CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

AN APPLICATION OF LANGER'S AESTHETICS TO POPULAR ART

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by

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TO DRAGON,

whose understanding helped make this possible.
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ABSTRACT

AN APPLICATION OF LANGER'S AESTHETICS TO POPULAR ART

by

C. Ronald Kimberling

Master of Arts in Mass Communication

This study examines the aesthetic philosophy of Susanne K. Langer, a contemporary symbolist philosopher, and applies the salient points of her work to the popular arts, which are primarily transmitted via the mass media. Langer's thought is compared with the work done by scholars currently working in the area of popular arts criticism.

The prime contribution of Langer to modern philosophy is her distinction between discursive and presentational symbols. The former can be used to construct logical models and arguments. The latter are the symbols of art, and these represent human feeling. By constructing a
category of symbol that conveys content in a non-logical way, Langer is able to bypass traditional aesthetic argument about the "meaning" of art.

Langer sees all art as forms expressive of human feeling. Art is permeated with an organic sense of life; by symbolic transformation of this sort, humans are able to intensify their experience in the world of feeling, which Langer views as biologically rooted and hence one with intellect.

Langer's aesthetic ultimately can be joined with the recent work of John Cawelti, in the area of formula analysis of popular art, and Raymond Durgnat, who sees popular art serving the essentially classical role of hypostasizing the feelings of the general populace. Her major concept, that beauty is distinct from traditional canons of taste by being a function of the intent of the artist, consciously or not, to imbue the work of art with human feeling, allows popular art to be considered as one with all other traditional modes of artistic expression, rather than being relegated to some minor sub-category of art.
Chapter 1
THE PHILOSOPHY OF SUSANNE K. LANGER

BIOGRAPHY

The vast majority of scholars spend their careers hopping from one area of interest to another. Though bound by the loose ties of their discipline, they seem to offer up a journal article on one aspect of their field and then, a couple of years later, pop up with some commentary in another corner altogether. Very few people in academe engage in a planned enquiry that takes them over a predetermined path of investigation requiring years of work.

Susanne Katherina Knauth Langer is such a person. A symbolist philosopher who follows directly in the path of Alfred North Whitehead and Ernst Cassirer, Langer is a scholar who has always had the next project firmly in mind while engaged in writing up the results of her current investigations. Issuing her books judiciously, Langer spends a great amount of time between volumes, reading almost anything that may, in the slightest fashion, relate to her current area of interest. Moreover, all her new work seems to build on the foundation of the old work, so that in the process of a lifetime of study, we see the slow, careful development of a significant work constructed by a great mind.
Langer was born in New York City on December 20, 1895, one of five children of Antonio and Else M. Knauth. Her father, a wealthy attorney from Leipzig, introduced her at an early age to the intellectually stimulating atmosphere of Manhattan's German colony. She became proficient at the cello, an instrument her father also played, at a young age. From her mother, Langer acquired a love of great literature.

Her education was delayed a bit because her father objected to college educations for his daughters. But after his death, Susanne Knauth entered Radcliffe College, where she obtained her B.A. in 1920, majoring in philosophy and graduating Phi Beta Kappa. After a semester of graduate study at the University of Vienna, she returned to Radcliffe, where she took an M.A. in 1924 and a Ph.D. in 1926.

Susanne Knauth had married William Leonard Langer, a Harvard graduate student, on September 3, 1921. The marriage ended in divorce in 1942. As a result of the union, Langer produced two sons, Leonard C. R. Langer and Bertrand W. Langer.

A children's book, The Cruise of the Little Dipper, and Other Fairy Tales, was Langer's first published work. Issued in 1924, the volume was illustrated by Helen Sewell, to whom Langer was later to dedicate Problems of Art.
From 1927 to 1942 Langer remained at Radcliffe, serving as a tutor in philosophy. She also taught occasional courses at Wellesley and Smith colleges. After leaving Radcliffe, she taught for a year at the University of Delaware in Newark as an assistant professor of philosophy. From 1945 to 1950 she lectured in philosophy at Columbia University, conducting occasional seminars and serving as a visiting professor at New York University, Northwestern University, the New School of Social Research, the University of Washington, Ohio University and the University of Michigan.

Langer returned to New England in 1954 to become a full professor and chairperson of the philosophy department at Connecticut College in New London. She is now a professor emeritus of that institution and is listed as a research scholar while she completes work on her magnum opus, Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling, two volumes of which have already been issued.

Langer's philosophical writing reflects a mind that has had a growing concern for human beings as total units of perception, conception and action. In her later work, especially, Langer has tackled the age-old problems of reason versus emotion, mind versus body, and vitalism versus mechanism. As I hope to demonstrate in the ensuing exploration of Langer's aesthetic theory, which represents only about three-fifths of Langer's achievement, she is
able to offer solutions to these problems which are radical departures from the ones put forth by more traditionalist thinkers.

The first of Langer's philosophical volumes, *The Practice of Philosophy*, was issued in 1930 and contained a prefatory note by Whitehead, who had encouraged Langer from the time he had served as one of her teachers at Radcliffe. The book reviews the purposes and accomplishments of philosophy, paying particular attention to symbolic logic.

The next book, *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic*, was published in 1937. It became a standard text in the field, though Langer explored some of the implications of the methodology as she set it forth for her readers.

*Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (hereafter to be referred to as *Philosophy in a New Key*) was the book that first focused public attention on Langer. Published in 1942, the volume draws heavily upon the pioneer work of Ernst Cassirer, whose *Language and Myth* Langer translated in 1946. Her first major voyage into the world of aesthetics, *Philosophy in a New Key* argues that symbol-making and symbol-using are basic human processes, and that symbolic transformation underlies all works of art.

From 1946 to 1949 Langer worked under a Rockefeller Foundation grant while at Columbia, doing the basic re-
search that emerged in 1953 with the publication of
Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art (which we shall shorten
to simply Feeling and Form). The book takes up where
Philosophy in a New Key leaves off, exploring the nature
of individual art forms such as dance, painting, sculp-
ture, music, poetry, fiction, drama and film, while at the
same time attempting to develop a general symbolic theory
for all the arts.

Ten lectures were collected and published in 1957
under the title Problems of Art. In these lectures,
Langer expands some of the themes raised in Feeling and
Form, concentrating especially on the non-discursive
nature of the art object and upon the audience's response
to art.

Also in the fifties, Langer contributed articles to
Structure, Method and Meaning: Essays in Honor of Henry
M. Sheffer (Liberal Arts, 1951) and Aesthetic Form and
Education (Syracuse Univ. Press, 1958). In 1958 she pub-
lished a volume of aesthetic essays which she edited
under the title Reflections on Art: A Source Book of
Writings by Artists, Critics, and Philosophers.

In 1962 Langer issued a series of nine essays, pre-
liminary studies for Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling,
under the title Philosophical Sketches. Although about
half the essays simply amplify earlier concerns with
symbolic transformation, the role of language as a basic
human mode of symbol making, and the function of art in human experience, the rest of the book forages into new territory, concerning itself with humans as social beings and with the biological basis of consciousness.

These concerns become paramount in Langer's more recent work. The first volume of Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling was issued in 1967, the second in 1972. In the initial volume, Langer begins with a discussion of the nature of human feeling, leading on to a fairly large section on art as projected feeling. The final section, however, explores biological individuation and the significant concept of the act as the basic characteristic of living organisms. Volume two of the work consists entirely of a long section titled "The Great Shift" which explores the differences between animal and human consciousness, drawing from the most recent experimental work in biology and neuropsychology. A projected third and final volume will deal with problems of ethics and epistemology.

Overall, Mind is a considerable work for any great scholar, but it is particularly remarkable in view of Langer's advanced years. It certainly promises to become one of the major works of philosophical synthesis of the twentieth century, bringing much credit to a woman who has devoted her life to a broad-based investigation of the ontological status of humankind.
INFLUENCES AND ORIGINS

The mentor-student relationship between Alfred North Whitehead, the great British philosopher who spent his final years in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Susanne K. Langer affected the latter scholar profoundly. Whitehead, perhaps anticipating the principle concerns of contemporary philosophers, was deeply interested in reconciling the observations of modern science with the models drawn up by philosophers. As he put it in Science and the Modern World, his goal was to draw up a philosophy that "... shall be wide enough to include what is fundamental both for science and for its critics." 1

Whitehead's search for a unified philosophy, one that contains a framework broad enough to embrace all areas of philosophy, such as epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics, led him to postulate a mode of existence fundamentally different from that of scientific materialism. The turning away from mechanism occurred after the publication of Principia Mathematica, which Whitehead co-authored with Bertrand Russell, when Whitehead began investigating the problem of other minds.

Perhaps the most radical element in Whitehead's "organism" is its unification of mind and body. Previous-

ly, there had been much concern about the fact that our minds seem to be capable of fantasizing "unreal" states of being; for example, I can conceive of a pink dragon with mauve butterfly wings, though presumably such a strange creature does not exist in the "real" world.

Philosophers divided themselves into camps, the dualists, who postulated separate states of existence for mind and body, and the monists, who argued that mind was a product of body (an extreme determinist position) or vice versa.

One of the more puzzling aspects of this problem is how one reconciles differences in perception recorded by individuals viewing the same object. Whitehead quotes one of Berkeley's dialogues, wherein two conversants discuss the differences they note in viewing a castle, and goes on to write that in organism:

"... the idea of simple location has gone. The things which are grasped into a realised unity, here and now, are not the castle, the cloud, and the planet simply in themselves; but they are the castle, the cloud, and the planet from the standpoint, in space and time, of the prehensive unification here. It is, therefore, aspects of the castle, the cloud, and the planet which are grasped into unity here... Thus, concrete fact is process. Its primary analysis is into underlying activity of prehension, and into realised prehensive events."

The notion of prehension is an important concept in understanding organism. The word "prehension" means, to

2 Ibid., p. 71.
Whitehead, an apprehension of an aspect of an event which may or may not involve cognition. The world of reality, of "truth," is made up of a set of completely interconnected events. The relationship between one event and another remains precisely the same, whether or not the data obtained from human senses is being applied. As Whitehead puts it:

The claim that the cognition of alien mentalities must necessarily be by means of indirect inferences from aspects of shape and of sense-objects is wholly unwarranted by this philosophy of organism. The fundamental principle is that whatever merges into actuality, implants its aspects in every individual event.³

Thus we have the upsetting of the Cartesian applecart, the assumption of bodies and minds as independent individual substances, since one's very being is defined in terms of a unique relationship in regard to every other event. For Whitehead, human existence, "... this total bodily event \[\int\] is on the same level as all other events, except for an unusual complexity and stability of inherent pattern."⁴ An event is not, then, seen as existing in a static state, but rather it is constantly engaged in the process of becoming some new event, in terms of both its own "internal" modification, and also in terms of its modification vis-a-vis the prehension of

³ Ibid., p. 151.
⁴ Ibid., p. 73.
all other events.

With this framework, and with the "scientific" desire to "objectify" subjective experience, Whitehead explored humankind's symbol-making and symbol-using capacity in a slim volume published in 1927 entitled Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect. Therein Whitehead tells us that, "The human mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and usages, respecting other components of its experience."5

This process of symbolic transference of direct sensory experience explains, to Whitehead, how complex human emotions evolve. He explains the fundamental unity of emotional response in aesthetic appreciation by noting:

This whole question of the symbolic transfer of emotion lies at the base of any theory of the aesthetics of art. For example, it gives the reason for the importance of a rigid suppression of irrelevant detail. For emotions inhibit each other or intensify each other. Harmonious emotion means a complex of emotions mutually intensifying; whereas the irrelevant details supply emotions which, because of their irrelevance, inhibit the main effect. Each little emotion directly arising out of some subordinate detail refuses to accept its status as a detached fact in our consciousness. It insists on its symbolic transfer to the unity of the main effect.

Thus symbolism, including the symbolic transference by which it is effected, is merely one exemplification of the fact that a unity of experience arises out of the confluence of many components.6

6 Ibid., pp. 85-6.
The above notion, of course, is wider in its application than merely explaining how the consumer of art can agree with his or her fellows on the "meaning" of the art object. The same process of the "unity of the main effect" explains how we can have broad patterns of cultural agreement while yet retaining our individual perspectives in examining the finer details.

Symbols, therefore, have a role as fundamental components in our nature as social creatures. To Whitehead:

... when we examine how a society bends its individual members to function in conformity with its needs, we discover that one important operative agency is our vast system of inherited symbolism. There is an intricate expressed symbolism of language and of act, which is spread throughout the community, and which evokes fluctuating apprehension of the basis of common purposes.

The wider concerns of Whitehead with the problems of individuation in response to an "objective" set of objects of perception remain the paramount concerns of Langer. Indeed, Langer's lifelong orientation seems to be inspired to a large extent by the work of Whitehead. Her concern with unifying her conclusions with the observations of science, with resolving the apparent disparity between mind and body, perception and memory, and analysis and synthesis stems directly from the earlier work of Whitehead. Whitehead's work in symbolism was to have a major effect on Langer's thinking, though it wasn't the

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Ibid., p. 73.
only major influence on the younger scholar.

At about the same time Whitehead was exploring symbolism as a basic solution set to the problem of other minds, the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer was exploring the role of symbolic transformation in the development of language and myth. In his 1924 seminal work, *Language and Myth*, (translated into English by Langer in 1946) Cassirer explores the non-rational conceptions that make up all human cultures, jarringly asserting that:

> Theoretical, practical and aesthetic consciousness, the world of language and of morality, the basic forms of the community and the state—they are all originally tied up with mythico-religious conceptions. This connection is so strong that where it begins to dissolve the whole intellectual world seems threatened with disruption and collapse. ..

Cassirer places a much greater emphasis on the importance of humankind’s symbol-making nature than does Whitehead. The earlier discussion revealed that, for Whitehead, symbol-making was merely one component of consciousness, albeit a significant one. For Cassirer, the entire abstract function of human intelligence is rooted in symbolism.

> The mythical form of conception is not something super-added to certain definite elements of empirical existence; instead, the primary "experience" itself is steeped in the imagery of myth and sat-

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urated with its atmosphere. Man lives with objects only in so far as he lives with these forms; he reveals reality to himself, and himself to reality, in that he lets himself and the environment enter into this plastic medium, in which the two do not merely make contact, but fuse with each other.9

Symbolism, the "mythical form of conception" in its broadest sense, is seen by Cassirer as serving the important function of fixing the past and the conceptualized future in our imagination. If existence is process, as Whitehead and many others believe, then we must account for the seemingly related functions of memory and anticipation. To Cassirer, "Only symbolic expression can yield the possibility of prospect and retrospect, because it is only by symbols that distinctions are not merely made, but fixed in consciousness."10

This fundamental ability to organize and order the whirl that presents itself before the senses and other aspects of human perception rests in the twin symbolic functions of language and myth. To Cassirer:

Language and myth stand in an original and indissoluble correlation with one another, from which they both emerge but gradually as independent elements. They are two diverse shoots from the same parent stem, the same impulse of symbolic formulation, springing from the same basic mental activity, a concentration and heightening of simple sensory experience. In the vocabulary of speech and in primitive mythic figurations, the same inner process finds

9 Ibid., p. 10.
10 Ibid., p. 38.
its consummation; they are both resolutions of an inner tension, the representation of subjective impulses and excitations in definite objective forms and figures.\(^{11}\)

Myth-making is a primary level of participation in the ordering of sensory impressions. To Cassirer, myth is at the root of our basic experience of experience, and the creation of personal devils and deities is an ongoing process, a primary product of our immediate involvement with the world outside the boundaries of our own skins.

When, on the one hand, the entire self is given up to a single impression, is "possessed" by it and, on the other hand, there is the utmost tension between the subject and its object, the outer world; when external reality is not merely viewed and contemplated, but overcomes a man in sheer immediacy, with emotions of fear or hope, terror or wish fulfillment; then the spark jumps somehow across, the tension finds release, as the subjective excitement becomes objectified, and confronts the mind as a god or a daemon.\(^{12}\)

Notice here that Cassirer sets forth two conditions for this sort of "instant mythical" experience. First, we must be "possessed" by the object of our attention; it must be of a magnitude sufficient to suspend any possible distraction. Additionally, there must be the "utmost tension" between the subject and object. An example of this sort of experience might be the first time a child witnesses lightning; many of us perhaps hold vivid memories of the


experience and recall that the shining bolt struck our imagination as a lit-up Lucifer of some kind.

Language is a symbolic function operating in a "cooler" mode, to borrow a bit from the terminology of McLuhan. The language faculty allows humans to hold concepts in suspension, to turn them over and reflect upon their import.

The word stands, so to speak, between actual particular impressions, as a phenomenon of a different order, a new intellectual dimension; and to this mediating position, this remoteness from the sphere of immediate data, it owes the freedom and ease with which it moves among specific objects and connects one with another.13

Words are "hypostasized" symbols, symbols which seem to lose their original protean characteristics and become, ironically, "concrete" abstractions.

We have noted that Cassirer argues that myth and word have a common root in humankind's symbol-making nature. He attempts to reconcile the two, after examining their separate qualities, when he notes that:

... this very hypostatization of the Word is of crucial importance in the development of human mentality. For it is the first form in which the spiritual power inherent in language can be apprehended at all; the Word has to be conceived in the mythic mode, as a substantive being and power, before it can be comprehended as an ideal instrument, an or-

13 Ibid., pp. 56-7.
ganon of the mind, and as a fundamental function in the construction and development of spiritual reality.\textsuperscript{14}

The ultimate resolution, however, comes from the fact that language, while it originally divides and fixes aspects of experience, in the long run tends to create broad categories of generalization. Thus the primitive religions, full of specific tales and rituals, are unable to satisfy the urge brought about by this generalizing tendency for the expansion of theology into the unbounded universe beyond space, time and language. The history of religion has been a history of movement from the worship of nature deities to that of an incorporeal substance which has no name, which presides over a kingdom of exalted silence.

\textbf{SYMBOLISM IN LANGER'S THOUGHT}

From Whitehead, the scientific-minded scholar, and from Cassirer, the philosopher of myth and symbol, then, Langer drew her inspiration. But her own ideas were to grow as she expanded her own awareness, so that the ultimate stage reached by Langer during the past decade demonstrates clearly that she has succeeded in pioneering territory that was unexplored by her predecessors. For while Whitehead was interested in the discoveries of mod-

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 62.
ern science, he confined most of his inquiries to the topics being debated by the theoretical physicists of his day, a natural reaction given the flurry of interest in the two decades immediately following the publication of Einstein's theory. And while Cassirer was interested in the broader issues of myth and culture, he confined most of his study to the prehistoric roots of theology and the manifestation of myth and ritual in contemporary social institutions, religious and secular.

Langer, on the other hand, has done most of her important writing since the mid-century mark. Her scientific biases, therefore, tend to move in the direction of more recent studies in the fields of biology and physiological psychology. These are the "hot" sciences of recent years. And although she is not at all uninterested in the sociological import of humankind's symbol-making capacity, she prefers to apply symbolism to a study of aesthetics. To this extent, her work is entirely original, and it is to this aspect of Langer's work that we will turn in the next chapter. But before we do so, we need to look at precisely how Langer predicates her thought. As we've seen in the case of Whitehead and Cassirer, one thinker who places profound significance in the symbol-making and symbol-using function of human beings may have significant differences with another. Thus we need to examine Langer's early work in symbolism to see what part of the ballpark
she likes to claim as her fielding area. To this purpose we will now turn, looking primarily at Langer's first book on symbolism, the one which brought her to the attention of scholars around the world, *Philosophy in a New Key*, published in 1942.

Langer tips her hand in the preface of the book, where she reveals her roots in Whiteheadian and Cassirerian thought by noting that the "new key" of symbolic transformation appeals to "... a mind essentially preoccupied with logic, scientific language, and empirical fact." 15 Most studies of art that have treated it as having symbolic significance have been rooted in the post-Kantian idealistic tradition, she asserts, although she argues that symbolic criticism does not necessarily have to have its roots in idealism. "We need not assume the presence of a transcendental 'human spirit,'" she writes, "if we recognize, for instance, the function of symbolic transformation as a natural activity, a high form of nervous response, characteristic of man among the animals." 16

This is the cornerstone of Langer's thinking. Human intelligence makes a qualitative quantum leap upwards from that of the apes when it encompasses symbol-making as a broad-based conceptual tool. The best short summary of

16 Ibid., p. viii.
this idea is to be found in the translator's preface to her edition of Cassirer's *Language and Myth*, though bold and witty restatements occur throughout the Langer corpus.

Human intelligence begins with conception, the prime mental activity; the process of conception always culminates in symbolic expression. A conception is fixed and held only when it has been embodied in a symbol. So the study of symbolic forms offers a key to the forms of human conception. The genesis of symbolic forms—verbal, religious, artistic, mathematical, or whatever modes of expression there be—is the odyssey of the mind.\(^\text{17}\)

The notion from Cassirer that conceptual data can only be concretized and manipulated as a function of memory and anticipation is echoed in the phrase "fixed and held." We also see how Langer's primary interest, in the study of art, is wedged squarely between Cassirer's interest in language and religion and Whitehead's interest in mathematics in the enumeration of the various modes of symbolic expression.

The same thought is presented in a slightly different form in *Philosophy in a New Key*. Here Langer tells us, in an important early chapter on "Symbolic Transformation," that we must not assume a merely mechanistic model for human conceptualization.

Symbolization is pre-rationative, but not pre-rational. It is the starting point of all intellection in the human sense, and is more general than think-

\(^{17}\) In Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, p. ix.
ing, fancying, or taking action. For the brain is not merely a great transmitter, a super-switchboard; it is better likened to a great transformer. The current of experience that passes through it undergoes a change of character, not through the agency of the sense by which the perception entered, but by virtue of a primary use which is made of it immediately: it is sucked into the stream of symbols which constitutes a human mind.18

There are some problems with the above; how we get from the simple symbol-using state of childhood to the vast whirlpool of symbols Langer describes is not dealt with. One presumes she would have the challenge taken up by Piaget or some other child developmental psychologist. At any rate, we see that symbol-structures function in some sort of gestalt-like homogeneous fashion in Langer's imagination. This "pattern recognition" mode of thinking is suggested by much of the more recent literature on cerebral hemispherism, which argues that the right hemisphere of the brain "thinks" holistically while the left hemisphere deals with ideas as separate, constituent elements in a logical sequence. This division of the thinking processes certainly explains the qualitative differences between the symbolizing in language and symbolizing that transforms sensory data into other modes of expression, differences which are duly noted by Langer in her aesthetic criticism; the nature of symbolism in dance, music and sculpture is clearly different from that in poetry

18 Philosophy in a New Key, p. 46.
and fiction.

But back to the main argument. Langer has, in the quote given above, defended symbolism against the interpretation that might be given by mechanists (i.e., for our era, logical positivists). Her response to vitalists is briefer, dismissing what one might loosely term "theists" in a quick manner. She writes, "It is really no harder to imagine that a chemically active body wills, knows, thinks, and feels, than that an invisible, intangible something does so, 'animates' the body without physical agency, and 'inhabits' it without being in any place."¹⁹

One important corollary needs introduction at this point. Langer is not attempting to argue that symbols are the precise mental referents for their physical and phenomenal counterparts in the world outside human conceptualization, that is, in the world of experience that feeds into the individual human imagination. This is the function that Jonathan Swift erringly perceived for language in Gulliver's Travels, when he spoofed Royal Academy linguists by having his fictional characters experiment with a system of carrying with them objects around which conversations could be, literally, "constructed." As even the real-life language specialists in Swift's time knew, words are qualitatively different from their referents. Symbols

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 45.
must be seen with the same sort of distinction applied.

Langer notes:

Symbols are not proxy for their objects, but are vehicles for the conception of objects. To conceive a thing or a situation is not the same thing as to "react toward it" overtly, or to be aware of its presence. In talking about things we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves; and it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly "mean." [author's emphasis]

Symbols refer to the idea of the real world, then, not to the "real world" as given. Our translation of the objective world of reality into symbols means that we cast a subjective shadow on the process by converting experience into idea before we have an "idea of experience." That is the price we must pay for the sort of expanded consciousnesses we have.

At this point we need to make the distinction between "sign" and "symbol." According to Langer, a sign is a direct indicator of some object or process. A green light means that we are free to continue along the highway. Black borders surrounding body type in a newspaper means that an important person, usually the head of state or the founder of the paper, has died. Of course, signs may often stand for a variety of processes, so the proper interpretation or "reading of the signs" may require a high level of intelligence. But at root, signs simply
point to things in the world of phenomena. Symbols, as we have seen, represent a conceptualization of phenomena, and they are, therefore, one layer more removed from their subject. Langer clarifies the difference between sign and symbol when she writes:

In an ordinary sign-function, there are three essential terms: subject, sign, and object. In denotation, which is the commonest kind of symbol-function, there have to be four: subject, symbol, conception, and object. The radical difference between sign-meaning and symbol-meaning can therefore be logically exhibited, for it rests on a difference of pattern, it is strictly a different function.21

Connotation is also a symbol function; it is seen as the conception a word conveys. Thus, "Because the connotation remains with the symbol when the object of its denotation is neither present nor looked for, we are able to think about the object without reacting to it overtly at all.22

The distinction between denotation and connotation leads us to another topic, one which presents many more difficulties to philosophers. This involves the traditional metaphysical notion that humans have two entirely separate modes of being. The first involves what Langer calls the "discursive" mode, which is essentially the mode of logic, of form, in its generally understood sense, and of language. The discursive mode is that which allows us to

21 Ibid., pp. 63-4.
22 Ibid., p. 64.
articulate thoughts, to utilize symbols in a process of communication that can be dissected by semanticists, so that meaning can be generally agreed upon. It is the mode of "operational definitions" and clearly constructed forms, the mode that logical positivists say is our only way of "knowing."

The traditional philosophers, according to Langer, feel that "Outside this domain is the inexpressible realm of feeling, of formless desires and satisfactions, immediate experience, forever incognito and incommunicado." The level of feeling is seen as the mode about which we can say nothing. Feeling lies in the metaphysical realm, according to the standard assumptions, because there is no agreed-upon way in which we can discuss its ability to articulate meaning. Its symbols are seen as vague, private and indefinite.

The problems wrought by this dichotomy, according to Langer, can be easily solved if we first acknowledge that "... the error which it harbors is not in its reasoning. It is in the very premise from which the doctrine proceeds, namely that all articulate symbolism is discursiv[e]." If we admit that a different category of symbolic representation may be articulate, but yet non-discursive, then we may have solved the problem. In putting

23 Ibid., p. 81.
24 Ibid., p. 82.
forth the argument for such a category, Langer notes that:

... in this physical, space-time world of our experience there are things which do not fit the grammatical scheme of expression. But they are not necessarily blind, inconceivable, mystical affairs; they are simply matters which require to be conceived through some symbolistic schema other than discursive language.25

She adds that there are phenomena about which we assume we know quite a bit, but that when analyzed reveal that we have merely constructed an explanatory model that does not really approach the "thing in itself": "The world of physics is essentially the real world construed by mathematical abstractions, and the world of sense is the real world construed by the abstractions which the sense-organs immediately furnish."26

This new category is necessitated by the natural interface between perception and conception in the thought process. Langer tells us that:

Our merest sense-experience is a process of formulation. The world that actually meets our senses is not a world of "things," about which we are invited to discover facts as soon as we have codified the necessary logical language to do so; the world of pure sensation is so complex, so fluid and full, that sheer sensitivity to stimuli would only encounter what William James has called ... "a blooming, buzzing confusion." Out of this bedlam our sense-organs must select certain predominant forms, if they are to make report of things and not of mere

25 Ibid., pp. 82-3.
26 Ibid., p. 85.
dissolving sensa. . . . An object is not a datum, but a form construed by the sensitive and intelligent organ, a form which is at once an experienced individual thing and a symbol for the concept of it, for this sort of thing. 27

In this rather lengthy quote, Langer has characteristically looked sensibly at the way we experience experience, and in so doing has virtually destroyed the foundation underlying the work of two decades of behaviorists. For the simple fact is that we cannot escape the state of natural delirium, wrought by symbol-making, that convinces us that this page, for example, exists as an entity unto itself in the same fashion as we are forced, by the nature of our being, to perceive it. An easily understandable example of this primary illusion of sensory function is when we reflect upon "trick" photographs produced as if they were viewed with the multiple lenses of a fly's eye. That confusing blur of repeated images is reality to a fly.

The new category of non-discursive-but-meaningful symbolism that Langer postulates, she terms "presentational symbolism." Presentational symbolism is the mode of human feeling, in the generally understood sense of the term "feeling," and it differs from the discursive symbolism of language proper. As she draws the distinction:

27 Ibid., p. 83.
Language in the strict sense is essentially discursive; it has permanent units of meaning which are combinable into larger units; it has fixed equivalences that make definition and translation possible; its connotations are general, so that it requires non-verbal acts, like pointing, looking, or emphatic voice-inflections, to assign specific denotations to its terms. In all these salient characters it differs from wordless symbolism, which is non-discursive and untranslatable, does not allow of definitions within its own system, and cannot directly convey generalities. 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.28

The assumption that constituent elements of a presentational symbol cannot be dissected and analyzed for meaning perhaps draws on the Whiteheadian notion, given earlier in this chapter, that aesthetic symbolism demands a unity that engages in a "rigid suppression of irrelevant detail." But it goes much further; it offers materialist philosophers a new way to conceive of hitherto difficult areas of meaning. This fundamental insight rightfully garnered praise for Langer's incisive thought.

In the remainder of Philosophy in a New Key, Langer looks at language, religion, myth and art. We will look at Langer's views on the first three topics from time to time during the course of this narrative, particularly with

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28 Ibid., p. 89.
respect to the role of ritual in myth and culture, since it will be germane to a discussion of the popular arts, but at this time we only need note that in these sections Langer essentially broadens the base of thinking established by Cassirer.

The guiding aspect of Langer's philosophy has been, and to a large extent still continues to be lodged in the realm of aesthetics. We will look at Langer's aesthetic theory in some great detail in the ensuing chapter, but in light of the present discussion, we should part with a brief examination of an assertion put forth near the end of Philosophy in a New Key, an assertion that we will now merely note, but one which should guide our enquiry as we explore the philosopher set loose in her palace of art.

An artistic symbol—which may be a product of human craftsmanship, or (on a purely personal level) something in nature seen as "significant form"—has more than a discursive or presentational meaning; its form as such, as a sensory phenomenon, has what I have called "implicit" meaning, like rite and myth, but of a more catholic sort. It has what L. A. Reid called "tertiary subject-matter," beyond the reach of "primary imagination" (as Coleridge would say) and even the "secondary imagination" that sees metaphorically.

Langer continues, quoting Reid as saying that tertiary subject-matter is subject matter imaginatively experienced in the work of art, something which cannot be grasped outside the work, though presumably distinguishable from the

29 Ibid., p. 221.
expressiveness of the art work. Here Langer is making an initial attempt to articulate the concept of "virtual" qualities that will dominate her analysis of individual art forms in Form and Feeling. We will turn to those qualities, and to the broad range of Langer's aesthetic thinking, at once.
Chapter 2
LANGER'S AESTHETIC THEORY

OVERVIEW

In this chapter we will explore the major tenets of Langer's aesthetic philosophy. A short summary is in order, because we must keep Langer's system clearly in mind as we inspect the various modes of approaching the popular arts that will be presented in the next chapter. In particular, we need to keep in mind how much Langer's thought has apparently influenced the argument given in Abraham Kaplan's essay discussed in Chapter Three, because it is my contention that Langer's premises can be used to argue an entirely different approach to the popular arts than that given by Kaplan. More on this later.

After a brief introduction to Langer's major aesthetic writings, we will examine her definition of art as expressive forms symbolic of human feeling. We will see how the basic abstractions used by artists can capture a sense of life via "virtual" qualities in art. Virtual gesture, for example, is the primary illusion in dance. These virtual qualities follow from the notion that all art has a quality of "virtual life," a sense of being alive that has roots deep in our nature as biological beings.

Besides the biological structure of humans, art can be seen as being universally rooted in social symbolism.
The unity of the arts lies in a common basis in biology and in culture. Langer suggests that art may have emerged from a primitive mythic consciousness, but she argues that today, art is founded in common cultural patterns present in the society where the work of art is produced.

The question of whether art can be said to "mean" anything is also raised. This hearkens us back to the distinction made in Chapter One between discursive and presentational symbolism. Since a work of art constitutes a presentational symbol, even though its constituent elements may include discursive symbols (the language used in drama, for example), it cannot be said to be presenting a "message" or "argument." It may, however, present a virtual argument between two characters or in the tension underlying the moral issues presented as the major conflict in the content of the work.

Finally, we will examine the process of making and apprehending a work of art. We find that Langer assumes certain attitudes on the part of the artist--notably that he or she have a concern for the "quality of expression"--and also on the part of the audience. The person responding to a work of art must be careful not to lose sight of the embedded feeling in a work by paying too much attention to the external qualities of form.

Before we proceed with an examination of the individual components of Langer's aesthetic theory, it would be
useful to briefly review the progress of her work in this area and see how the germs of thought sprouted. We need to keep in mind that Langer has always been methodical. She tends to cover the present area of investigation very thoroughly and map out her future territory pretty far in advance. So beginning with *Philosophy in a New Key*, we are given a clear indication of what we should expect next. And with each new volume, we are required more and more to be familiar with the root assumptions of Langer's earlier work. Though we do find some redundancy, we find less of it than in most scholars' works.

The major books dealing with aesthetics are *Feeling and Form*, *Problems of Art*, *Philosophical Sketches*, and the first volume of *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*. *Philosophy in a New Key*, of course, sets forth the basis of Langer's assumptions about the symbolic transformation processes of human conceptualization; these were dealt with at length in Chapter One. It also begins to apply this system of thought to music as an artistic mode, though Langer is to later refer to the ideas embodied in *Philosophy in a New Key* as "young and therefore half poetic."¹ In the later works, she tackles specific questions and specific genres in an exhaustive application of her premises. *Feeling and Form* and *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* are both

¹ *Philosophy in a New Key*, p. vi.
original works, the former dealing exclusively with aesthetic issues and the latter dealing with aesthetics only in the second part of the three-part Volume I. Problems of Art anthologizes ten lectures and includes as an appendix an essay on "Abstraction in Science and Abstraction in Art" from Structure, Method and Meaning: Essays in Honor of Henry M. Sheffer. Philosophical Sketches collects nine articles and lectures from a number of sources, including an essay on "The Cultural Importance of Art" originally published in Aesthetic Form and Education. All in all, beginning with Philosophy in a New Key, we have virtually everything Langer ever wrote concerning aesthetics gathered rather neatly in five volumes, including the major lectures and journal articles.

THE NATURE OF ART

Perhaps the briefest, most powerful definition of art within Langer's work can be found in Feeling and Form, where she defines art as, simply, ". . . the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling."2 This definition is expanded somewhat in Problems of Art, where Langer writes, "A work of art is an expressive form created for our perception through sense or imagination, and what it expres-

ses is human feeling." Finally, in Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling, we have art described as "a projection of feeling by means of a transformation of subjective intra-organic realities into objective, though virtual, forms of directly perceptible quality."4

We find a great deal of similarity between the first two definitions. The 1957 Langer simply seems to use the term "expressive" to clarify the type of form she refers to, and she notes that the work of art is created for human perception, implying that it is a product designed with a human "consumer" in mind. This is an important modification; it implies that art created to exist in a vacuum may lie outside her definition.

Langer takes care to define "expressive form" quite clearly in Problems of Art.

An expressive form is any perceptible or imaginable whole that exhibits relationships of parts, or points, or even qualities or aspects within the whole, so that it may be taken to represent some other whole whose elements have analogous relations. The reason for using such a form as a symbol is usually that the thing it represents is not perceivable or readily imaginable. We cannot see the earth as an object. We let a map or a little globe express the relationships of places on the earth, and think about the


4 Susanne K. Langer, Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1967), I, p. 128. Further references in the text will make use of the shortened title, Mind, which will refer only to the first volume of this work.
earth by means of it. The understanding of one thing through another seems to be a deeply intuitive process in the human brain; it is so natural that we often have difficulty in distinguishing the symbolic forms from what it conveys.5

A further clarification of the nature of expressive form comes in Mind, where we discover that Langer intends a work of art to be treated as a "single symbolic form" which "... has to encompass all its elements without losing its unity of semblance and sense."6 We can easily see this as being closely related to the "unity of effect" supposed by Whitehead and touched upon to some extent in the previous chapter.

Now that we have clarified the notion of form a bit, what about feeling? Here we find Langer parting company with some of the traditional thinkers, who puzzle over how feeling may be transformed via a work of art. In Feeling and Form, Langer writes:

Every good philosopher or critic of art realizes, of course, that feeling is somehow expressed in art; but as long as a work of art is viewed primarily as an "arrangement" of sensuous elements for the sake of some inexplicable aesthetic satisfaction, the problem of expressiveness is really an alien issue... In some sense, then, feeling must be in the work; just as a good work of art clarifies and exhibits the forms and colors which the painter has seen, distinguished, and appreciated better than his fellowmen could do without aid, so it clarifies and presents the feelings proper to those forms and colors.7

5 Problems of Art, p. 20.
7 Feeling and Form, p. 58.
To say that feeling lies within the form is to argue that the work of art somehow exhibits an intrinsic "life" of its own; here we get a grasp on the sort of "tertiary subject-matter" that art presents. The question most philosophers have turned to is, how can the "spirit-life" of feeling be contained and transmitted by art? To Langer:

The solution of the difficulty lies, I think, in the recognition that what art expresses is not actual feeling, but ideas of feeling; as language does not express actual things and events but ideas of them. Art is expressive through and through—every line, every sound, every gesture; and therefore it is a hundred per cent symbolic. It is not sensuously pleasing and also symbolic; the sensuous quality is in the service of its vital import.8

Here Langer is reaching back to the notion that feeling is dealt with in the human consciousness by a grammar of presentational symbols, as opposed to the representational, or discursive symbols of language. These presentational symbols are unique to each individual, though broad similarities exist for all human beings; thus, Langer refers to them in her Mind definition of art as "subjective intraorganic realities." These personal symbolic responses to the complex input we say triggers "feelings" are then transmuted into a work of art, which exists as an "objective" object for the audience to respond to. The whole thing is a crafty symbolic neo-Platonic process.

8 Ibid., p. 59.
But with this schema, Langer has constructed a "fail-safe" system. If response is our main pivot point in examining a work of art, then all things we call art may be seen as such, and traditional canons of taste go out the window. Langer realizes this problem, and in *Feeling and Form* she tells us that "... there may be poor art, which is not corrupt, but fails to express what he [the artist] knew in too brief an intuition." In other words, if the artist cannot successfully rescue the feeling that accompanied a moment of experience and translate it into a work that contains the same sort of feeling, the work of art may be termed poor. This is a failure on the artist's part but not on the work of art's. We will pick up the theme of good art, bad art, and non-art from time to time throughout this narrative, focusing especially on the question in the later discussion of whether or not Langer is able to conceive of popular art as "Art," but for the present let us simply note the problem and assume that, for Langer, beauty is a property inherent in all art, though some works of art are better executed than others.

Having explored some of the fundamental definitions Langer's works contain for the term "art," we will now turn to the "virtual" qualities in art briefly mentioned at the close of Chapter One. By "virtual," Langer is simply implying that the expressive form is one step removed from

the substance of feeling that triggered its creation. That is, the work of art is not to be seen as the original nexus of feeling, but as a construct that contains the "illusion" of that feeling. The concept may be compared with Aristotle's "imitation of an action," except that for Langer, genuine feeling is, as we have noted above, present in the expressive form.

We find that all art forms embody various qualities as virtual representations of their real-life counterparts. Some forms emphasize one or two virtual aspects, while others blend several elements into a complex compound. Music, for example, gives us virtual time as its "primary illusion." Painting gives us virtual space. But architecture makes use of both of these qualities to give us a sense of virtual place, i.e., a totally human-made environment.

In Problems of Art, Langer argues that all art must possess a quality she terms "living form." Living form, she tells us, has three principle aspects: 1) It reflects a pattern of change though it possesses a "permanent" structure; 2) Its elements are organically interrelated; and 3) The system is held together by rhythmic processes. She then cautions us that:

If art is, as I believe it is, the expression of human consciousness in a single metaphorical image, that image must somehow achieve the semblance of living form. All the principles we have just considered
must have their analogues in those of artistic creation. This is indeed the case. But it must be remembered that analogous principles are not identical. The semblance of life need not involve any actual change, nor the most forcible presentation of growth any actual accumulation. Artistic form is a projection, not a copy. Consequently there is no direct correlation between the constituents of an organism and the elements in a work of art.10

Here Langer is simply noting that art transforms its subject matter and does not literally reconstruct it. In Mind she clarifies this issue in a more concise fashion, telling us that, "The principles of life are reflected in the principles of art, but the principles of creation in art are not those of generation and development in nature; the 'quality of life' in a work of art is a virtual quality which may be achieved in innumerable ways."11 So we find our old friend, "virtual quality," once again, here being used to argue that a quality of "virtual life" underlies all art forms.

This leads us to the inevitable conclusion that art cannot escape being abstract. Indeed, Langer tells us that:

All forms in art, then, are abstracted forms; their content is only a semblance, a pure appearance, whose function is to make them, too, apparent—more freely and wholly apparent than they could be if they were exemplified in a context of real circumstance and

10 Problems of Art, p. 53.
11 Mind, p. 152.
anxious interest. It is in this elementary sense that all art is abstract.\textsuperscript{12}

The model that emerges is fairly straightforward; the artist abstracts forms from the "blooming, buzzing confusion" around us, and then creatively assembles these forms into a work of art, which is yet another layer of abstraction removed from the artist's abstractions, since the art object depends upon the audience to perceive it and conceptually abstract it.

Before we leave this section, we need to briefly touch upon two related issues that have long figured in discussions of art, the concept that art somehow contains a flavor of the social structure it emerges from and the idea that art can convey useful "messages" to the populace, i.e., that it can function as propaganda. We find that while Langer affirms the notion that art is grounded in the ritual structure of the society it emerges from, she holds to the Aristotelian view of art as "imitation," and therefore would argue that a work of art can have no intended meaning, no discursive "statement," though we may put it to whatever purposes strike our fancy.

Since we have progressed from the mythic consciousness of primitive existence to a state where social structure is based largely upon commonly agreed-upon cultural

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Feeling and Form}, p. 50.
assumptions and relatively long-lived institutions, art not unexpectedly deals with personal and social ritual and with the culture context from which it emerges. Ultimately an individualist, Langer nevertheless bases her sense of being in the commonality of culture. In *Philosophy in a New Key* she asserts that, "A life that does not incorporate some degree of ritual, of gesture and attitude, has no mental anchorage. It is prosaic to the point of total indifference, purely casual, devoid of that structure of intellect and feeling which we call 'personality.'"  

Langer argues that "original" works of art must begin with an understanding of the artistic forms of the culture it emerges from. In *Mind* she writes:

True works of art arise out of the standard artistic practices of a society, when someone who is prone to see the expressiveness of plastic forms in a way of his own modifies the familiar motifs to project that personal mode of feeling. In a gifted people this may happen frequently and freely, especially where the motifs are largely or wholly representational, so that new forms constantly present themselves to the reverberating sense and spontaneously abstractive eye.

From the standpoint of both the audience and the artist, social structure serves as a sort of "glue" that aids in cohesive production and interpretation of art.

Yet socially-grounded as it is, art must not be seen

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13 *Philosophy in a New Key*, p. 244.
14 *Mind*, p. 223.
as something merely functional and didactic. In Chapter One we discussed the difference between discursive symbolism, the most common system of which is language, and presentational symbolism, of which feelings are the most common sort. Discursive symbols "mean" something; we can apply a semantic analysis to them and yield a set of rule-bound relationships guiding their formulation and use. Presentational symbols construct for our minds the ineffable, the world of experience for which words have no categories. It is this world which is translated by the artist into a work of art, and the peculiar layer of feeling embedded within the work of art exists objectively for us to perceive and re-render into a presentational symbolic form of our own construction.

Art, therefore, has no "meaning" in the discursive sense. We cannot render the significance of art into quantifiable and qualitative "statements," because presentational symbolism has no grammar that can be formulated in a discursive mode such as language. The major problem, however, is that many of the art forms—poetic ones in particular—utilize the discursive world of language or oral conversation as the raw material of art. We are thus presented with the illusion of statement.

The paradox is pointed out clearly by Langer in the final chapter of Feeling and Form.
It has been generally assumed that if a work of art expresses anything, in a symbolic and not a symptomatic way, then it must be the author's comment on something. But a comment always does direct one's interest to something distinct from the words, gestures, or other signs conveying it; these are mere signs, they point to an object considered, and convey some opinion about it. So the questions arise in art criticism: what is the artist commenting on, what does he say, and how does he say it? These are, I believe, spurious questions. He is not saying anything, not even about the nature of feeling; he is showing. He is showing us the appearance of feeling, in a perceptible symbolic projection; but he does not refer to a public object, such as a generally known "sort" of feeling, outside his work. Only in so far as the work is objective, the feeling it exhibits becomes public; it is always bound to its symbol. The effect of this symbolization is to offer the beholder a way of conceiving emotion; and that is something more elementary than making judgments about it.  

If we recall the concept of virtual life with respect to the poetic arts, the above statement becomes a bit clearer. The "world of art," then, is not to be taken as a hidden message which is intended to make statements about the outside world. Langer argues that "... poetry is not genuine discourse at all, but a piece of virtual history, by means of discursive language; and that 'poetic language is language which is particularly useful for this purpose."  

15 Feeling and Form, p. 394.  
16 Ibid., p. 252.
CREATIVITY

To conclude this discussion of Langer's aesthetic thought, we will now turn to a consideration of the roles played by the artist and the audience. We have explored the origins and significance of the artifact long enough; it is only fitting that we tackle the process of art from the standpoint of the creator and the nature of the response to art made by its audience.

As we have already seen, the artist's principle function is to create an organic, expressive form from the nexus of basic abstractions he has made from his perceptions of reality. That, of course, does not mean that the work of art must attempt to emulate reality in a "realistic" fashion, though Langer does go so far as to argue that new breakthroughs in art forms almost always originate within the confines of representational art.17 And it does not mean that the feeling expressed by the work of art is limited to the feelings the artist is consciously aware of having experienced, as we will shortly see. What it does mean is that the artist fashions a work to give substance and meaning to human experience, to craft a virtual life out of inorganic matter.

What distinguishes the artist from Joe or Suzy Everybody is that he or she possesses vision. Langer notes:

17 See Mind, pp. 144-5,
... the first person to perceive the vital import of an artistic form, the emotive possibilities of an element, the expressive value of a change in composition... is the artist himself. He is the first, the steadiest, and usually the most competent percipient of his work. And he is an artist not so much because of his own feelings, as by virtue of his intuitive recognition of forms symbolic of feeling, and his tendency to project emotive knowledge into such objective forms.13

The important point here is that the artist is not a person gifted in his or her range of emotional response. Easy to weep does not an artist make. Langer says art conveys "... not feelings and emotions which the artist has, but feelings and emotions which the artist knows; his insight into the nature of sentience, his picture of vital experience, physical and emotive and fantastic."19

Langer does not, however, suggest that the artist has a cold-blooded recognition of the effects he or she can achieve. Indeed:

Even the artist need not have experienced in actual life every emotion he can express. It may be through manipulation of his created elements that he discovers new possibilities of feeling, strange moods, perhaps greater concentrations of passion than his own temperament could ever produce, or that his fortunes have yet called forth. For, although a work of art reveals the character of subjectivity, it is itself objective; its purpose is to objectify the life of feeling. As an abstracted form it can be handled quite apart from its sources and yield dynamic patterns that surprise even the artist.20

18 Feeling and Form, p. 390.
19 Problems of Art, p. 91.
20 Feeling and Form, p. 374.
But that's not all. The artist may not be able to see the full significance of this creation which has overstepped the emotional capacities of its maker. Langer asserts that "... because of the 'over-determined' character of art, he may see more, or less, or simply a different import from what someone else just as truly sees." 21 Thus it is quite likely that the artist will create a form expressing a feeling he or she cannot even identify. Overall, Langer seems to be quite critical of artists' appraisals of their own work. Though she asserts they have a profound ability to intuit significance in a particular feeling, she writes that "... their philosophical reflections are apt to be as confused as they are rich." 22 This occurs, she says, because artists tend to think mythically.

There are a few flatly-stated rules that all genuine artists must go by. The most significant assertion Langer makes is that:

... every artist is interested in achieving what Faure'-Fremiet called the "quality of expression"—whatever may be the immediate source of his interest; to make the image holy, or potent, or illustrative, high-lighting a story, or simply to produce a decorative design, perhaps without any representational motif. This interest in sensuous or poetic quality, whether avowed or unconscious, is what makes a person an artist, and his product a work of art. As such it may be good, or poor, or even bad, but it is art; whereas anything, made for any purpose, with perfect

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21 *Mind*, p. 114.
22 *Feeling and Form*, p. 186.
indifference to the "quality of expression" (though the maker may aim to please by falling in with fashion), is not art at all.23

The trivially-conceived, the casually-produced, and the thoughtlessly-wrought artifact, then, has no place as an object of art, as far as Langer is concerned. But a bare-breasted beauty lovingly painted by a fourteen-year-old apprentice in Tijuana is, as far as Langer is concerned, "art." Such a wide-open definition surprises the traditionalist and certainly raises a number of questions about intentionality, but it forms the basis for the present enquiry, since it leaves room for virtually every kind of popular art work. We will examine the full import of this statement later, in Chapter Four, when we look at how the popular arts might be rendered by Langer's system.

Another sharp assertion Langer makes is that mere self-expression is not art. She levels quite an attack on the "emotive" or "self-expressive" theory of creativity which abounds in the literature of the abstract expressionist painters, among others.24 To Langer:

The widely popular doctrine that every work of art takes rise from an emotion which agitates the artist, and which is directly "expressed" in the work, may be found in the literature of every art. . . . But there are usually a few philosophical critics--sometimes artists themselves--who realize that the feeling in

23 Mind, p. 127.

24 See Raymond Durgnat's model as outlined in Chapter 3.
a work of art is something the artist conceived as he created the symbolic form to present it, rather than something he was undergoing and involuntarily venting in an artistic process.²⁵

Or as she states more caustically in Problems of Art:

Self-expression does not require composition and lucidity; a screaming baby gives his feelings far more release than any musician, but we don’t go to a concert hall to hear a baby scream; in fact, if that baby is brought in we are likely to go out. We don’t want self-expression.²⁶

Notice that Langer does not at all rule out the possibility that an artist may express feelings he or she may have had in the work of art. It is simply that those feelings must first undergo symbolic transformation before they appear in art. There is no way feelings can be directly cast in art.

Finally, after attacking the myth of the artist as a person capable of superior feeling, who projects those emotions directly into a work of art created at moments of high passion, Langer dares to damage another great myth, that of the artist as a completely original human being. As we saw earlier, the artist functions within a culture-context that, to some extent, determines the range of choices available in artistic expression. Placing an even greater premium upon the import of the work than the above

²⁵ Feeling and Form, p. 176.
²⁶ Problems of Art, p. 25.
would convey, Langer asserts:

In the achievement of effects lies the abstractive function of art. The effect is sought because it conveys the insight into human feeling that is, I think, the aim of all art. Therefore technique is the skill of getting effects; and in every art we develop traditional means of "imitation" to enhance certain effects that artists see in the model and convey to those who can perceive through art. Such traditional means are what we call "conventions." They are not "laws," for there is no reason in the world to follow them except that the artist can use them for his own purposes. 27

In order to make the work understandable, or to avoid wasting time conveying trivial information in a "unique" way, or for whatever reason he or she may choose, the artist decides to abide by the conventions of his art.

We must see the creative process as one whereby the artist intuitively "knows" that a particular broadly-defined feeling would make a fitting subject to deal with in his or her given art form. The artist then chooses the proper set of presentational symbols to transform the idea while working within certain conventions of the art form and not fully knowing what the outcome will be. Concern for the quality of expression is present; ultimately, to Langer, the artist is a kind of "builder" whose bricks are elements of the human heart.

27 Ibid., p. 96.
Langer is also concerned with the quality of response given a work of art. Though she argues that the basic mode of aesthetic appreciation seems to be innate in humankind from primitive times onward, she does allow for a qualitative gradient measuring levels of response, so that it would be possible to judge one person's response as more "mature" or "sophisticated" than another's. If people get sidetracked from the conscious realization that art forms symbolize human feeling, so that they pay more attention to form as an "abstract" (in the common sense of the word) entity unto itself, they have a qualitatively diminished experience in appreciating the work of art. Likewise, if they allow themselves to become "underdistanced" from the work of art, confusing the immediate, personal emotional state with that expressed in the work of art, then they will not be able to properly respond to art. Proper response calls for the intelligent and judicious use of inherent aesthetic capabilities.

In Problems of Art, Langer observes that the average artist and critic will agree that perception of art is intuitive. But she continues to argue that this judgment usually preserves a dichotomy between the logical mind and the irrational world of feeling, thus throwing artistic response into the realm of the mystical. Though she be-
lieves artistic perception is, indeed, intuitive, Langer adds:

... I do not believe that artistic perception is a kind of reasoning performed, as people say, "through feeling," as though one could use feeling in place of thought to vindicate a belief. It does not involve belief, nor lead to the acceptance of any proposition at all. But neither is it irrational, a special talent for making a mystical, unnegotiated contract with reality. I submit that it is an act of understanding, mediated by a single symbol, which is the created visual, poetic, musical, or other aesthetic impression—the apparition that results from the artist's work.28

The old, by-now-familiar idea that presentational symbolism offers a non-metaphysical alternative to discursive forms can be seen in the above statement. Art does not express propositions; that is why we do not use logic to respond to it. But we do use other mental faculties which do not lie in some mystical limbo-land.

In Mind, Langer puts forth the argument that intuition is a basic, universal function of the human mind.

Intuition lies at the base of all specifically human mental function, and even deeply modifies those which we still share with other creatures, so that most of our truly instinctive acts appear vestigial beside the complexity and adaptedness of theirs. The ordinary intuitive acts, such as the recognition of similar formal structures in sensuously dissimilar things, the reception of one as symbolic of the other, the spontaneous production of new perceptible entities—from private images to publicly objectified things or events—to present all sorts of abstracted forms in concreto, are as natural to us as the motions of

28 Ibid., p. 61.
our limbs, uncoordinated at first, but patterned and integrated in the normal course of maturation, and later developed selectively to various degrees by employment. We need not undertake such acts deliberately: symbolic projection and interpretation are spontaneous responses which we may become aware of and cultivate, or always perform at the unremarked level of what Coleridge called "primary imagination." 29

We see, in this rather long statement, that intuition is a natural function that can be developed by use. Thus we can find individual differences in response to art, just as we can find differences in people's ability to run the 100-yard dash. But significantly, Langer tells us "The appreciation of expressive form seems to be primitive and immediate in man, and long before things natural and supernatural, real and imaginary, physical and ideal could have been sorted out for him as so many categories of experience, they appear to have served as opportunities for creating symbols of his intuitive realizations." 30

But if intuition is primitive and natural, though needing development, why does the adult audience misapprehend works of art? Can we take what Langer has given us and argue that some responses are deficient? The answer to the latter question is, of course, "yes." Langer tells us that "... artistic perception... always starts with an intuition of total import, and increases by contempla-

29 *Mind*, p. 130.
30 *Loc. cit.*
tion as the expressive articulations of the form become apparent. . . ."\textsuperscript{31} So we see that our minds must "work over" art, not just merely "absorb" it. In \textit{Feeling and Form}, Langer writes that there exists a "twilight zone" of half-attention, falling between genuine listening (in response to music) and the stage where music is left on as virtually unperceived "background," as when a student does his homework with the stereo on. This mode of response is unfulfilling because:

\begin{quote}
\text{\ldots it obscures the full vital import of the music noting only what comes handy for a purpose, and noting only what expresses attitudes and emotions the listener was familiar with before. It bars everything new or really interesting in a work, since what does not fit the \textit{petit roman} is passed over, and what does fit is the dreamer's own. Above all, it leads attention not to the music, but away from it--via the music to something else that is essentially an indulgence. One may spend a whole evening in this sort of dream, and carry nothing away from it at all but the "tired businessman's" relaxation--no musical insight, no new feeling, and actually nothing heard.}\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

We must be "in gear" to properly receive the art object. But we must not allow ourselves to become such "cultivated" critics of the art form that we are appreciating that we look solely at the minute particularities of form and totally neglect the feeling expressed in the work. This leads to dire consequences. Langer describes the pre-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[31] \textit{Problems of Art}, p. 68.
\item[32] \textit{Feeling and Form}, p. 168.
\end{footnotes}
We are not so much afflicted with bad taste, as with no taste. People tolerate the good and the bad, because they do not see the abstracted expressive form, the symbol of feeling, at all.

That is why the role of feeling in art has become an enigma. People who do rediscover the perceptual form, and realize that it is the truly essential factor, usually make it paramount by ruling out all its traffic with "meaning" of any sort. Thus they reject feeling, together with various associated "contents." What is left is an "exciting" mosaic of qualities, exciting us to nothing, a genuinely "aesthetic" object, an experiential dead end, pure essence.33

Notice here that Langer is careful to distinguish between "feeling" and "meaning." A careless reading of the passage may suggest that art, to Langer, does have discursive "meaning." But she is not saying this at all. Nondiscursive, art "bottles" feeling and presents it to us. Discursive forms may be used to present the feeling, but we should not be fooled into thinking the artist is trying to propagandize us or convince us. The artist begs empathy, not loyalty to his ideas. This is the case, Langer would argue, even for the artist who creates in order to convince. So long as the artist is concerned to transmit virtual feeling in his or her art, the resulting work must be taken as nondiscursive. Langer simply cautions us above not to throw out the baby with the bath water.

If we are told to pay attention to the work of art, but not to attend too closely to the picayune details of

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33 Ibid., p. 54.
form, how do we characterize the proper mode of response? Langer borrows the classic concept of "psychical distance" given by Edward Bullough. The "underdistanced" or "affective" response is one also characterized by I. A. Richards as "sentimental," one wherein the work is related too closely to emotions being experienced by the audience. A common response along these lines would be when someone responds to Gertrude Stein's famous lines by saying, "A rose—oh yes, I love roses. They remind me of my first corsage, at the junior prom in high school!"

As Langer characterizes the proper, "distanced" response, she argues:

All appreciation of art—painting, architecture, music, dance, whatever the piece may be—requires a certain detachment, which has variously been called the "attitude of contemplation," the "aesthetic attitude," or the "objectivity" of the beholder. . . . it is part of the artist's business to make his work elicit this attitude instead of requiring the perci­pient to bring an ideal frame of mind with him.34

Ultimately, then, psychical distance is a responsibility shared by both artist and audience. The artist must create a work that will not feed underdistanced responses, but the audience has the obligation to carefully avoid making them.

This conflict between the innate capacity of the audience to enjoy art and the admonishment that art must be

34 Ibid., pp. 318-9.
structured to force the audience to respond wholeheartedly is a problem never satisfactorily resolved by Langer. One gets the feeling that she would have us respond as she does, though she realizes we're not always able to. Significantly, nowhere in her work so far does she allow for an aesthetic response to the "sudden," a setting sun for instance, that is extremely underdistanced. We will take up this problem in ensuing chapters, and I will attempt to offer a pathway out of the dilemma that will, perhaps, account for the seemingly underdistanced response of the sort we frequently find with respect to the popular arts.
Chapter 3
CURRENT THOUGHT IN POPULAR ARTS AESTHETICS

INTRODUCTION

In the past ten years, colleges and universities across the United States have turned their gaze in the direction of the popular arts, instituting such courses as "Popular Culture and Mass Media," "Comic Books and Social Structures," and "Popular Icons and the Protestant Ethic." In many cases this focus arose merely from the sixties demands for "relevance" in education. But more often than not, the erosion of what many popular culture aficionados term "elitism" in academe came about as a result of a growing awareness of the "massification" of our lives by twentieth century technology and the realization that the alarmist sociology of the fifties, which pointed to the supposed creation of a new, robot-like man, was simply not sufficient in its analyses to deal with the complexity of the contemporary situation. Trailblazers in the academic community such as Marshall McLuhan, Ray Browne, Russel B. Nye, and John Cawelti successfully pushed for greater awareness of popular culture and the popular arts as legitimate subject matter for scholarly enquiry.

Briefly put, their arguments offer three main considerations: 1) popular culture is all around us and hence must be studied as the primary substance of our social
environment; 2) mass media, as McLuhan has noted, are not simply neutral filters through which pass the contents of popular culture, but rather they are, in part, shapers of the manner in which we will perceive, store, and interpret that content; 3) so-called elite art is actually derivative from the larger body of popular art. This last proposition represents a 180-degree turnaround from the old idea that popular art was a "trickling down" of ideas originally engendered via elite art. Be that as it may, all three of the above notions have made sufficient inroads upon the minds of most academics in the humanities and social sciences that brows are no longer arched when the department curriculum committee approves a new course in the popular arts.

What may take a bit more prodding is getting the classically trained critic of the arts to accept a preliminary investigation toward the aesthetics of the popular arts. The argument needs to be dealt with on a more sophisticated level than simply trotting out Chaplin's "Modern Times" and refuting William Gass' pronouncement that "... the products of popular culture, by and large, have no more aesthetic quality than a brick in the street..." If a synthetic aesthetic of the popular arts can emerge from

within the tradition of high arts criticism, it can perhaps stand more concretely as a defense of popular culture than the weaker "need to know what's goin' on" arguments that are now becoming a bit tattered. The present effort represents a first, hesitant effort toward that distant goal.

In this chapter, I propose to look at the popular arts from two main perspectives, the examination of the art object itself and the examination of the relationship between artifact and audience. The other main area of investigation, the examination of the relationship between creator and artifact, will not be treated until the next chapter, but some comments that point to my thinking on the subject will undoubtedly emerge from time to time in the present discussion. Since many popular arts have collectively produced artifacts, investigations of the creator-artifact relationship have not been pursued by many scholars. It will be an important area once Langer is brought back to the foreground of the discussion, but for now the impact of the artifact upon audience seems to me to be the more important area of investigation, since Langer contains some weaknesses in this area that need to be explored only after we've touched base with some other thinkers, particularly Raymond Durgnat, whose model covers the whole creative process, from conception to consumption.
Abraham Kaplan in "The Aesthetics of the Popular Arts" notes that popular arts have always been seen as too simplistic. He defends against this, arguing that "Art always strips away what is unessential, and purity has always been recognized as virtue." Yet he goes on to level the same sort of attacks. This seminal essay has Kaplan attacking popular art as being unoriginal, narrowly focused on the present provincial culture context, stereotyped, and too escapist.

In arguing that popular art is unoriginal, Kaplan asserts that "Popular art is never a discovery, only a reaffirmation." He amplifies these views a couple of sentences later: "The world of popular art is bounded by the limited horizons of what we think we know already; it is two-dimensional because we are determined to view it without budging a step from where we stand." In other words, popular art doesn't shake us in our boots until we are forced to jump out of them and explore the earth with our toes. This reminds one of Langer's "twilight zone," where she attacks a deficiency of audience response. With Kaplan

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3 Ibid., p. 52.

4 Ibid.
the deficiency seems bound up in the nature of the work, as well as in the response.

British film aesthetician Raymond Durgnat agrees that popular arts make use of familiar material, but he presents an argument that new and different recipes are frequently concocted with these old ingredients:

As others have pointed out, communication isn't a process whereby A, for artist, pushes his own feelings into S, for spectator, much as Aunt Aggie sends rockcakes through the post, with the same feelings as came out of the oven being popped into the mouth. What happens, I suggest, is that A says something—it may be "Help" or "Wow" or "Ugh"—and he hopes that that will remind S of his feelings when he said "Help" or "Wow" or "Ugh." He emits symbols which he hopes will have a resonance on S's experience. A sonnet is more complicated than "Help" or "Wow"—it tells, say, a complex structure of complex experiences. But the principle is the same. And works of art which seem to be saying something new to us are, I suggest, first evoking familiar experiences, or ideas, or whatever, and then arranging them in unexpected combinations, so that out of the clashing and merging new experiences arise. But built out of old ones.5

Durgnat goes on to recall an early Disney cartoon, Skeleton Dance, which evokes familiar symbols of death, such as skeletons, skulls, and devils, but which turns them into merry musicians, so that we are forced to look at this unexpected synthesis of the familiar and ask, "Oh death, where is thy stingalingaling?" Here we have the imaginative use of social symbols for unique, creative purposes.

Kaplan argues that most popular art is too narrowly bound by conventions of the time and place where it is produced. To him, "... convention is laid down beforehand, guiding reactions along a fixed path. ... For this reason, popular art becomes so easily dated. ..." Durgnat disagrees, arguing as does Langer that all art, to a large extent, is bound by the assumptions and customs of the time in which it was produced. We can all look at how "English" Shakespeare's characters were, and we can read eighteenth century literature and become totally lost unless we read the footnotes added by modern scholars which inform us about the topical references. Durgnat shows us how even the language is bound by these provincial restrictions; he offers a Macbeth quote which, taken from its context, can be misread as a lofty ode to RAF pilots. All art, we discover, is time-bound and place-bound in some ways, and we must work hard to retrieve it from the dustbins of history.

Even more dangerous ground is trod when Kaplan argues that popular art is too escapist. He attacks it as presenting, for the most part, an ideal world.

\[6\] Kaplan, p. 56.
All art is illusion, inducing us as we experience it to take art for life. But some of it is true to life, illusory without being deceptive. Popular art is a tissue of falsehoods. Popular art depicts the world, not as it is, nor even as it might be, but as we would have it.7

The wider implications of this statement are astonishing. It appears that the author assumes we can objectively know the world which we have abstracted at the most fundamental level, even though Langer and most modern philosophers agree that the best we can do is define the world according to our own respective subjectivities, which may allude to some larger, logically incomprehensible "objective" world. But even from a narrower view, the notion that popular art tells us lies about our world (shades of Plato!) is misapplied. More frequently the elite artist creates beautiful falsehoods, which serve neither to mirror the world of the familiar nor to present us with a utopia, but rather to exaggerate components of the here and now in order to focus on specific forms of feeling. Thus we can find significance, artistically, even in the creation of what Norman Mailer calls "factoids."

Langer presents a different notion, which she applies to all art forms. Her ontology of art argues that the artifact is a holistic unit that does not discursively reference outward to the world of our experience.

7 Ibid., p. 59.
A work of art differs from a genuine symbol—that is, a symbol in the full and usual sense—in that it does not point beyond itself to something else. Its relation to feeling is a rather special one... in effect, the feeling it expresses appears to be directly given with it—as the sense of a true metaphor, or the value of a religious myth—and it is not separable from its expression.

As we've seen in earlier chapters, Langer here again invalidates the notion that the art object "points" to any meaning outside itself.

The major consideration in examining the artifact is Kaplan's notion that popular art is too stereotyped, that "... aesthetic perception is replaced by mere recognition." In other words, we are back to the proposition that popular art doesn't force us to look at the world in a new way. We've seen how the Disney cartoon provides a counter-example. We can surely dredge up many more.

But there are several schools of thought that argue the importance of familiar stereotypes in art. Literary critic Northrop Frye, for instance, argues that the mythic element (he takes the term from the Greek mythos, a word Aristotle used to describe what we would call "plot") is the most significant, because it has universal appeal. Cross-cultural comparison reveals much similarity among myths, so that to some extent the myth-making aspect of

9 Kaplan, p. 53.
artistry has to invoke charges that it is stereotyped.

Symbolists would see the necessity of repetition in reifying abstract values and transforming them into cultural icons in order to transmit cultural norms. This comes close to the classical function of popular art as seen by Durgnat, the notion that popular art interprets the meaning of people's lives for them, instead of giving the audience the often tortured personal experiences and values of a single artist, values which may or may not be relevant to anyone else. We will get back to this model later. Here we need note that the social symbolic associations that we bring with us when we examine a Western hero, for example, are necessary to the same extent that the populace of the late medieval period brought a number of religious presumptions and stereotyped values with them when they watched a morality play, a genre currently held up as "elite" art.

The greatest amount of work in codifying and justifying stereotyping has been done by John Cawelti, a professor of English at the University of Chicago. Cawelti is the "father of formula" as it applies to the popular arts. He defines formula as "... a conventional system for structuring cultural products. It can be distinguished from form which is an invented system of organization." 10

10 John G. Cawelti, "The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Literature," in Ray B. Browne and David Madden, eds., Instructor's Manual to Accompany the
Cawelti distinguishes formulae from myths in several ways. Formulae are closely connected to a single culture, and therefore are more specific and limited than myths. Yet they serve an important function because "Today, with cultures composed of a multiplicity of different religious groups, the synthesis of values and their reaffirmation has become an increasingly important function of the mass media and the popular arts."\(^{11}\) Here Cawelti acknowledges stereotyping but argues the media serve an important function, identifying and presenting cultural ritual, that other institutions, notably the church, performed in the past. This idea is similar to the arguments of Susan Sontag that the overall function of art is changing.

Moreover, as Cawelti sees it, formula in the popular arts is not just blind repetition of work-out prayers. To Cawelti:

\[\ldots\] all cultural products contain a mixture of two kinds of elements: conventions and inventions. Conventions are elements which are known to both the creator and his audience beforehand—they consist of things like favorite plots, stereotyped characters, accepted ideas, commonly known metaphors and other linguistic devices, etc. Inventions, on the other hand, are elements which are uniquely imagined by the creator such as new kinds of characters, ideas, or linguistic forms.\(^{12}\)

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11 Ibid., p. 64.

12 Ibid., p. 62.
So for Cawelti, popular art is far from unoriginal and stereotyped.

But then we come to another of Kaplan's criticisms, that popular art represents what eighteenth century artists would call fancy, the ability to take the known and assemble it into new combinations, but that it lacks imagination, the ability "... to confer reality on its own products."\(^{13}\) In other words, to Kaplan, popular art cannot create its own special world where the rules are topsyturvy and where we are forced into new ways of seeing.

From Langer's perspective, this is a serious charge, since all art must be infused with organic feeling, with what she specifically terms "virtual life" in the case of the literary arts.

But this seems to be an internal contradiction from Kaplan's earlier notion, that popular arts stray from a realistic depiction of the present world and depict a could-be world of distorted, "ideal" (from the point of view of the creator) values. I feel that Durgnat's distinction between art and entertainment will serve to clarify much of this debate over popular art and stereotyping.

One can perhaps distinguish Pop art (the challenging inquiry into life) from Pop entertainment (the celebration of agreeable platitudes) in terms of the extent to which such tensions are clarified and heightened—maximized—rather than left at that minimum.

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\(^{13}\) Kaplan, p. 60.
needed to render the banal or reassuring plausible. Such a criticism also reveals much high culture as merely entertainment, and it has little to do with the traditional high culture stress on intricacy of texture or, in James' phrase, "density of specification." ¹⁴

If we take Langer's notion about the symbolic transformation of feeling in the creation of art, and if we accept Durgnat's model, then we must conclude that popular art must be considered as being within the larger realm of Art. As we shall see in the ensuing section, the relationship between popular art and its audience provides us with indicators that point to just such a notion, and thus popular art must be seen as something more than just idle piffle.

THE ARTIFACT AND ITS AUDIENCE

Perhaps the oldest sorts of arguments against popular art say that it plays up to people's emotions and leaves them high and dry, though perhaps grasping for handkerchiefs. Kaplan is fully in this tradition when he writes, "Popular art wallows in emotion while art transcends it, giving us understanding and thereby mastery of our feelings. For popular art, feelings themselves are the ultimate subject matter." ¹⁵ He later asserts that "Popular art is not sentimental because it evokes so much feeling, but

¹⁴ Durgnat, p. 24.
¹⁵ Kaplan, p. 56.
because it calls for so much more feeling than either its artist or audience can handle." 16

With the preparation given in the previous chapter, I would hope that the person reading this statement is, by now, blanched by Kaplan's use of the word "feeling." For Langer, the term refers specifically to a complex nexus of presentational symbols that can only be properly rendered by other presentational forms. Art must wallow in feeling, in the Langerian sense. It cannot at all transcend it, as far as Langer is concerned; it would no longer remain art. All in all, she would probably see Kaplan as one of those overdone critics who concentrate on form so much that they forget feeling is the fundamental component of content.

To be fair, though, we must read Kaplan's statement as if the more proper term "sentiment" were being used, in lieu of "feeling." I. A. Richards argues in Practical Criticism that "Most, if not all, sentimental fixations and distortions of feeling are the result of inhibitions, and often when we discuss sentimentality we are looking at the wrong side of the picture." 17 If we take this as gospel, and I do feel that Richards is onto something perhaps better treated by psychologists, though I wouldn't completely buy the argument that popular art is overly sentimental,

16 Ibid., p. 58.
we might see Kaplan's postulated abundance of sentiment in the popular arts as a strategy for avoiding real confrontations with cultural norms of repression. In other words, the inhibitions created in the populace by the residue of Puritan ethics and by the submission to an exploitative economic system may be the very cause of such an overflowing of tears in response to popular art forms, a modern instance of the emperor's new clothes hiding the naked truth. Seen in this light, we would merely note that popular art is culture-bound, ground that we've already been over. Contemporary burlesques of exaggerated sentimentality, such as "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" may mean that we are reaching the age of puberty on a mass cultural level.

The reaction that Kaplan attacks as sentimental may be what I would term the "primary" aesthetic response. To me, the primary response is that sudden, shuddering shock of recognition we get when we suddenly grasp the simple and familiar in a new light, as opposed to the "cooler" detachment of the "secondary" response. It's the "sentiment" we feel when we look at the moon on a cloudy night. Sentiment here means that we are somewhat underdistanced from our aesthetic artifact.

The problem of distance in aesthetic appreciation was raised in Chapter Two. It is not a new question; Bul-lough argued in 1913 that audiences must have the ability to create a distance between themselves and the aesthetic
object in order to turn it over, examine it, and respond to it with some degree of complexity. But we've seen that popular art draws from the familiar, that it takes the commonly known and recasts it in order to socialize people into their culture context. This is what Durgnat means by the classical function of popular art.

Georg Mehlis, in a seminal 1916 article titled "The Aesthetic Problem of Distance," allows the familiar into his world of appreciation.

In trying to solve the problem of distance especially with regard to its aesthetic significance, we must needs connect it with the ideas of recollection and anticipation, for the beauty-creating force of recollection and anticipation is obviously related to the idea of distance.

These worlds of experience and memory are our permanent possession. They are the only paradise from which we cannot be expelled. They have the advantage of assured property for which we no longer need to fight. They have a quality of completion which is denied to the present. They are the great miracle of the spirit, for they are past and yet can be ever present, they are and yet they are not. In them rests the wealth and the entire force of our individuality. They elevate us above merely momentary existence. In them rests the possibility of forgetting old age and transfiguring death. And in the course of history the mnemonic gift of the individual expands into the memory of mankind.\[18\]

In this rather long quote, we see that the familiar in art serves the same function of aiding memory and anticipation that all symbolic forms do.

The nearer the artifact is to our values and experi-

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ences and the more closely it weaves the context of our lives into the pattern of myth, as Frye would have the popular arts do, and as Jung might second with his notion of the collective unconscious, the more immediate and emotional—sentimental if you please—is our response. It is as if we were all Vietnam moms welcoming our sons home at the airport. The tangle of feelings is deep—we may indeed "wallow" in them—but the response is something that is so much a part of being human that it can scarcely be said not to be aesthetic. This, then, is the primary aesthetic response—the hot response of shocking recognition. It is the secondary response, the one that depends upon the audience deliberately integrating the artifact with a nexus of experiences and values reflected upon in tranquility, as it were, that most so-called elite art caters to.

Kaplan must be noting the same sort of process when he writes that:

On the psychodynamic level, the aesthetic response is replaced by a mere reaction. The difference between them is this: a reaction, in the sense I intend it, is almost wholly determined by the initial stimulus, antecedently and externally fixed, while a response follows a course that is not laid out beforehand but is significantly shaped by a process of self-stimulation occurring then and there. Spontaneity and imagination come into play; in the aesthetic experience we do not simply react to signals but engage in a creative interpretation of symbols. The response to an art object shares in the work of its creation, and only thereby is a work of art produced.19

19 Kaplan, pp. 53-4.
Here Kaplan is placing the familiar premium on the audience's interaction with the aesthetic artifact. He seems to disallow any notion that the rendering of familiar social symbols in popular art may involve the audience in the creation of the artifact in the sense that, by bringing familiar feelings to the surface via the primary aesthetic response, the work of popular art may be calling upon the audience to explore the roots of those feelings, examine their universal character, or do any one of a thousand active things with them other than merely experience them.

If we ponder it over, the biggest jolts of response we get as we read a novel or view a film occur when we see a character and suddenly recognize a bit of ourselves. When art jerks us into recognizing the universal human qualities in its fictional characters, and therefore teaches us something about ourselves, a reflexive recognition, since we can now react to even the most foolish buffoon or the most evil being as an aspect of self, then we can genuinely say that an aesthetic connection has been made. Whether that shock of recognition comes about in an immediate sense because we are watching someone very near to our mode of life, or whether it takes a bit longer because we have more cross-connecting to do in order to "identify" with the character means very little. To repeat Kaplan's own argument against those who dismiss popular art as too simplistic, "Art always strips away what is un-
essential. . . . Put the adjective classic before it and simplicity becomes a term of high regard. What is simple is therefore not simple-minded. . . . Art, we may say, does away with unnecessary complications."

Classic is precisely the adjective used by Durgnat in constructing his model of the relationship between works of popular art and their audiences. Durgnat first looks at two creator-oriented theories of aesthetics. The self-expression theory argues that the artist's responsibility is to himself or herself, and that the public be damned. It says the artist should be heedless of the concerns of any conceivable audience, and it places the burden of interpreting the artist's often-obtuse expression upon the receiver of the artifact. As we've seen, Langer doesn't even admit the products of such activities into the realm of art.

The communication theory goes one step further and argues that the artist:

. . . has had some sort of emotion or experience or vision or attitude which he feels he must share with someone else, i.e. an audience. What his actual motives are, doesn't matter. He may share because he feels it'll enrich their lives, or because he just wants to get it off his own chest, or because he wants to shout the truth from the housetops, or because he thinks the best way to hide the truth from himself is to make everyone else believe his lies."

20 Ibid., p. 51.
21 Durgnat, p. 12.
But whatever his motive, the artist in this theory is seen as someone who is conscious of an audience he is directing a statement toward.

Durgnat then looks at a third theory of art, one which embodies a classical impulse. It is this function that he feels is served by popular art. The popular artist

... aims neither to communicate his own individual feelings to others, nor to give himself a workout in artistic activity, but to express people's feelings for them. It's true that he can only know their feelings via his own. It's true that he's not an objective machine and that his feelings are bound to influence his picture of theirs. None the less he uses his own feelings as a way of tracking other people's. His self-expression is accidental, one almost feels as if he would like to be invisible.22

And indeed, in a collectively-produced work of the sort one often finds in popular art, the individual artist is invisible and the message perceived by the audience is of primary importance.

The value of Durgnat's model, then, is that it is good affective criticism, audience-centered. It gets off the romantic high horse that focuses upon the creator, and it gives us a chance to examine the creation and the role art plays in mediating choices in people's lives. Durgnat's neo-classicism indicates that the popular artist is much more concerned with audience feedback in shaping new works than the romantically-driven artist can ever be. The

22 Ibid., p. 13.
schema of Durgnat's model (see Appendix) shows us some of these values.

We have seen that every objection that has been raised against popular art can either be turned back on itself, refuted, or shown to be a virtue. Ultimately we find that there is very little that distinguishes popular art from any other kind of art. The main distinction seems to be that it is more accessible to a person who has not had sophisticated training in picking up the complex cues buried within an elite art object. But complexity, even Kaplan will admit, is not the criterion by which we can judge quality. Quality is simply that, and while some people prefer the labyrinth of possibilities inherent within chess, others prefer the more relaxed, open style of canasta. Both are fun games.

Finally, we might point at a seemingly obvious but little attended-to aspect of response to popular art. That is, the conventions of popular art are generally taken for granted. We assume that it is easy for someone to understand a work of popular art, simply because such material is popular and is all around us. We grow up in a world where even five-year-olds are so socialized by TV commercials that they amuse themselves by singing familiar jingles. Little do we realize that it involves learning in order for us to perceive the apparently obvious.

Television is perhaps the best example of this. The
character conventions of an ongoing series are often extremely complex. In order to fully understand the implications of a particular plot twist on a TV episode, we must be familiar with the idiosyncracies of the characters. If we do not possess this information, if we tune in mid-season and pick up on a series by accident, then we must struggle just as hard to understand the complex situations and buried wit as if we were to read an elite novel which is steeped in the conventions of its genre.

For the regular consumer of high art, the conventions of the artifact are readily at hand. If Joe or Suzy reads a poem and sees the words "illimitable inane," a suggestion of universal meaninglessness, or what Fielding Dawson calls the "comic cosmic" will be elicited, simply because the reader has attended to the dictionary definition of the words. But if Joe or Suzy is familiar with Tennyson, a literary allusion that has broader implications that tie into Victorian fear emerging from the perplexities of Darwinian thought will be understood. The point is, the reader here needs background information in order to understand the work of art in a wider, more subtle context.

Similarly, the audience for popular art must be prepared. One of the best bits of visual humor I've ever seen was on a take-off on One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest shown on NBC's "Saturday Nite" show. Titled "One Flew Over the Hornet's Nest," the skit perfectly satirized the movie.
I was watching the show with an English friend, and when the comedienne who parodied the bald schizophrenic Cheswick screwed up her face in just the right fashion, my friend, who had seen the movie, laughed with me. But when "Cheswick's" split personality was demonstrated by the actress reaching for and lighting a cigar, doing a perfect mime of George Burns, I laughed myself silly while my friend remained silent.

The reason? Though he knew of Burns, my friend had not seen him act enough to be able to recognize the mugging. I could aesthetically appreciate the humor and he could not, since he didn't have the tools. Countless other examples could be trotted out, but this should suffice to prove that popular art, too, demands quite often a public educated in its formal conventions.
Chapter 4

THE RELEVANCE OF LANGER'S AESTHETIC TO POPULAR ART

What we have done over the past three chapters is lay the groundwork for an application of the aesthetic theory of one of the most cultured scholars of the present age to art products which are designed primarily by commercial interests for "mindless" consumption by the unwashed masses. Now, in this final chapter, we will attempt to synthesize what we have learned about Langer's aesthetic with the study in Chapter Three on contemporary modes of viewing the popular arts.

We discover that Langer provides us with a system that allows scholars to enter popular culture study through the "front door" instead of the servants' entrance. That is to say, as a respected "elite" aesthetician, Langer is taken very seriously by most scholars. If we can tease out a definition of Art from her system that makes room for popular art, then we have come a long way in making popular culture respectable. In this chapter, we will see that the above task can be completed easily enough, but we discover that a close investigation of the whole "communications process" in art, from creation, to a consideration of the art object itself, to the audience's response to a work of art reveals some serious deficiencies in Langer's thinking. As we will see, she centers her def-
inition of art on the process of creation. In so doing, she opens up the whole question of intentionality and leads us into arguments that have gone on for years and which still promise to continue. And in the area of response, Langer proves herself to be an elitist.

These problems will provide the focus for this final look at Langer, but we must first begin at the proper spot, with an examination of her definition of art, so we can see how Langer arrives at a notion that legitimizes the popular arts. In Problems of Art, Langer asserts:

"... where there is any artistic intent (whether avowed, exclusive artistic intent, or unconscious artistic impulse) there will be some artistic result, i.e., some expressive form. The main point is that this definition includes every kind of art. Whether a work is good or bad depends on other things than the artistic intent. But whether it is art depends on its maker's desire to compose it into a form that expresses his idea of a feeling or the whole nexus of feeling—or, as he would be likely to say, "that has some feeling in it," or "has life.""

She restricts this definition somewhat a few pages later, after noting that artistic intent as the sole criterion would allow certain crafts, such as cabinet-making and pie-baking, to be treated as art. "Art is craftsmanship," she tells us, "but to a special end: the creation of expressive forms—visually, audibly, or even imaginatively perceivable forms that set forth the nature of human feeling." Thus a

1 Problems of Art, pp. 109-10.
2 Ibid., p. 111.
product may be considered art as long as the creator intended it to be a form expressing some component of human feeling. This definition is broad enough that Langer can and does even consider a "pot for the dime store" an artistic creation, as long as it meets the above criterion.3

PROBLEMS OF CREATION AND THE ART OBJECT

Langer's priorities in the creator-work-audience relationship are significant in looking at how she comes to allow a place for popular art within her overall aesthetic system. Most thinkers who have dismissed the popular arts as being worthy of serious consideration have been concerned with response and effects, the relationship between the art object and its intended audience. These critics and philosophers hold that art is primarily defined by measurement according to certain "standards of taste." The critic, presumably, is better able to mete out these canons of judgment than the average citizen; hence the definition of art is usually constructed so as to justify the critic's task.

Beginning with a healthy egalitarianism, Langer levies an attack on the elitist notion that the few can dictate what art is to the many.

3 See Feeling and Form, p. 388.
The old adage, "De gustibus non disputandum," has firmly established the belief that beauty is simply what satisfies taste, and as beauty is artistic value, such value depends on taste, just as the value of coffee or candy does; and it certainly seems, on this basis, like pure snobbism to set up the taste of a few as more important than that of the many—that is, to make anything but the most popular taste the measure of good art.

Langer does not, however, propose that art be defined by a popularity contest. Instead, she leaves the matter of taste up to the individual and proceeds to argue that beauty is simply the expressiveness of a form. This places beauty in the spot occupied by the artist, who must, as we recall, be concerned with the "quality of expression" he or she puts into a work of art, and of course it also places the concept of beauty as a quality bound up within the nature of the work itself. Langer tells us that by separating taste and beauty, we can easily perceive how the beauty of an expressive form may go unperceived even when it unarguably exists.

The above discussion may seem to some to be overextended and even unnecessary. Yet it is of utmost importance that we deal with the question of whether or not popular art is to be relegated to some sort of nebulous "second class" status, or whether it is to take its place as a co-equal with the more traditional, "respectable" forms of art. If we recall William Gass' assertion that the pro-

4 Problems of Art, p. 119.
ducts of popular culture have no more aesthetic value than bricks in the street, we can see how refreshingly revolutionary is Langer's definition of art.

But problems abound. Who is to say whether or not the artist has put feeling into a work? If we go back to Langer's definition of art, we find that "artistic intent" can even be an unconscious impulse! This gets us into circles. If Suzy, for example, is asked by her PTA chairperson to make a ceramic pot for the annual crafts fair, she may be creating simply to gain brownie points when the nominations for next year's officers come up, or she may be throwing herself into the task because she is in a creative mood. In the latter case, Langer would assure us that the result, good or bad, must be considered "art."

But let us suppose that Suzy wants that Vice-Presidency, and that she makes the pot only because she wants to score those brownie points. Isn't it conceivable that her subconscious mind, acting on its own impulses, decides to put feeling into the work. In this instance, we have to call it art, don't we?

But let us go a bit further with this hypothetical example. How are we to tell whether or not the PTA pot is a genuine "form expressive of human feeling?" If Suzy's subconscious provided the artistic intent, her conscious mind will have to admit that it was not genuinely engaged in a creative act, by Langer's standards. But in our dis-
cussion of taste and beauty, we found that the "beauty" in a work of art, i.e., its feeling, can be stored within the work itself. But since beauty and taste are not equivalent our evaluation of the PTA pot has no relevance to a determination of whether or not it is indeed a genuine work of art. We come down to a place where we are talking about "colorless green ideas" and "invisible zombies." If the feeling is locked into the work of art, and neither the artist herself nor that percentage of the audience incapable of "perceiving" the feeling can spring it loose, then we are left with a situation where some of the viewers will claim that feeling is there, and thus that the pot is genuine art, while some will claim that there is no feeling to be found, and that the pot is merely a crafted object.

Langer does provide one small opening out of such a dilemma, but it provides little hope in instances such as we have outlined above. Just as Plato would allow the banished poet to argue his way back into the Republic, Langer would allow realism in the popular arts to educate its audience so that the entire experience, from creator to audience, could be conceived of as a full-fledged artistic process. She writes:

There is one other function of the arts that benefits not so much the advance of culture as its stabilization; an influence on individual lives. This function
is the converse and complement of the objectification of feeling, the driving force of creation in art; it is the education of vision that we receive in seeing, hearing, reading works of art—the development of the artist's eye, that assimilates ordinary sights... to inward vision, and lends expressiveness and emotional import to the world. Wherever art takes a motif from actuality... any model or theme from life— it transforms it into a piece of imagination, and imbuces its image with artistic vitality. The result is an impregnation of ordinary reality with the significance of created form. This is the subjectification of nature, that makes reality itself a symbol of life and feeling.

This is basically an argument that art serves to "make the familiar strange" by symbolically transforming it into a work of art. There is undoubtedly truth in this statement. With regard to the popular arts, one might even posit that the over-sentimentalized "givens" of one generation would be transformed into the burlesques of the next by means of this process. The notion raised in Chapter Three that "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" represents an evolution away from the simple sentiment of yesteryear can be explained rather nicely by this model.

But Suzy's PTA pot cannot. It would be a giant leap of faith for us to assert that this single artifact somehow contained enough feeling from Suzy's subconscious to educate our collective response to the point where we all would unanimously agree that it must be a work of art. So at this point we remain stuck, if we hold fast to Langer's

5 Problems of Art, pp. 72-3.
criteria of intentionality in defining art. A return to
the rigors of biographical scholarship that marked the ex-
pressionist literary critics of the twenties may solve the
problem some of the time, but as soon as we start asking
questions like "Did the author intend, consciously or not,
to create a form expressive of human feeling in this no-
vel?" we are getting into the same patch of quicksand as
that selfsame school of critics, who died painfully when
confronted by the so-called "new" critics.

We must either widen Langer's definition to exclude
the whole matter of intentionality, or else we must re-
treat back to the position which ties together beauty and
taste and which in many instances would cause the door to
be slammed shut on the popular arts. I propose that we do
the former. In other words, why not keep the definition of
art as a form expressive of human feeling and just leave
out the whole business of intent. The quality can still
lie with the art object, and creation can still be either
conscious or subconscious. We just wouldn't concern our-
selves with trying to find out.

But neither would we have to resort to canons of
taste that may reveal elitist biases. The definition would
provide us with objective criteria for determining what is
and is not art. First, we would go back to the basic dis-
tinction between discursive and presentational symbols.
All discursive symbols would be thrown out, since art can
only be considered as a type of presentational form. The problem with literary forms can be solved easily enough if we distinguish between the communicative functions of discursive speech and the artistic functions of speech used as art. The problem has been discussed in recent years by ordinary language philosophers with some encouraging results. Briefly put, ordinary language scholars draw a distinction between classes of speech acts which have illocutionary functions (that is, performative functions such as promising, threatening, offering a prayer, etc.) and those which lack illocutionary acts. Communicative speech contains illocutionary acts, but literature does not, since certain felicity conditions are not met.6

Some presentational symbols, such as maps, would give us problems, because we do not ordinarily think of maps as "art." Yet the lines get pretty fuzzy when we consider that Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical drawings (maps of the human body) and schemes for fantastical mechanical devices are considered by most people to be among the greatest works of art the world has ever known. If we recall that we are only constructing a definition of art, not of "good art" or "bad art," then it seems quite reasonable to toss in virtually every presentational symbol expressing human

feeling rather than get bogged down with intentionality. If we look back at Langer's thinking process in the section of Problems of Art where she raised the question of the artist's intent, we find that the problem of how to exclude mere craft from the category of art figured prominently in her construction of the definition. And she solved the problem very easily, merely by tightening her definition to include as art only those forms which further the presentation of human feeling.

We can do the same thing without having to go into the sticky area of the artist's intent as our source for the feeling in art. All we need do is realize that culture provides us all with built-in screens which strongly influence what our perceptions of art may be. We are not here talking about matters of taste or of subjective evaluation, but of basic definitions of "human feeling," the quality which is universally transmitted by objects of art. It seems rather obvious that a cake, for example, does not contain an idea of human feeling (and I am here excluding from consideration the sorts of tableaux often created with icing that may be likened more to "painting" and hence may be considered as art.)

Social symbolism, cultural ritual, the "dramatism" that pervades the critical views of Kenneth Burke, seems to be an excellent place to look for standards by which we can impute "human feeling" to a piece of craftsmanship
and thereby have it enter the "kingdom of art." Langer tells us that "Ritual has always been a natural and fertile source of art."\(^7\) she argues that items which are produced for ritualistic or even utilitarian purposes, such as Indian rugs or Grecian urns, may be considered art if they are imbued with feeling, even though no consciously "creative" intention is present. Thus social symbols, in directing the manner in which certain artifacts are viewed, may have the unintentional value of making them artistic. This is an important point in its impact on a consideration of the popular arts. If we recall the Durgnat model from Chapter Three, we find that the "classical" impulse driving the popular artist, the desire to make people's feelings known to them within a certain broadly understood culture context, fits very neatly within this scheme of things.

Cawelti's concept of formula also fits in here. His notion that formulae consist of both conventions and inventions allows for a process of constant change within the cultural framework of the familiar. This explains how we can have ongoing change in artistic products and artistic styles. The inventive components of a convention can provide us with the "education of vision" that Langer feels all art can accomplish.

\(^7\) Problems of Art, p. 121.
PROBLEMS OF RESPONSE

Now that we have somewhat cleared the air of the problems raised by Langer's creator-oriented definition of art, we need to turn to some of the problems surrounding our response to a work of art. In an early lecture in Problems of Art, Langer tells us that "What is artistically good is whatever articulates and presents feeling to our understanding." 8 This places the onus solely upon the audience; taste is a matter of response, and as we've seen earlier, Langer feels that qualities which are objectively present in a work of art may not be perceived by the audience. This is clear enough; the preceding chapter noted that the audience quite often must utilize background knowledge in perceiving and understanding a work of art. And in Chapter Two we noted that the audience must be "in gear" in order to properly receive a work of art. But the full import of the quote which began this paragraph would mean that "god" is a term that is purely evaluative when applied to art; it can refer only to the response to the work.

And Langer does not always view our responses as "good." In Problems of Art she tells us that:

Every generation has its styles of feeling. One age shudders and blushes and faints, another swaggers, still another is godlike in a universal indifference.

8 Ibid., p. 25.
These styles in actual emotion are not insincere. They are largely unconscious—determined by many social causes, but shaped by artists, usually popular artists of the screen, the juke-box, the shop window, and the picture magazine.  

Here we find the most obvious signs of Langer's own elitism, because she continues to argue that such effects are what brings her to object to the influence of comic books (a hot topic at the time of her writing *Problems of Art*). The main problem seems to be her assumption that the popular audience lacks aesthetic distance from its art. She tells us that "Most people are so imbued with the idea that feeling is a formless total organic excitement in human beings as in animals, that the idea of educating feeling, developing its scope and quality, seems odd to them, if not absurd."  

The difficulty underlying the response to popular art, then, is the main area in which Langer would refuse to hop on the popular culture bandwagon. She gives popular art the status of real art, and she acknowledges the important interface between human beings and their culture context, but she somehow feels that the popular audience lacks the ability to be detached or aesthetically distanced from the art object, a response that we have seen I. A. Richards term "sentimental" and that we have seen Abraham Kaplan

9 Ibid., p. 72.
10 Ibid.
term as mere "reaction" instead of a response.

The model of "primary" and "secondary" aesthetic responses set forth in Chapter Three is an attempt to move away from these sorts of biases. The same aestheticians who allow great freedom to the artist in creating a work of art want to restrict modes of response to the cool, calculated, "distanced" response that I term "secondary" because it requires removal in at least time, if not also space, from the moment of perception. Thus those who would equally applaud the work of Wordsworth, a poet who believed in recreating emotions in tranquil reflection, and Kerouac, a novelist who wrote spontaneous, stream-of-consciousness stuff that he refused to edit, would denounce as "underdistanced" the tears of a person viewing the film "Love Story."

It is time we realized that there is nothing wrong with primary aesthetic responses. There seems to be a holdover from the attention of the new critics on the art object that biases the contemporary critic against any sort of affective humanism. It is bad, the critic tells us, if we liken a Dickens character to a spinster aunt of ours, or if we obtain our "intuitive" grasp of the plot line in a movie by "instantaneously re-living" a recent torrid love affair.

The simple truth is, such modes of response are natural to human beings. We live within our own skins, and
we know no other history like our own life's journey. We cannot help but relate the objects and events of the external world to the memories and dreams inside us. And if we search our own experiences, we will probably be forced to confess that those art objects which have most strongly arrested our attention are those which contain feelings close to the core of our own experience. If such weren't the case the argument presented by ethnic minorities that majority culture art has no relevance to them as human beings would have no significance. But since we do realize that WASP literature often contains characters and incidents totally meaningless to the black experience, for example, we must realize that at some level the response to the feeling in a work of art is dramatically heightened when personal experience comes close to that feeling, that is, when the art object comes closer to being a mirror than a telescope.

Actually, we can see two other modes of aesthetic response presenting themselves to us. I choose to call "reflexive" the sort of response that occurs when the art object forces the audience to dig back into self, that is, when art serves a "mirror-like" function. The other mode I call "transcendental," because it forces us to move away from self to the "other," to feelings we are not familiar with or which we have not experienced, or perhaps simply to the aesthetic object (a term which is broader than "art
object" because it includes objects not crafted by humans, toward which we have an aesthetic response).

Both the reflexive mode and the transcendental mode can occur with the primary and secondary modes of aesthetic response, so the whole pie consists of four "slices": reflexive primary, transcendental primary, reflexive secondary, and transcendental secondary. These four modes of response can be seen as comprehensive, covering virtually every category of aesthetic response.

Let us take a few examples. The reflexive primary experience occurs when we immediately see some bit of ourselves while engaged in experiencing the aesthetic object. This is a type of response found frequently with respect to the popular arts, as when we feel like walking out of a movie because the verbal abuse being taken by a character reminds us "almost exactly" of a situation we've been in recently with a person we took for a friend. No cognitive cogs have to whir and click here; we know the significance of the action being portrayed in the film (and it just as easily could have been a book, play, or television show) because we have lived through something very similar.

The transcendental primary response is a bit harder to pin down, and it quite often involves an aesthetic response to something in nature, rather than to something made by humans. An example would be the shiver we get down our
spines when we look up and see the purpled sky of daybreak. Something deep within us "lifts" us out of our thoughts, our awareness of self, for this ecstatic moment.

The secondary responses, as indicated in Chapter Three, are more "distanced." Thus the reflexive secondary response might be likened to the process of drawing a set of elaborate correlations between self and the art object. The trained enjoyment of literary critics to a novel that captures an experience close to their own—World War II, let us say—would be this sort of response.

The transcendental secondary response is likewise distanced. It is the sort of self-transcendence that we engage in, for example, when listening to Beethoven or when reading about an era very unlike our own.

We need note that the type of response is entirely up to the individual. In fact, when Langer attacks those who attend almost entirely to form, it seems that she comes close to chastizing "over-distancers," those who concentrate so much on the modality of the work of art that they neglect content. These are people who would probably only be capable of responding to art in the secondary mode. But the same work of art that triggers a secondary response in this sort of person may trigger a primary response in an "under-distancer." Thus Beethoven may stiffen my friend's neck while tingling my spine. The average person, we should
note, is capable of both types of responses, each appropriate to the occasion.

We might speculate on the nature of the art medium vis-a-vis the type of response "normally" made. It seems likely that the novel, a medium which allows us to break off our involvement to contemplate the significance of portrayed events or merely to attend to minor household tasks, would more commonly engender a secondary response than would film, the dream medium, which grips our entire conscious being during the period we are functioning as part of an audience. Such an experience would more frequently encourage primary aesthetic responses.

The schema given above would explain many of the objections elite critics (and here Langer has to be considered as just one of many) have toward the types of responses elicited by works of popular art. For it is certainly true that primary responses are immediate, here-and-now events. They deny us the power of critical detachment. They involve us in a hypnotic fashion that frightens anyone who may read the word "propaganda" into the situation. And yet, such responses are unquestionably part of the overall human experience, and if we are to deny the popular audience, or any audience for that matter, the right to have the same intensity of response to the human feeling in a work of art that sparked the creative idea on the part of the artist,
then we are to deny our own humanity at a very fundamental level.
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Appendix

A SCHEMA OF RAYMOND DURGNAT'S THEORIES
OF ARTIST-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIPS

THE ROMANTIC IMPULSE:
Self-Expression Theory

THE CLASSICAL IMPULSE:
Popular Arts Theory

ARTIST

MEDIA

AUDIENCE

ARTIST

MEDIA

AUDIENCE

100