practices labeled as "primitive" within Eurocentric philosophical anthropologies. I argue that Susan Langer's notion of the "life symbol" can be a fruitful tool for these projects. However, this notion must be separated from her Eurocentric philosophical anthropology which underlies her argument that the mythic worldview is a symptom of the intellectual

limitations of “primitive peoples.” Langer claims throughout her work that symbolisms of myth and ritual are replaced by artistic symbolism as human consciousness develops. I argue that Langer’s notion of the “life symbol” once divested of Eurocentrism, points to new ways of conceptualizing our embeddedness in nature and reveals transformative meaning possibilities made available through different forms of communion with life. Life symbols then, rather than merely being mythic predecessors to contemporary modes of Euromodern artistic expression, can symbolize modes of connection, communion and comprehension which expand what it means to be alive.

## **FRIDAY: SUSANNE K. LANGER CONFERENCE**

**‘Say it with music!’ Langer and Maaßen contra Wittgenstein:**

**On What May Be Symbolized When It Cannot Be Said.**

George R. Lucas, Jr., United States Naval Academy

Friday morning will be devoted in part to a tribute to our late colleague, Helmut Maaßen. At the time of his sudden, surprising, and tragic death roughly one year ago, Dr. Maaßen was at work on a two volume study of the philosophy of music. His preliminary work on this topic suggested his special indebtedness to the philosophy of Susanne K. Langer and A.N. Whitehead with appreciation for a wide variety of other sources ranging from Plato and Pythagoras, Kepler and Kant, to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Adorno and Cassirer. I will endeavor in my presentation to pose some questions for our group discussion arising from Maaßen’s project, concerning (for example) the way in which music serves to convey concrete objective meaning apart from the strict confines of natural language, while simultaneously allowing us to include mixed modes that include forms of linguistic discourse, such as opera and choral music (the latter of special significance for Maaßen), within the purview of music generally. Against Donald W. Sherburne’s initial account of Whitehead’s aesthetics, moreover, Maaßen argued that we must attend to more than art objects, like painting and sculpture, to include performance as a principal mode of symbolic form.]

### **Mexikanische Lieder (in memory of Helmut Maaßen)**

Ignacio Castuera, Cobb Institute, Claremont, California

Langer's section on music in *Philosophy in a New Key* provided me with the courage to put forward the idea that the Mexican songs of the late XIX and early XX Century deserve to be considered alongside the more famous and revered *Deutsche Lieder*. I have contacted a gifted musical family who will provide me with samples I will share at the event in Carbondale.



## **LANGER CIRCLE BUSINESS MEETING**

Join us for the Susanne K. Langer Circle Meeting to discuss further activities.

Would you like to become a member? Contact us at **[langercircle@gmail.com](mailto:langercircle@gmail.com)**.

Find more information under our website **<https://langercircle.sites.uu.nl>**

The Susanne K. Langer Circle hosted by Utrecht University, Netherlands.



**Organized by the Susanne K. Langer Circle 2024.**

Sponsored by The Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, The Foundation for the Philosophy of Creativity, and Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

