

Susanne K. Langer and the Harvard School of Analysis

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1. Introduction

Susanne Langer was a student at Radcliffe College between 1916 and 1926—a highly transitional period in the history of American philosophy. Intellectual generalists such as William James, John Dewey, and Josiah Royce had dominated philosophical debates at the turn of the century but the academic landscape gradually started to shift in the years after World War I. Many scholars of the new generation adopted a more piecemeal approach to philosophy—solving clearly delineated, technical puzzles using the so-called “method of logical analysis”.¹ Especially at Harvard, the intellectual climate rapidly changed. The department hired several philosophers who had contributed to the development of symbolic logic—H. M. Sheffer, C. I. Lewis, and A. N. Whitehead—and Harvard quickly began to be viewed as a central hub for analytic philosophy in the United States.

This chapter contextualizes Langer’s earliest work by reading it through the lens of this shifting academic environment. Though Harvard did not allow women to take its courses until 1943, Langer is one of the most significant fruits of this period. Her dissertation “A Logical Analysis of Meaning” and her first publications are all illustrations of the approach that came to dictate the American philosophical conversation. By exploring the increased focus on the logical-analytic method and Langer’s attempts to expand the new approach to what she later called “non-

¹ Langer, Susanne K., “A Logical Analysis of Meaning” (Ph.D diss., Radcliffe College, Cambridge, MA, 1926), 2.

discursive” symbolisms,² I situate her publications in the intellectual context of the 1920s.

2. The Method of Logical Analysis

In 1914, two years before Langer entered college, Bertrand Russell spent a semester at Harvard University. The philosopher-logician was already an academic celebrity at the time. He and Whitehead had just completed their three-volume *Principia Mathematica*, he had been one of the first to employ the new logic to tackle philosophical problems, and he was one of the leading opponents of James’s theory of truth. Naturally, the department was eager to acquire the Englishman who started to receive “more attention than any logician since Aristotle”.³ According to Harvard philosopher George Santayana, there was “no one whom the younger school of philosophers” was “more eager to learn of” than Russell. And T. S. Eliot, who attended the latter’s logic seminar, even wrote a poem—*Mr. Apollinax*—about the way the Harvard community behaved in the presence of the forty-one-year-old philosopher.⁴

Russell visited ‘the other Cambridge’ in a crucial period in the history of Harvard philosophy. The local department had, in Russell’s view, been “the best in the world”⁵ but it had lost three of its intellectual leaders in a few years’ time. James had died, Santayana had moved to Europe, and Royce had suffered a mild stroke. Though he had received Harvard’s first invitation when all three were still active, the department was in a state of deep crisis when he first entered Emerson Hall in March 1914. Not surprisingly, Russell made full use of the opportunity to fill the void

² Langer, Susanne K. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 75.

³ Royce, cited in Lenzen, Victor F. “Bertrand Russell at Harvard, 1914”. *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, vol. 3 (1971): 4.

⁴ Santayana to Russell, Feb. 8, 1912, cited in Russell, Bertrand. *Autobiography* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967-1969/1975), 259-60; Eliot, Thomas S. *Prufrock and Other Observations* (London: The Egotist Press, 1917).

⁵ Russell, *Autobiography*, 205.

created by the unit's intellectual decapitation. He persuaded the department's chairman "that logic is *the* important thing" in philosophy, taught courses on epistemology and the *Principia*, and argued that logic is "the essence of philosophy"⁶ to a crowd of over five hundred people.⁷ Symbolic logic had always played a role in Harvard's philosophy curriculum due to Royce and the indirect influence of C. S. Peirce but its impact had been rather limited in a department that valued methodological pluralism.⁸ Russell's Lowell Lectures *Our Knowledge of the External World* were explicitly designed to make amends and illustrated "by means of examples, the nature, capacity, and limitations of the logical-analytic method in philosophy".⁹

The method of logical analysis means many things in Russell's philosophy. On the most general level, it asks philosophers to adopt a scientific attitude and to view their discipline as a collaborative, objective enterprise, aiming "at results independent of [their] tastes and temperament".¹⁰ Russell maintained that philosophy should aim at "piecemeal, detailed, and verifiable results" instead of "large untested generalities recommended only by a certain appeal to imagination".¹¹ On a more detailed level, Russell's method involved what Michael Beaney calls a "transformative" approach to analysis.¹² Whereas traditional philosophers had tried to analyze complex ideas and propositions by *dissecting* them into component parts, Russell advocated *rephrasing* them into their proper, logical form. The best-known illustration of this method is

⁶ Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (Chicago: Open Court, 1914), 26.

⁷ Russell to Morrell, March 19 and May 29, 1914, cited in Griffin, Nicholas. *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 497; 508.

⁸ Between 1878 and 1915, only 2 out of the 103 Harvard philosophy dissertations were on "Logic and Methodology" (See Palmer, George H. and Perry, Ralph B. "Philosophy, 1870-1929." In *The Development of Harvard University since the Inauguration of President Eliot, 1869-1929* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930], 30). Most likely, Palmer and Perry are referring to the dissertations of Sheffer (1908) and Lewis (1910).

⁹ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*, xv.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² Beaney, Michael. *The Analytic Turn: Analysis in Early Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2.

Russell's theory of descriptions, often heralded as a "paradigm of philosophy".¹³ In "On Denoting", Russell (1905) aimed to dissolve ontological questions about non-referring descriptions such as 'the present King of France' by analyzing them away. Rather than dissecting a sentence such as "The present King of France is bald" into a subject (the present King of France) and a predicate (is bald), he proposed to rephrase the sentence as "There is one and only one King of France, and whatever is King of France is bald", arguing that, on such an analysis, there is no longer any puzzle about the sentence's truth value.¹⁴

A key component of Russell's approach is the notion of 'logical form'. The method just sketched presupposes that every sentence has an underlying logical structure that may be masked by its grammatical appearance. In his Lowell Lectures, Russell characterized logical form as that what remains unchanged when the constituents of a sentence are altered. In a series of propositions such as (1) "Socrates drank the hemlock," (2) "Coleridge drank the hemlock," (3) "Coleridge drank opium," and (4) "Coleridge ate opium", the constituents of (1) are altered one by one while the logical form of the propositions remains the same. The logical form of a proposition, in other words, "is not another constituent, but is the way the constituents are put together".¹⁵ According to Russell, philosophy can be defined as the discipline which is "concerned with the analysis and enumeration of logical forms". Whereas the special sciences aim to answer questions that are decided by empirical evidence, philosophy is "the science of the possible" and concentrates attention upon the investigation of the "logical forms" that allow us to meaningfully talk about the world.¹⁶

¹³ Ramsey, Frank P. *The Foundations of Mathematics* (London: Routledge, 1931), 263.

¹⁴ See Beaney, *The Analytic Turn: Analysis in Early Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology*, 2-3.

¹⁵ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*, 34.

¹⁶ Russell, Bertrand. "Scientific Method in Philosophy." 1914. In *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1917), 75-93.

3. Transition

Russell's attempts to sell his logical-analytic method were successful. After his 1914 visit, he became the faculty's prime candidate to become James' successor. In his final days as the department's chair, Ralph Barton Perry wrote that they had to try "by hook or crook [to] attach [Russell] to ourselves"; and when Royce died in 1916, the department's new chair James Haughton Woods acted swiftly, offering Russell a position.¹⁷ And though Russell never became a Harvard professor because of a conviction during World War One, the department immediately started to search for people with a similar profile, hoping that they could help Harvard attract "many of the cleverest of the youth with predilections for logic".¹⁸ The department hired Sheffer and Ralph Monroe Eaton as logic instructors, both of whom would stay at Harvard until the end of their careers. And a few years later, Woods managed to obtain the funds to offer positions to Lewis (1921) and Whitehead (1924), appointing two of the best-known logicians in the Anglophone world. Lewis had just published his seminal *A Survey of Symbolic Logic* (1918), presenting his system of strict implication; Whitehead was the co-author of *Principia Mathematica*. Sheffer, finally, had studied with Russell in Cambridge before the latter's 1914 visit and was viewed as "Russell's most enthusiastic representative at Harvard".¹⁹

As a result of these changes, Harvard quickly became a central hub for technical philosophy in the United States. Whereas James had once confessed that he was "a-logical, if not illogical, and glad to be so", there was "an unmistakable drift in the

¹⁷ Perry to Bernard Berenson, March 20, 1914, cited in Kuklick, Bruce. *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930* (New Haven. Princeton University Press, 1977), 409; Woods to Russell, September 23, 1916, The Bertrand Russell Archive, McMaster University (hereafter, BRA), RA1, Box 5.57.

¹⁸ Woods to Russell, January 5, 1916, BRA, RA1, Box 5.57.

¹⁹ Floyd, Juliet. "Sheffer, Lewis, and the 'Logocentric Predicament.'" In *C. I. Lewis: The A Priori and the Given* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 33. Incidentally, this is also the period in which Harvard philosophers helped generate new attention for Peirce's contributions to the development of symbolic logic. Harvard acquired the latter's papers in 1914 and reserved funds to have a group of scholars organize and catalogue them, leading to the six-volumed *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Peirce's work was to have a significant influence on Langer's development. See Innis (2009).

direction of logic” among graduate students by the late 1920s.²⁰ Roy Wood Sellars wrote about the “efflorescence of mathematical logic so characteristic of Harvard”²¹ and Palmer and Perry²² boasted about the department’s “unquestioned leadership” in the field in an article about the evolution of Harvard philosophy.²³ Bruce Kuklick’s study of Harvard philosophy doctorates confirms these conclusions about the rapid transformation of the Harvard intellectual climate. The proportion of dissertations on technical subjects (logic, methodology, epistemology, and philosophy of science) increased from 0% in the 1890s to a stunning 54,8% in the 1920s.²⁴ The new generation of Cambridge’s best and brightest—e.g. Susanne Langer, William Parry, Henry Leonard, W. V. Quine, and Nelson Goodman—produced dissertations that fell squarely in line with Russell’s plea for the use of the logical-analytic method in philosophy. Whether or not it was a direct consequence of Russell’s suggestion to invest more in logic, the department had quickly become a frontrunner in the analytic approach that would come to dominate American philosophy after World War II.

4. Langer’s dictum

Whitehead, Sheffer, and Lewis were Langer’s most prominent teachers. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Langer became a strong advocate of the method of logical

²⁰ James to Peirce, Dec. 24, 1909, cited in Misak, Cheryl. *Cambridge Pragmatism: From Peirce and James to Ramsey and Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 104; Palmer and Perry, “Philosophy, 1870-1929,” 31.

²¹ Sellars, R. W. “Current Realism in Great Britain and United States.” *The Monist*, vol. 37, no. 4 (1927): 513.

²² Palmer and Perry, “Philosophy, 1870-1929,” 27.

²³ The fact that Harvard became widely viewed as center for technical philosophy does not imply that the department could keep up with the developments in Europe. Indeed, Quine would later complain that although “American philosophers *associated* Harvard with logic because of Whitehead, Sheffer, Lewis, and the shades of Peirce and Royce [...] the action was in Europe”, where the work of Ackermann, Bernays, Gödel, Herbrand, Löwenheim, Skolem, and von Neumann was revolutionizing the field (Quine, Willard V. “Autobiography of W. V. Quine.” In *The Philosophy of W. V. Quine. Library of Living Philosophers* [La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1986], 9, emphasis added).

²⁴ See Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts*, ch. 24, appx. 3. Ph.Ds. in psychology are not included in these numbers.

analysis. She explicitly adopted the approach in her dissertation “A Logical Analysis of Meaning” (1926) and early publications such as “Confusion of Symbols and Confusion of Logical Types” (1926) and “A Logical Study of Verbs” (1927).²⁵ In fact, Langer was already well-known for her adoption of the method when she was still a student. Unpublished lecture notes of Sheffer’s 1924 seminar on philosophic methods make mention of “Mrs. Langer’s dictum that the analytic is the only method in philosophy”.²⁶ Naturally, Sheffer himself also favored the approach. His seminar discussed ‘dialectic’, ‘intuitional’, ‘pragmatic’, and ‘phenomenological’ methods but it was clear that Sheffer was committed to the method of logical analysis. He was convinced that “logic *is* philosophy”.²⁷ Indeed, in reflecting on the period, Langer would later describe Sheffer as the “intellectual guide of a small group of perceptive, serious students [...] who looked forward to a new philosophical era, that was to grow from logic and semantics”.²⁸

Langer, like Russell, presupposed a transformative conception of analysis. In her dissertation, Langer set herself the task to find the “logical form of all meaning-situations”.²⁹ And in her textbook *An Introduction of Symbolic Logic*, one of the first logic handbooks published in the United States., she offered students a host of examples to teach them the importance of the distinction between a statement’s grammatical appearance and its underlying logical form.

²⁵ Langer’s dissertation was supervised by Whitehead, who had then recently arrived at Harvard. The dissertation is viewed as one of the best Harvard theses in logic from that period. Juliet Floyd, who studied all Harvard dissertations on logic up through 1932, describes Langer’s dissertation as “the finest thesis I saw.” Floyd, Juliet. “Recent Themes in the History of Early Analytic Philosophy.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2009): 199.

²⁶ Unidentified author, “Secretary’s Note Book: Seminary in Philosophic Method 1924”, Harvard University, Houghton Library, Susanne K. Langer Papers, Box 29. See also McDaniel, K. “Ontology and Philosophical Methodology in the Early Susanne Langer. In *Innovations in the History of Analytical Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), fn. 3.

²⁷ Floyd, “Sheffer, Lewis, and the ‘Logocentric Predicament’” 34.

²⁸ Langer, Susanne K. “Henry M. Sheffer 1883–1964.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1964): 306.

²⁹ Langer, *A Logical Analysis of Meaning*, 2.

“[I]n ‘Jones killed his wife’ the word which a grammarian would call the direct object does more than a direct object should, namely to denote the element to which Jones stood in the relation of killing; it also conveys that this element stood in the relation ‘wife’ to Jones. In other words, ‘Jones killed his wife’ means more than ‘A kd B,’ though that is its grammatical form; it signifies ‘A kd B and B wf A’. Here we see how ... it is ... the easiest thing in the world to miss [a statement’s] logical form completely.”³⁰

The notion of logical form, in other words, played an important role in Langer’s work. In explaining the notion, Langer explicitly relied on Russell’s account, extensively quoting from the 1914 lectures in which the British philosopher had characterized logical form as the way “constituents are put together” using a series of propositions starting with “Socrates drank the hemlock”.³¹ According to Langer, she could not have done “better than to quote Bertrand Russell’s admirably lucid exposition of logical forms”.³² Langer repeated this strategy in her above-mentioned textbook, published seven years later. After defining logic as “a science of forms”, she again used Russell’s account to explain to students what she meant when she talked about the “logical form of our language”.³³

5. Pluralism

Although Russell is the most-cited philosopher in *The Practice of Philosophy* and some of Langer’s first journal publications, it would be a mistake to conclude that she was Russell’s disciple, except in the broad sense of adopting a logical-analytic approach and a transformative conception of analysis. There are at least two important differences between Russell’s and Langer’s accounts, both of them

³⁰ Langer, Susanne K. *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic* (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1937), 53.

³¹ See section 2 of this chapter.

³² Langer, Susanne K. *The Practice of Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930), 91.

³³ Langer, *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic*, x; 31.

inspired by her *direct* teachers.³⁴ Rather than thanking Russell, Langer often expressed her indebtedness to Sheffer in her earliest publications. In her dissertation, Langer noted that her analysis of meaning is a “philosophical application of the purely formal work done by [...] Dr. Sheffer”³⁵ and in her logic textbook, Langer thanked Sheffer for the insight that logic is the “science of forms”.³⁶

A first key difference is that Langer advocated a pluralistic stance toward logical structures. Most early twentieth-century philosophers and logicians, including Russell, had defended a universalist conception of logic, culminating in Wittgenstein’s thesis that propositions are pictures of facts and that facts and their corresponding propositions have the same logical form.³⁷ For Langer, however, there is no such thing as *the* logical form of reality. In “Form and Content: A Study in Paradox” (1926), Langer argued that the world can be symbolized by different logical systems:

“The false premise ... is the supposition that there is such a thing as *the* form of anything. A logical form is always relative to a system; a logical term or complex of terms without reference to any particular system is as meaningless as a word or phrase without reference to any particular language.”³⁸

Whereas Russell presupposed that logic is absolute, Langer accepted a pluralistic philosophy of logic. She repeated her thesis in her first monograph *The Practice of*

³⁴ I say “at least two important differences” because there are many smaller, more technical, points of disagreement. See, e.g., Langer, Susanne K. “Confusion of Symbols and Confusion of Logical Types.” *Mind*, vol. 35, no. 13 (1926): 222-9; or Langer, Susanne K. “The Logical Perspectives of the World.” *Journal of the Philosophy*, vol. 30, no. 7 (1933): 178-87.

³⁵ Langer, *A Logical Analysis of Meaning*, iii.

³⁶ Langer, *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic*, x. Adrienne Dengerink-Chaplin also notes that Sheffer was the “first and foremost significant influence on Langer’s thinking”, in *The Philosophy of Susanne Langer: Embodied Meaning in Logic, Art and Feeling* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 61.

³⁷ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. “Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.” 2.2., in *Annalen der Naturphilosophie*, vol. 14 (1921): 195-262.

³⁸ Langer, Susanne K. “Form and Content: A Study in Paradox.” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 23, no. 16 (1926): 437.

Philosophy, adding that we can pragmatically choose between logics by selecting the system that best suits our purposes:

“There is no such [thing] as *the form* of a real thing, or of an event... there are many patterns possible within the same reality... This means, in the end, that *all understanding is selective*, and that the great work of science is to find out those ways of conceiving an object which shall be most appropriate to certain purposes. [...] Originality and genius in science consist mainly in the ability to recognize the configurations which are important for a given purpose.”³⁹

In advocating such a pluralistic conception, Langer was clearly influenced by her Harvard background. For Lewis and Sheffer, too, had defended variants of pluralism and were known for their pragmatic conception of the a priori⁴⁰ and theory of notational relativity.⁴¹ In a co-authored paper on the development of American philosophy, Langer credits both her teachers for the innovation and traces the idea back to Royce, who first conceived of logic as the study of abstract *forms* (plural):

“Royce's logic belongs to the fertile new inquiry. His conception of logic *as the study of abstract forms* is exemplified in the analysis of formal systems developed by H. M. Sheffer, demonstrating the relativity of abstract structures themselves to the notation by which they are rendered.... The technical development of Royce's logic ... led to the free construction of ‘logics’ by C. I.

³⁹ Langer, *The Practice of Philosophy*, 135-6; 142 [Langer's emphasis]. See also Felappi, Giulia. “Susanne Langer and the Woeful World of Facts.” *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2017): 38-50, §2, and McDaniel “Ontology and Philosophical Methodology in the Early Susanne Langer,” 272-83 for more detailed analyses of Langer's pluralism.

⁴⁰ See Lewis, Clarence I. “A Pragmatic Conception of the A Priori.” *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 20, no. 7 (1923): 169-77.

⁴¹ See Sheffer, Henry M. “Notational Relativity.” *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy* (1927): 348-51. For a reconstruction of Lewis' and Sheffer's pluralisms see Floyd, “Sheffer, Lewis, and the ‘Logocentric Predicament.’”

Lewis—systems of inference all somehow related to the classical pattern, but ‘queer’ in their assumptions and [...] formal appearance.”⁴²

Whitehead, finally, helped Langer develop a *diachronic* perspective on logical systems. Following the latter’s *Science and the Modern World* (1925) and moving from individual propositions to systems of thought, Langer maintained that the history of philosophy should not just be viewed as a succession of different theories but as a series of logical languages or conceptual frameworks.⁴³

6. Non-discursive symbolisms

Langer does not only defend a *pluralistic* conception of logical form; she also *generalizes* it. Though she often uses Russell’s 1914 account to explain the distinction between a sentence’s logical form and its grammatical appearance, Langer moves beyond the English philosopher-logician in using the term in a much broader sense, including for example “musical form”, “physical, grammatical, social forms”, and “norms of conduct”; in short, anything that “follows a pattern of any sort, exhibits order, internal connection”.⁴⁴ Russell and many of his contemporaries employed the method of logical analysis exclusively to study what Langer would later call “discursive” symbolisms,⁴⁵ relegating all other types of expressions to the realm of emotion or the “unspeakable”.⁴⁶ Langer, however, maintained that the approach can also be used to study non-discursive or ‘presentational’ symbolisms (e.g. art, myths, and dreams):

⁴² Langer, Susanne K., and Eugene T. Gadol. “The Deepening Mind: A Half-Century of American Philosophy.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1950): 126 [original emphasis].

⁴³ See Langer, *The Practice of Philosophy*, 170; 193. The related idea that every ‘epoch’ has a ‘generative idea’ or ‘key’, which Langer would later employ in *Philosophy in a New Key*, was also influenced by *Science and the Modern World*. See Langer (1942, ch. 1) and Dengerink-Chaplin (2020, 109-12).

⁴⁴ Langer, *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic*, 23-4.

⁴⁵ See Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, ch. 4.

⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, “Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,” 4.115.

“This logical ‘beyond,’ which Wittgenstein calls the ‘unspeakable,’ both Russell and Carnap regard as the sphere of subjective experience, emotion, feeling, and wish ... The study of such products they relegate to psychology, not semantics. And here is my point of radical divergence from them... We are dealing with symbolisms here ... The field of semantics is wider than that of language.”⁴⁷

Langer would not develop her seminal distinction between discursive and presentational symbolisms until the 1940s but much of her early work can be also read as an attempt to break with the more restricted conception of logical form. Her dissertation aimed to show that “Mr. Russell’s system of ‘propositional’ logic” is not sufficiently general to account for all “possible meaning-situations”;⁴⁸ one of her first journal publications aimed to develop a set of postulates to reveal the “logic of music”;⁴⁹ and *The Practice of Philosophy* argued that a theory of meaning which fails to incorporate the significance of art, “commits exactly the sins of narrowness which logical philosophy is supposed to avert”.⁵⁰

Langer’s attempts to move beyond the presuppositions of early analytic philosophy were, again, inspired by her Harvard teachers. In an essay written for a *Festschrift* for Sheffer, Langer argued that Russell failed to “see the entire potential range of philosophical studies built on the study of relational logic”, emphasizing that “Whitehead came nearer to it”, that “Peirce and Royce saw it” but that “the actual development of systematic abstraction” had been the accomplishment of her most valued teacher.⁵¹ It was Sheffer who had shown her Russell’s “error of treating logic

⁴⁷ Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 70 [Langer’s emphasis].

⁴⁸ Langer, *A Logical Analysis of Meaning*, iv.

⁴⁹ Langer, Susanne K. “A Set of Postulates for the Logical Structure of Music.” *The Monist*, vol. 39, no. 4 (1929): 562.

⁵⁰ Langer, *The Practice of Philosophy*, 152.

⁵¹ Langer, Susanne K. “Abstraction in Science and Abstraction in Art.” In *Structure, Method, and Meaning: Essays in Honor of Henry M. Sheffer* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1951), 179.

as essentially a study of *propositional* forms” and taught her that logic should concern itself “with *all* sorts of forms”.⁵²

7. New directions

The previous sections sketch some of the ways in which Langer was a child of her time. In the earliest stages of her career, Langer liberally combined influences from Peirce, Royce, Russell, Lewis, Whitehead, and especially Sheffer. A more complete account of Langer’s intellectual context would also have included German influences on her thought: philosophers such as Ernst Cassirer, Edmund Husserl, and Ludwig Wittgenstein all played a significant role in the formation of Langer’s ideas.⁵³

Langer’s admiration for German intellectual movements was somewhat unusual in the early 1920s since Germany had been widely viewed as the aggressor during World War One. By “labeling a conception, a policy, or a mode of conduct ‘German’”, Frank Thilly wrote a few years after the end of the conflict, philosophers were able “to put the quietus on it: whatever was German was wrong”.⁵⁴ Still, her reading of the

⁵² Langer, Susanne K. “A Logical Study of Verbs.” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 24, no. 5 (1927): 129 [emphasis added].

⁵³ See, e.g., Dengerink-Chaplin, *The Philosophy of Susanne Langer*, chs. 5 and 7; this volume, and Pollock in this volume.

⁵⁴ Thilly, Frank, “Book Review: The Present Conflict of Ideals.” *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 29, no. 2 (1920): 185. In fact, it may even be argued that Russell’s plea for logical analysis was partly successful because German speculative philosophy and psychology, which had strongly influenced the previous generation of Harvard philosophers, became suspect during the war. Many Harvard philosophers had passionately contributed to public debates about the war and some of them had explicitly made a connection between German thought and the German war effort. George Santayana, in *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916), and Ralph B. Perry, in *The Present Conflict of Ideals: A Study of the Philosophical Background of the World War* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1918), for example, drew a clear link between German militarism and the development of 19th-century speculative philosophy.

Germanophone literature—which came naturally to her since her parents were German immigrants⁵⁵—significantly influenced Langer’s development.

In arguing that Langer was partly a product of her scholarly environment in the earliest stages of her career, I do not wish to suggest that she was just a passive recipient of the views of her teachers. On the contrary, Langer developed these views into new directions and played an active role in shaping the course of American analytic philosophy throughout the 1930s. She was probably the first American philosopher to use the term ‘analytic philosophy’ in print⁵⁶ and her books were widely reviewed in U.S. philosophy journals.⁵⁷ When the New York philosopher Leo Abraham, a few years after the publication of *The Practice of Philosophy*, made a list of the philosophers who had given “considerable impetus to the development of a distinct science of symbolism”, he included Langer on his list, along with Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap.⁵⁸ Similarly, when American philosophers such as Charles Morris and Ernest Nagel were asked about the development of logic and scientific philosophy in the United States on their trips to Europe, they both mentioned Langer as one of the main representatives.⁵⁹ Langer’s early publications made her one of the few American experts in a field that was quickly becoming more popular in the 1930s, as is evinced by the role she played in institutionalizing the new approach

⁵⁵ Dryden, Donald. “Susanne K. Langer 1895–1985.” In *American Philosophers before 1950* (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2003), 190.

⁵⁶ See Langer, *The Practice of Philosophy*, 17; Frost-Arnold, Greg. “The Rise of ‘Analytic Philosophy’: When and How did People Begin Calling themselves ‘Analytic Philosophers’?” In *Innovations in the History of Analytical Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁵⁷ For example, in Baylis, Charles A. “Book Review: The Practice of Philosophy.” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 28, no. 12 (1931): 326-9; Fisch, M. H. “Book Review: The Practice of Philosophy.” *Philosophical Review*, vol. 43, no. 3 (1934): 321-6; Feigl, Herbert. “Book Review: An Introduction to Symbolic Logic.” *American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 51 (1938): 781; Stebbing, Susan. “Book Review: An Introduction to Symbolic Logic.” *Philosophy*, vol. 13, no. 52 (1938): 481-3.

⁵⁸ Abraham, Leo. “What is the Theory of Meaning About?”, *The Monist*, vol. 46, no. 2 (1936): 229n5.

⁵⁹ See Morris, Charles. W. “The Relation of the Formal and Empirical Sciences within Scientific Empiricism.” *Erkenntnis*, vol. 5 (1935): 6-16, and Ernest Nagel’s “list of recent publications in America which stand at somewhat the same place as the logical-positivists”; Nagel to Neurath, October 14, 1934, “Moritz Schlick Papers,” 275, Haarlem, Wiener Kreis Archiv.

through her activities for organizations such as the Association of Symbolic Logic and the Unity of Science movement.

Langer's book also had quite an impact *outside* the United States. When Quine, who was also a student of Sheffer, Lewis, and Whitehead, attended meetings of the Vienna Circle in 1933, for example, he was surprised to discover that they were reading *The Practice of Philosophy*.⁶⁰ And it was definitely not the first time that members of the Circle had been studying Langer's book. Moritz Schlick, the group's leader, had already written about it two years before, when he had first received a copy from its publisher Henry Holt and Company. In his reply to the publisher, Schlick had praised the book in exceptionally strong terms:

"I have thoroughly enjoyed reading it. There have been very few philosophical books indeed during the last years that have given me a similar pleasure. The book is certainly excellently written. The author's exquisite style, lucid, fluent and brilliant, has been a source of real joy for me, and must be, I am sure, for every reader. But what is more important: the philosophy expounded in the book is the true kind of philosophy: its method, the method of logical analysis, will be the only method of future philosophizing."⁶¹

Carnap, too, appears to have been impressed by Langer's work. Although he did not attend the 1933 meetings of the Vienna Circle, he listed Langer as one of the people he would like to work with if he were to obtain a Rockefeller Fellowship to move to the United States.⁶² And when Carnap finally did arrive in the United States approximately two years later, Langer was one of the first people he met. Carnap's

⁶⁰ Quine to Sheffer, February 16, 1933. W. V. Quine Papers, item 981. Harvard University. Houghton Library.

⁶¹ Schlick, Moritz, "Moritz Schlick Papers," March 22, 1931, 103/Holt-1. Haarlem, Wiener Kreis Archiv.

⁶² Carnap to Kaufmann, September 27, 1933, Rudolf Carnap Papers (hereafter, RCP), 024-22-07, Archives of Scientific Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh. Cf. Limbeck-Lilienau, Christoph. "Rudolf Carnap und die Philosophie in Amerika. Logischer Empirismus, Pragmatismus, Realismus." In *Vertreibung: Transformation und Rückkehr der Wissenschaftstheorie* (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2010), 130. Carnap's correspondence with Feigl suggests that Carnap was planning on reviewing *The Practice of Philosophy*. See Feigl to Carnap, April 29, 1934, Herbert Feigl Papers, 02-69-03, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Archives.

diary reveals that he, Langer, and a few Harvard academics had tea at Quine's place on December 26, 1935, about a week after he arrived in the United States. In his diary, Carnap notes that Langer used her first meeting with the by-then famous German philosopher to ask him about Frege.⁶³

It was Herbert Feigl, however, who was most influenced by Langer in the early 1930s. When the Viennese philosopher visited Harvard for a year on Rockefeller Fellowship, Langer was one of his most frequent contacts. In letters to Schlick, Feigl regularly mentions meetings of a discussion group on logic and philosophy organized by the Radcliffe philosopher. Feigl called it the "*Langer Zirkel*" and told Schlick that it reminded him of the *Wiener Kreis*:

"I was delighted to meet Susanne Langer, who is a professor here at Radcliffe College ... She is an excellent woman and her versatility is admirable... We (i.e. a group of young people who are interested in logic and philosophy...) meet at her place every Monday evening for discussions on the Viennese model."⁶⁴

"In the Langer Circle we almost always discuss logic [...] it is almost like in Vienna! Mrs. Langer is always very interesting; amusingly, she reminds me a bit of Wittgenstein in her demeanor, in her intuitive determination, and in the biblical conciseness of her statements."⁶⁵

Feigl's letters reveal that Langer, despite her junior position, played an important role in Cambridge's philosophical circles. Not only did she host meetings for young people 'interested in logic and philosophy', she also invited senior professors to her circle. When her group started to discuss work in the philosophy of physics, for example, the meetings were attended by the later Nobel laureate Percy W. Bridgman, who had recently published his influential *The Logic of Modern Physics*

⁶³ Carnap, "Rudolf Carnap Papers," 025-82-01. Langer was very interested in Frege's work at the time. See Felappi, "Susanne Langer and the Woeful World of Facts," 45. Carnap had taken several courses with Frege at Jena in the 1910s.

⁶⁴ Feigl, December 6, 1939, Moritz Schlick Papers, 99/Fei-17 [translation by author].

⁶⁵ Feigl, April 5, 1931, Moritz Schlick Papers, 99/Fei-19 [translation by author].

(1927). And when Russell spent another period at Harvard in 1929, he also visited Langer's "cozy attic studio" to discuss philosophy.⁶⁶

Considering Feigl's high opinion of Langer, it is hardly a surprise that his positivist manifesto "Logical Positivism: A New Movement in European Philosophy" prominently mentions her book as one of the three "American publications" that exhibit tendencies related to the approach that had been developed in Vienna,⁶⁷ the other two being Lewis' *Mind and the World-Order* and Bridgman's *The Logic of Modern Physics*. At the time, however, this would have been a remarkable list: Bridgman and Lewis were both established professors and were viewed as some of the most influential scholars of the country; Langer was a 35-year-old analytic philosopher who had just started developing the views of her teachers into exciting, new directions.

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⁶⁶ Feigl to Schlick, December 6, 1930, Moritz Schlick Papers, 99/Fei-17.

⁶⁷ Blumberg, Albert E. and Feigl, Herbert. "Logical Positivism: A New Movement in European Philosophy." *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 28, no. 11 (1931): 281-296.

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