Feeling, Scale and Religion: Approaching Abstract Painting through the Aesthetics of Susanne Langer

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Abstract

This study offers a new framework for understanding abstract paintings as well as offering a fresh look at Susanne K. Langer, a philosopher and aesthetician who has been somewhat marginalised over the last few decades and whose ideas deserve a fair hearing and application. Methodologically, the study also aims to be an art historically informed aesthetics, modelling one way in which the two disciplines can be integrated in the study of the visual arts.

There are several reasons why a new framework for understanding abstract painting is useful. One is that art historians have asked for a clearer account of what constitutes an abstract painting, particularly in the wake of new discoveries of artistic practices from the prehistory of abstraction which have provoked a mixed reception. Even for canonical works, however, the standard understanding of abstract works as non-figurative or non-objective makes these works very hard to approach for many people. I argue that a framework for understanding abstract paintings which draws attention to the structure and phenomenology without undermining the diversity and complexity of these works is helpful, and, moreover, that informing expectations in this way facilitates individual responses to artworks. Finally, abstract artists' statements frequently refer to the qualities of scale and space that the new framework concerns, and often object to their work being seen in terms of the absence or presence of recognisable subject matter.

I examine Langer's claim that artworks are images expressive of human feeling, first looking at her visual taxonomy, which includes images, models and pictures, before unpacking what Langer means by feeling in the three books she devotes to the subject, and the use that is now being made of Langerean feeling in neuroscience and psychology. Putting these together, I then look at Langer's theory of art, considering the way that she claims expression functions, testing her claims against artworks, rival expressivist theories, and against common issues with functionalist theories, such as hers. The discussion on feeling looks at Langer's ideas on how we interpret qualitative perceptual gradients; the discussion on art looks at how we interpret qualitative artistic gradients.

The thesis considers objections to Langer's work that have been made largely on the grounds that the influence of early Wittgenstein on Langer's ideas undermines her whole approach. This leads into a discussion of one notion of form, tripartite form, which it has been claimed Langerean aesthetics cannot give a clear explanation of.

I then go on to look at one gradient in detail, a gradient which I argue is particularly salient and which has been written about frequently in art history but which has never received sustained attention in the aesthetics of painting – the gradient of clarity of scale. This is looked at first in the context of traditional Chinese religious art, in examples which deal with progressively more ambiguity of scale, before the thesis offers the new framework for understanding abstract paintings – completely ambiguous intrinsic scale. In the context of these abstract works, I look in particular at how the manipulation of the device of scale intersects with the creation of works evocative of the sublime. The argument for this is developed through close attention to artist's statements and other art historical material, and through readings based on Langerean aesthetics.

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Introduction

This thesis introduces a new framework for understanding abstract painting. This framework is new, but based on the philosophical ideas of Susanne Langer (1895-1985) – both her aesthetics and theory of mind.[1] By utilising an art historically informed aesthetics, the main aim is to facilitate the investigation of these works and the distinctive experiences provided by them.

As the title suggests, however, this study spends most of its time approaching this end point, only arriving there in the final chapter. Before this the components of such an approach are introduced, unpacked, and analysed, as well as being applied to specific artworks at each stage in order to understand and test the implications of the unfolding view.

Langerean aesthetics may seem an unlikely and unwieldy toolset for such an endeavour – Langer's work is rarely taught or written about in analytic aesthetics today, despite being popular, particularly in the US, in the 1940s and 50s. Langer's career began in the philosophy of logic, and she published two books in this phase, *The Practice of Philosophy* (1930) and *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic* (1937). After this she moved into aesthetics, publishing *Philosophy in a New* Key (1942, hereafter *PINK*), *Feeling and Form* (1953, hereafter *FF*), and *Problems of Art* (1957). Langer then changed career direction once more, moving into philosophy of mind. After publishing the preliminary work *Philosophical Sketches* (1962), she then published her magnum opus – *Mind* – in three volumes (1967, 1972, 1982).

The initial promise of the ideas has yielded to greater understanding of why they are productive in the context of abstract works. Firstly, Langer has a sophisticated account of artistic expression. Secondly, she has a sophisticated account of feeling – not just in comparison to other aestheticians.

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[1] For a recent biography of Langer see Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: pp. 11-58

Religion has been chosen as a term in the subtitle somewhat uneasily – the best of a range of choices with conflicting associations. The sacred, for instance, often works well, but is too narrow in that it denotes a thing or space that has been sanctified, and so excludes the more mystical side of the subject. Conversely, the spiritual suggests something immaterial in a way that is only sometimes appropriate for the subjects at hand – at other times, the religious topics under discussion are extremely grounded in their basis on the material constitution of the world.

Religion covers the examples chosen well, with the sole exception of the sublime, to be discussed in Chapter 6. Religion needs to be considered somewhat broadly to accommodate this. However, there is support for seeing it this way, with William James taking religion to be "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."[2] James is not trying to define religion but rather demarcate his area of discussion. He is, moreover, somewhat uneasy about referring to the divine, noting that God-like is enough, what might today be called a higher power.[3] James goes on to note the attitude associated with the religious:

> There must be something solemn, serious, and tender about any attitude which we denominate religious. If glad, it must not grin or snicker; if sad, it must not scream or curse. It is precisely as being *solemn* experiences that I wish to interest you in religious experiences.[4]

I am taking religion in this study to mean both personal and organised religion (the latter of which James excluded). Also supporting the identification of the sublime as a kind of religious experience is the work of Robert Doran, who draws attention to the parallels between three writers perhaps most associated with the sublime – Longinus, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant – and with the structure of authentically religious experience:

> [The Longinian sublime] clearly draws its structural affinity with religious experience, an affinity that would become consequential in a modern intellectual attitude strongly

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[2] James, 1902: p. 31
[3] Ibid.: p. 34
[4] Ibid.: p. 38

influenced by Christianity. The dual structure of sublime experience reflects the Christian (and especially Protestant) relation to God or the divine: we are overwhelmed and overawed before God's greatness and power ("God-fearing"), but are also exalted and elevated by God's love. Thus Burke remarks that "false religions have generally nothing else but fear to support them". This sentiment is echoed by Kant, who uses the dual transcendence structure of sublimity to distinguish enlightened from archaic religion: "In this way alone does religion internally distinguish itself from superstition, the latter not providing a basis in the mind for reverence [*Ehrfurcht*] for the sublime, but only for fear and anxiety before the being of superior power".[5]

The use made of the sublime in this study is in these terms, which is to say that artworks with a relationship to the sublime are understood as religious artworks.

Consideration of Mark Rothko's *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea* (Figure 1) will help to clarify some of the terminology used in the present study. From a Langerean perspective, *Slow Swirl* shows us a *virtual* form, meaning perceptible but non-actual, existing for perception only. There seems to be a space of depth receding behind the picture plane which, whilst it can be seen into, cannot be physically accessed.[6] The entire artwork is a *primary virtual form*, and the discrete visual elements are *secondary virtual forms*; the latter combine to create the former. This aspect of Langer's account requires there to be visually distinguishable elements, and so Langer's account cannot deal with true monochromes, such as those by Yves Klein. These have their own complex issues and the current study will put them to one side.

In addition to being virtual, *Slow Swirl* is an *image*, which is one of Langer's two types of the virtual. It is an image rather than a model because it presents an appearance rather than demonstrating a functional principle. Moreover, as an artwork, Langer would insist that *Slow Swirl* presents an image of *feeling*. Feeling is one of the more complex terms that Langer works with; briefly, feeling should

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[5] Doran, 2015: p. 14, citing Burke, 1757-9: p. 70; Kant, 1790: p. 264

[6] Langer claims that sculpture and architecture also provide distinctive experiences of virtual space, and argues that viewers do not have physical access to this virtual space, despite being often able to walk around and inside sculptures and buildings, sharing their actual space. This is a less straightforward claim than the pictorial case, and will be examined in Chapter 3

Figure 1: Mark Rothko, 'Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea', 1945, oil on canvas
(Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1,910 x 2,150 mm)

be thought of as close to consciousness or awareness. For *Slow Swirl* then to present an image of

feeling is for it to present an appearance of how consciousness seems.[7] In order to do this, artists

employ *gradients*, each of which is a qualitative variable (Langer approvingly cites Rudolf Arnheim

who defines a gradient as "an increase or decrease in quality").[8] Two of the basic *salient* gradients in

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[7] Usually not in an autobiographical sense, though in this case it seems likely – the subtitle of the work (*Mell Ecstatic*) relates to Rothko's at the time fiancée and later wife, and the artist's son writes, "*Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea* was painted for my mother during my parents' brief courtship… An abstracted depiction of the two of them (we must assume) on a fantastical beach, it is the only "rendering" he will make of my mother and the last work that passes for a self-portrait. Yet for all the dynamic qualities of the figures, the viewer is ultimately more absorbed by their relation to the space around them, in which they seem to participate and yet from which they also float free. It is one of those magical places, a landscape of the mind, the type of unspace he will create in the best of his classic works…" See Rothko, 2015: pp. 265-6
[8] Langer, 1967: p. 214

Slow Swirl, for instance, are figurative to abstract, and transparent to opaque. Salience of a gradient depends on the artwork – even these basic ones are often not relevant.

There are gradients of feeling and there are gradients in artworks, the latter are secondary virtual forms. Gradients are *projected* into artworks, there are no set rules for how this is done, though it is possible to analyse an artwork to see how a work has been achieved. By stressing the absence of *rules of projection*, what Langer means is that the results of these analyses cannot be generalised and reapplied. Looking at *Slow Swirl*, the depicted space of the primary virtual form has an interesting duality in that it appears to both be a domestic interior and a seascape, with the ambiguity of various secondary virtual forms – the waves of the carpet or sea, the deep recession of the sky or potentially wallpaper – giving a quality of either an enchanted domestic interior or a desert island setting which has been made home for the two figures. This reading may or may not be convincing, the important point is that it would be bizarre to try and generalise this reading and claim that this is how paintings in general function. This is the sense in which Langer means that there are not stable rules of projection for artworks. For models, however, which demonstrate functional principles, there are stable rules of projection, such as Mercator projection in mapping.[9]

The last major term which needs to be introduced is scale. Scale is frequently mentioned in relation to abstract painting, but generally the term is used as a synonym for size, with working on 'a monumental scale' code for having made large paintings, and if artists have elected to work on a 'more modest scale', then they are working on smaller canvases than is usual for their type of work.[10] In the present study, *size* refers to extension in space.

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[9] Langer, 1942: pp. 79-80

[10] The catalogue for the Royal Academy *Abstract Expressionism* exhibit, for instance, uses scale in this way. See Anfam (ed): 2016 pp. 7, 59, 63
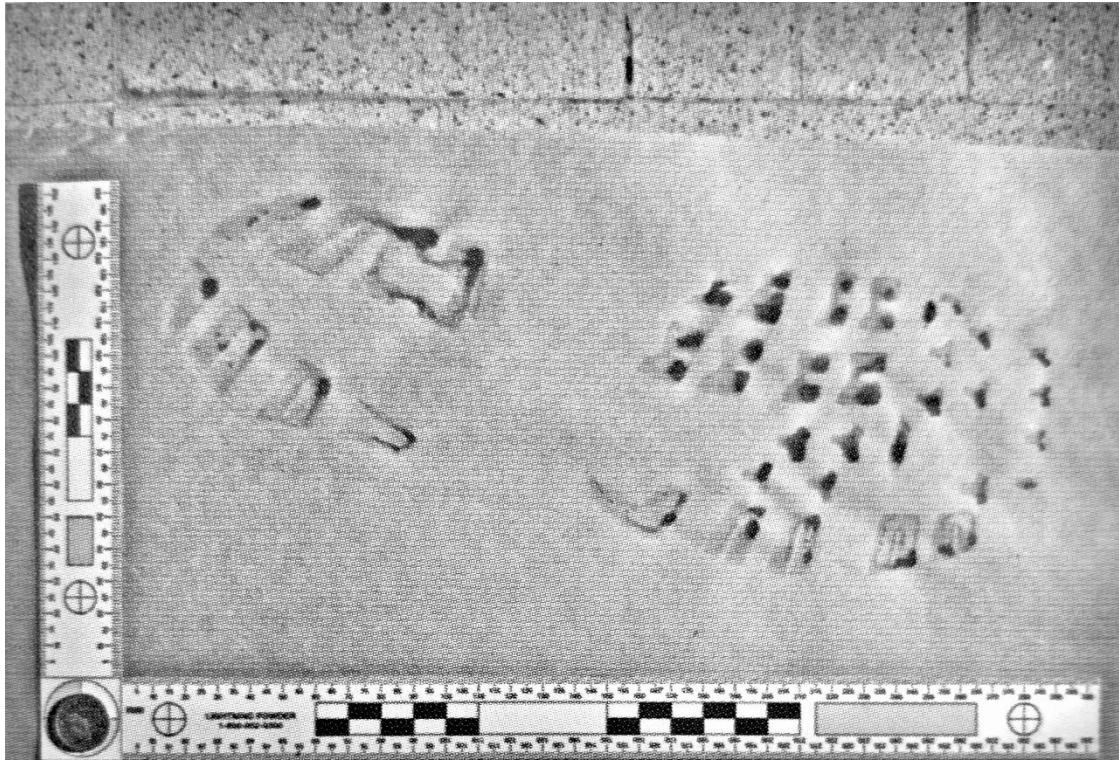
Figure 2: A forensic photograph showing a footprint with scale (Marsh, 2014)

There is another, relational sense in which scale can be meant, and it is this which is the object of discussion. In figurative works, depicted objects are shown in relationship to each other and the kind of space they exist within: this is the other familiar sense of scale, meant as size relationships. This may be reasonably straightforward – as in a case of an unedited photograph showing a person standing next to a car – or more complex – when artists utilize distortions in scale for effect.

A literal illustration of how scale can be shown is given in Figure 2, where a footprint has been photographed – and a forensic ruler placed next to it which will allow for the shoe size to be determined with a high level of accuracy. The ruler gives the footprint scale, but we might just as well say that the footprint gives the ruler scale; the photograph is blurry, the numbers difficult to read, and it is easy to imagine someone checking that the larger units on the ruler are centimetres rather than inches by being guided by the size of the footprint. The brick background too suggests scale, though less precisely. A viewer's confidence regarding the size of the depicted objects is

reached in this case by the correlation of relative sizes in relation to the viewer's experience of

shoes, rulers and bricks.

Figure 3: John Martin, 'Belshazzar's Feast', 1821, oil on canvas (Private Collection, 1,600 x 2,490 mm)

An artistic use of the same device is John Martin's painting *Belshazzar's Feast* (Figure 3), which

utilises human figures in the foreground, in combination with linear perspective, to create a strong

sense of *intrinsic scale*, which I define as the viewer's experience of the size relationships of visual

elements within an artwork. This in turn helps the narrative function of the painting, since

Belshazzar's palace is shown to be a spectacular edifice, merely the centre of the territory he

controls, and yet still his might is shown to be insignificant next to the depicted might of God, whom,

a contemporary audience would have been aware, was just about to strike Belshazzar down. This

use of intrinsic scale is complemented by Martin's decision to make the work physically imposing –

at nearly two and a half metres wide, viewers find it dominant in *extrinsic scale* as well, which I

define as the experience of the relationship of the physical size of the artwork itself to the body of

the viewer. It is worth noting that intrinsic scale is preserved in reproduction, whilst extrinsic scale is not (apart from the unusual case of a 1:1 scale reproduction).

Whilst these two examples show significant clarity of intrinsic scale, this need not be the case. Indeed, need for scaling objects in the first place shows the very real possibility of ambiguity. Sometimes, as in the forensic photograph, this ambiguity is undesirable, but it can also afford certain artistic possibilities. This thesis considers both semi-abstract paintings, in which there is less clarity of intrinsic scale, and argues that completely abstract paintings can be usefully seen as having completely ambiguous intrinsic scale – this is the new framework for understanding abstract painting mentioned earlier.

There is a large amount of high-quality art historical work on abstraction, from catalogue raisonées to monographs on individual artists, and indeed on individual paintings; critical studies of, especially, the first wave of European abstraction and Abstract Expressionism; the way in which abstraction relates to surrealism, ornament, Picasso; and critical theory from gender studies, psychoanalysis, and the social history of art. There is yet still more, much too much to even briefly survey, but this study will make use of some of this material.

By contrast, there is little written directly about abstract painting in analytic aesthetics. Jerrold Levinson has written of the particular challenge which emotional responses to abstract works pose to those trying to understand them, writing that:

> Emotional response to abstract art is puzzling, principally, because the strategies that provide obvious explanations of both *why* we respond emotionally, and *what* we are responding to, in the case of representational art, here seem not to be available.[11]

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[11] Levinson, 1997: p. 27

Levinson is writing here about emotional *response* on the part of the viewer, which is one role which feeling and emotion may play. In a figurative work, subject matter seems to provide an explanation for emotional response. Considering Jean-François Millet's *The Gleaners* (1857, Figure 4) for instance, may provoke feelings of admiration for the workers, sympathy for their plight, or, potentially, indignation if the viewer feels their own position in society is being attacked by the heroic portrayal of rural workers. Remove this subject matter, and it becomes difficult to explain emotional responses.

It is worth noting that in the above quote, Levinson contrasts abstract art with representational art, a common distinction, but one which is rejected within the small literature in aesthetics on abstract depiction. Richard Wollheim writes that most abstract works are in fact representational – but that they represent abstract concepts such as irregular solid, sphere or space, rather than figurative concepts such as dancer, boy or torso.[12] Michael Newall similarly argues that most abstract works depict abstract spaces – with features such as overlapping, transparency, illumination and shadowing – and points out, moreover, that the idea of abstract works having depicted content, and so being representational, is found in the work of mid-20th Century art theorists Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried.[13] For clarity, this study will keep to the terms figurative and abstract, as well as semi-abstract. While this clarity of terminology is important, it does not solve the immediate problem that Levinson brings up of emotional responses to abstract works – why, for instance, there could be an emotional response to an irregular solid.

Other roles which feeling and emotion may play in abstract art are linked to expression and expressiveness. Leo Tolstoy, in *What is Art?*, claimed that artworks transmit the emotions of the

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[12] Wollheim, 1987: p. 62
[13] Newall, 2011: pp. 172-3

Figure 4: Jean-François Millet, 'The Gleaners', 1857, oil on canvas (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 838 x 1,118 mm)

artist to a receptive audience – this is often known as the contagion theory of art.[14] This theory has

little support today, problems include the artist's sustaining an emotional state for a potentially

lengthy period whilst creating the work and, on the audience side, the issue that audience responses

are divergent.[15] Tolstoy's theory does however clearly demonstrate the idea of expression – an

inward state is objectified, and this object affords an audience an aesthetic experience. More

sophisticated versions of this theory were put forward by Benedetto Croce and R. G. Collingwood,

among others, in which the ideas of expression and expressiveness were distinguished. For Tolstoy,

these were identical – the art object was expressive of the emotion that the artist expressed – but

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[14] Tolstoy, 1897.

[15] Other problems include many high emotional states being incompatible with skilled manipulation of a medium (which may not be necessary for all art but is surely necessary for some art); in the case of multiple authors determining whose emotion is being transmitted, or if a performer of a musical work is transmitting their own emotions or the composers in the common situation where composer and performer are non-identical

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the distinction enabled later expressivists, named to avoid confusion with Expressionist artists, to

avoid some of the problems Tolstoy faced. Expressiveness is a property of some objects which

appear to have an emotional attribute: Peter Kivy uses the example of a Saint Bernard dog – which

looks sad without, presumably, always being sad.[16] The dog is therefore *expressive* of sadness

without *expressing* sadness. Expressiveness is a commonly recognized aesthetic property of some

artworks, though few philosophers today defend an expressivist theory of art; similarly, many of the

ideas originally put forth for expressivist art theories are now used in discussing expressiveness.[17]

The three main components of expression theories outlined so far then are expression,

expressiveness, and emotional response; there is also the issue of assuming, suggesting, or defining

what sort of things emotions are to begin with. Within philosophy this is an ontological issue, but

frequent recourse has been made to the findings of psychology and neurology since empirical

findings help to guide philosophical thought towards reality. This is done for emotion in general, it is

also done in each of the areas outlined so far. The responses broadly fall into two camps: cognitive

theories and bodily theories of emotion.[18] The former draw attention to the role beliefs play in

emotion (I become indignant when I see you holding what looks like my pencil, only to feel like a fool

when I find mine in my pocket – this seems to necessarily involve cognitive components), whereas

the latter point to the embodied nature of emotions (my cheeks flush and my heart races when my

horse seems to be winning at the Grand National, my 'heart sinks' and jowls slacken when the horse

falls on the final straight – this seems to necessarily involve bodily components).

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[16] Kivy, 1980: pp.2, 12-7

[17] Evers, 2018: pp. 181-91 outlines two defences which expressivists could make to attacks from Kivy but stops short of defending expressivism himself. Jenefer Robinson defends a version of Collingwood's ideas as a theory of expression rather than a theory of art. See Robinson, 2005: pp. 229-50

[18] A recent volume exploring these positions is Naar & Teroni (ed.) *The Ontology of Emotions* (2018)

Langer exists within this expressivist tradition, and within aesthetics her work is cited most frequently when expressiveness is discussed – in particular musical expressiveness.[19] Paul Guyer summarizes her career as follows:

> We can conclude that Langer offered one of the more detailed accounts of the expression theory of art, as that version of the cognitive theory of art in which our own feelings become the object of artistic knowledge, to be found in the first half of the twentieth century. We might also conclude that she offered the final statement of this theory, since in the same year *Feeling and Form* appeared, 1953, another work appeared that would radically change the direction of Anglo-American aesthetic theory, namely, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.[20]

Wittgenstein is twice a problem for Langer scholarship – both for the reason Guyer mentions, and also since Langer's use of the Tractarian Wittgenstein has often been found problematic. Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin has recently published a defence of Langer on this point – which will be brought into Chapter 4. Suffice it to say however, that the Wittgensteinian hurdles to making use of Langer's ideas are diminishing – not least because of the receding influence of the *Philosophical Investigations* in philosophy departments.

Moreover, whilst an expressivist theory of art may or may not be desirable, a plausible theory of expression in general is a desirable component of aesthetics. The literature on expression is quite well developed, however, despite several leading figures on expression engaging with Langer, this study will argue that none of them do her work justice. The chief reason for this is the exclusive focus on Langer's two or three works which are openly about aesthetics, *PINK* and *FF*, with the lecture volume *Problems of Art* (1957) sometimes included. This neglect of Langer's late work is, Guyer argues, indicative of the wider turn away from Langer, for reasons external to the work itself:

> The last [twenty five] years of her life were devoted to the huge work *Mind*, whose psychological and physiological approach to the nature of human thought and feeling was no longer of interest to the mainstream of American "analytical" philosophers when the influences of logical positivism, Wittgenstein, and ordinary language philosophy were at

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[19] Langer's work is more commonly cited now in psychology and neuroscience than aesthetics (see Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p. 326 n. 7) – Chapter 2 will draw on this

[20] Guyer, 2018: p. 365; Robert Stecker has argued that Arthur Danto's theory of 'embodied meaning', first put forward in 1971, is an expression theory despite not being put forward as one. See Stecker, 1996: p. 43-7

their peak nor to American "continental" philosophers when the influence of Heidegger was at its peak. This work thus did not enjoy the wide attention of Langer's earlier work.[21]

It is not unusual to neglect an aesthetician's work outside the discipline – probably few in aesthetics read Arthur Danto's *Analytic Philosophy of History* – but in this case the neglect is a problem, because Langer's theory of mind is based on feeling, and so is her theory of expressiveness. The first volume of *Mind* contains almost two hundred pages that directly tackle artistic matters, since a central claim of the work is that the history of art provides an *image* of human mental life, and the entire work contains ideas which can be used to look at aspects of the production and reception of works of art. A central claim of this study is that Langer's ideas give aesthetics a better theory of expression than competing ideas.

To return to the first of the Guyer quotes given above, Langer's theory of emotion is a cognitive one, but cognition is seen as a fundamentally embodied process. Feeling, for Langer, underlies both thought and emotion, which are high developments of it:

> Feeling is a dynamic pattern of tremendous complexity. Its whole relation to life, the fact that all sorts of processes may culminate in feeling with or without direct regard to each other, and that vital activity goes on at all levels continuously, make mental phenomena the most protean subject matter in the world. Our best identification of such phenomena is through images that hold and present them for our contemplation; and their images are works of art.[22]

This study examines these and other claims, both philosophically and art historically. The latter is not something which has often been done,[23] as aesthetics and art history have diverged from the long 20th century moment where figures such as Heinrich Wölfflin and E. H. Gombrich produced work

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[21] Guyer, 2018: p. 352-3
[22] Langer, 1967: p. 67
[23] Never for the *Mind* books, though Ranjan Ghosh includes a 20-page appendix to his doctoral thesis on Langer's philosophy in which he applies certain ideas from FF and PINK. See Ghosh, 1979: pp. 130-43. Sushil Kumar Saxena explores Hindustani Sangeet music and Kathak dance through Langerean aesthetics – See Saxena, 2001.

which straddled the disciplines.[24] The principles that 1) there are historically invariant properties of artworks and that 2) historical context is essential for reconstructing the meaning of artworks, are, however, not incompatible. This study means to pursue both of these principles, and combines aspects of both disciplines; the art history is informed by the aesthetics, the aesthetics tested by the art history.

A final motivation for this study is the persistence of the debate between opticality and tactility, perhaps best epitomized by the disagreement between Greenberg and Leo Steinberg. Greenberg argued that the medium specificity of high Modernist painting led abstraction to be given to vision alone, whilst Steinberg argued that our visual experiences remain informed by our haptic experience of the world.[25] It was in considering this debate that the ideas regarding scale and the new framework for understanding abstract painting were first prompted.

The methodology of the thesis is a mixture of theoretical elements, drawn especially from Langer, image analysis, and aspects of art history. Archival research was undertaken at the Langer Archive, but materials from this have only indirectly informed the thesis – in the final analysis, Langer's published works better support the arguments I wish to make. The thesis contains exegesis of both Langer's texts and other philosophical and religious texts and approaches the following research questions:

1. What is Langer's visual taxonomy? How plausible is it?

2. How plausible is Langer's view of feeling? How useful is it for aesthetics?

3. What is Langer's theory of art as it emerges from considering her complete works? How does it hold up to rival approaches?

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[24] This is not to say that art historically informed aesthetics no longer exists – Jason Gaiger and Michael Newall, for instance, produce work that can be described in this way
[25] Greenberg, 1960: pp. 311-2; Steinberg, 1972: p. 71

4. Are the criticisms of Langer based on inappropriate influence from the Tractarian Wittgenstein warranted?

5. How does the device of scale function? What possibilities are there for manipulating scale in painting, sculpture and architecture?

6. How useful are Langerean aesthetics when viewing abstract paintings?

In terms of the negotiation between history of art and aesthetics, there is perhaps reason to be cautious. The text *Art History vs Aesthetics*, based on a conference organised by James Elkins, gives little promise that the disciplines can be brought into productive dialogue. Under the heading 'Dead and Deader', David Raskin writes "[aesthetics] seems to have a great deal to say about writings on aesthetics, and I see this as very useful, but solely as a kind of private practice for the scholar. Let's just not pretend it has much to do with anything beyond that."[26] Slightly more constructively, John Hyman writes that there is a small amount of overlap between the subjects and that "studying the history of art can encourage philosophers to be skeptical about the generalizations they have inherited; and it can teach them that some of the concepts they find useful have a far more local and contingent value than they tend to assume."[27] On the other hand, philosophers can help art historians to escape the pernicious influence of philosophical myth, such as "a painting is a kind of text and that 'realism' is an honorific term."[28] In general, the volume, with more than thirty contributors, is marked by stark disagreement on what art history and aesthetics can offer each other, if anything at all. Perhaps the only real point of agreement is interest in certain aesthetic properties, such as the dainty, the dumpy, and the repulsive.[29] The art historians and the aestheticians contributing to the roundtable discussion are interested in these notions, though it is certainly arguable that the aestheticians are more interested in the conceptual side and the art historians are more interested in their embodiments in artworks. It is notable that a Langerean

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[26] Raskin, 2006: pp. 102-3
[27] Hyman, 2006: p. 105
[28] Ibid.: pp. 105-6
[29] Elkins, 2006: pp. 66-7

aesthetics very much focuses in on aesthetic properties such as this, which in an artistic context are known as qualitative gradients. Langer's account gives a structure for identifying these properties and relating them to the functioning of the entire artwork. Whilst caution may be merited, the problems discussed in the Elkins text have not arisen in the current study.

Another note on methodology concerns Chapter 5 – which exclusively analyses traditional Chinese religious art, in a departure from the rest of the thesis which largely considers European and North American art. Chapter 5, moreover, makes use of Langerean aesthetics less than the rest of the thesis. Whilst this might seem a strange departure, it makes sense in that the chapter introduces scale. In this sense, Chapter 5 could have been written by examining works in any tradition which has produced semi-abstract art. The real benefit of considering China here is that its religious traditions are explicitly tied to differing conceptions of part to whole, allowing for many salient points about scale to be investigated. Concentrating on an entirely different tradition also has the advantage of making clear the interaction between art history and aesthetics I propose – as it is the same aesthetic concept of clarity of scale which is the thrust of the investigation in the chapter on Chinese art and the following one on abstract painting.

The final point that I wish to make before outlining the structure of the chapters is to introduce an analogy between Langer and St Thomas Aquinas, an analogy which holds in several different connections. Thomas Aquinas may seem a strange parallel – Langer does not mention him, and she was not religious – but the parallel, nonetheless, recommends itself. Aquinas defended the study of Aristotle on specific grounds: against the charge that he was encouraging a pagan materialism.[30]

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[30] The defence was necessary due to the controversy of Aristotle's works outside of logic in the mid-13th Century. F. C. Copleston notes the extremely unusual situation in which some of Aristotle's works were banned whilst others were required reading: "…by the time Aristotle began his teaching career at Paris the Aristotelian philosophy had become known to the medieval Christian world. But it had met with a very mixed reception. On the one hand it was received with enthusiasm by considerable numbers of professors and students. On the other hand, when the statutes of the university of Paris were sanctioned by the papal legate in 1215 Aristotle's works on metaphysics and natural philosophy were prohibited, though study of the *Ethics* was not forbidden and that of the logical works was ordered." See Copleston, 1955: p. 64

Aquinas argued that only through attention to these material surfaces, through the senses, can we come to knowledge, including knowledge of God. Edward Feser describes Aquinas's situation at this point in his life:

> The use of Aristotle's philosophy in expounding and defending Christian doctrine was highly controversial in Aquinas' day… More traditional theologians thus regarded Aristotelianism as theologically dangerous… The controversy between defenders and critics of Aristotelianism was particularly fierce at the University of Paris, and Aquinas was determined to show that, when rightly understood, Aristotle's philosophy was not only compatible with Christianity, but the best means of expounding and defending it.[31]

This view is echoed by James A. Weisheipl, who writes that "[s]trong opposition came from thirteenth-century Augustinists…[who] also rejected the use of the pagan to dilute the pure stream of theology."[32] Without opening a discussion about a Thomist conception of God, this can safely be said to be the interest in the sensuous for Aquinas. F. C. Copleston, for instance, argues that whilst "Aristotle seemed to some at first sight to have to have elaborated a naturalistic system in which no room was left for Christianity,"[33] Aquinas did not see Aristotle this way. Copleston argues that what Aquinas took from Aristotle was that, "[i]t is the senses which first set the mind in contact with existent things and which supply it with the materials for the formation of ideas."[34]

Langer is widely considered to be a formalist. But she is a formalist only in the sense that St Thomas Aquinas was a materialist. Where Thomist thought posits the value and necessity of coming to know God through contemplation and experimentation, Langer claims that people come to know human feeling through art.

This episode in the life of Aquinas offers an analogy to the situation of the received Langerean aesthetics. Most straightforwardly, there is the collapsing of Langer's position with that of Roger Fry and Clive Bell – partially on the grounds of her taking up the phrase 'significant form' from Bell. If

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[31] Feser, 2009: p. 5
[32] Weisheipl, 1974: p. 285
[33] Copleston, 1955: p. 66
[34] Ibid.: p. 28

Bell and Fry are the pagans in the analogy, then Langer is Aquinas – encouraging us to look through form and see meaning. The place of Aristotle in the analogy would be taken by a range of figures, most prominently Ernst Cassirer, with the place of traditional theology taken by logical positivism.[35] This aspect of Langer's aesthetics and its reception will be tackled directly in Chapter 4.

There is, moreover, a mental analogy – only through sense impressions can we make mental models , a position very close to Aquinas's, the Langerean version of which will be discussion in Chapter 1.[36]

Lastly, there is an analogy which holds, not between Langer and Aquinas, but between Aquinas and the approach advocated in this thesis; seeing what is for Aquinas Truth (from theology) and Fact (based on the report of the senses) as Aesthetics and Art History. As Feser, quoted above, writes of Aquinas arguing that Aristotelianism is the "best means of expounding and defending Christianity", with Aristotelianism being understood as being guided by sensory experience, I argue that the welter of facts and reports of contextualised sensory experience which constitutes a great part of art history is the best way of coming to correct conclusions in philosophy of art. Whilst a weak version of this thesis is uncontroversial, as few working in philosophy of art would argue that their conclusions are not based in any way on their own or others sense experience, I advocate for a stronger version of this thesis: that more use should be made in philosophy of art of both direct experience of artworks and art history.[37]

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[35] Rather than an analogy, an additional point of connection between Langer and Aquinas is both are adherents of a hylomorphic approach that considers structure especially salient. See Feser, 2009: p. 13-16 for information on Aquinas and hylomorphism, and Chapter 4 of the present study for a discussion of Langer and hylomorphism

[36] Chapter 2, however, will also consider the role that mental models play in mature perception, looking at the recent field of Predictive Processing

[37] David Carrier makes a similar claim in the opening to his philosophical commentary on the artist Lewis Carroll that "Philosophers and cultural historians typically discuss works of art in abstract terms. But the true significance of art for philosophy, and philosophy for art, can only be established through close analysis of specific examples…" I agree, though my methodology is different – Carrier has undertaken numerous interviews with Carroll and so has produced a philosophical commentary on an artist's work, whilst I have produced an art-historically informed aesthetics. See Carrier, 2019: p. x

Whilst philosophy of art is structurally inclined to generalise, history of art is prone to specify; as noted, it is a contention of this thesis that these contradictory methodologies are not incompatible. They can be made to play nicely with one another not by reducing them to a single method, but by flexible negotiation. The way to come to grips with a concept in philosophy of art is through careful consideration of artworks and artworlds; conversely, whilst having an open mind helps when thinking about artworks, it is enormously helpful to have elaborated expectations – which really help the perceptual experience. Without expectations it is not really possible to be surprised, and without surprise there is no new understanding. This is an argument for a 'middle way'.

The methodological claim being made, that aesthetic approaches and art historical approaches are not incompatible, parallels the approach to be outlined in Chapter 2 with the top-down approach of aesthetics guiding expectations and the bottom-up process of art history, reporting back, corroborating the model, but most salient are where expectations are *not* met. From the point of view of aesthetics, this is an opportunity to refine a model. From an art historical perspective, these expectations are extremely valuable – this identification of salience, the idea that things are not created in a vacuum, the context-dependence, tradition dependence, dependence on conditions of production that is art history's bread and butter, puts the lie to the idea that the best way to experience artworks is completely fresh, as if for the first time. Keeping an open mind is critical, but viewing artworks *with* expectations is critical too.

This coincides with the argument Kendall Walton makes about the importance of learning the standard properties of a category of art. As Walton writes

> It should be emphasized that the relevant historical facts are not merely useful aids to aesthetic judgment; they do not simply provide hints concerning what might be found in the work. Rather they help to determine what aesthetic properties a work has; they, together with the work's nonaesthetic features, make it coherent, serene, or whatever.[38]

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[38] Walton, 1970: p. 364

Art historians generally build these expectations unconsciously, through exposure, learning by seeing so many examples of a particular kind of thing, with deviations jumping out as salient. One major problem with it is that it has resulted in an art history that is very white and male and European in its perspective, and it is not very clear how to escape that. Formalising the expectations, which is one way of describing what aesthetics does, is a way of bringing these unconscious positions to the surface, so they can be challenged and engaged with and a more representative art history achieved.

The contention here is not that aesthetics and art history are the same or that they can be or ought be reconciled into a single subject. The contention is rather that they can be complementary, and sometimes it is particularly valuable to make use of both sets of tools – as will be done here.

Chapter 1 considers Langer's ideas concerning virtual space, including the distinction between images and models and her account of what makes a picture. For aesthetics, there is limited utility in Langer's symbol – and, as the literature attests, ample room for confusion. An attempt will be made to navigate this confusion, and in doing so various conceptions of symbols and the symbolic will be considered. However, the thesis is not meant primarily as an explication of Langer's thought or a study in symbology.[39] The chapter builds to an analysis of an abstract painting by Hilma af Klint, arguing that Langer's work illuminates aspects of af Klint's practice which are otherwise hard to account for.

Chapter 2 looks at Langer's account of feeling, contrasting it not with other philosophical accounts but with contemporary neuroscientific perspectives on feeling. That this is possible and productive is a result of Langer's work being made use of in the neuroscientific community.

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[39] Innis, 2008 and Dengerink Chaplin, 2019 are extensive and largely chronological monographs on Langer's thought

Chapter 3 provides a defence and criticism of Langer's theory of art, building on the results of Chapters 1 and 2; Chapter 1 has presented Langer's ideas on images, with Chapter 2 presenting her ideas on feeling: Chapter 3 looks at her account of artworks, which she describes as images of feeling. As well as investigating Langer's theory on its own terms and by using it to think through various artworks, Langer's account is considered alongside the accounts of Collingwood and Wölfflin, before being set in the context of theories of art more broadly. Finally, I consider the existence of inexpressive artworks.

Chapter 4 falls into two parts, both of which deal with the central Langerean concept of projection. The first of these considers the reception of Langer's ideas in Anglo-American philosophy, arguing that her ideas were distorted due to the prevalence of Wittgensteinian thinking in academic departments at this time. The latter part of the chapter takes up a specific challenge from Garry Hagberg, who claims that Langer's aesthetics results in a view of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* in which the subject matter is unrecognisable and the viewer is left with a confused jumble of impressions. I counter this by offering an in depth reading of the painting using Langerean resources.

Chapter 5 looks at the experience of scale in traditional Chinese religious art. The chapter argues that clear intrinsic scale is well-suited to depicting power relations, whilst any ambiguity of intrinsic scale affords opportunities to avoid depicting these hierarchies.

Chapter 6 puts forward a new framework for understanding abstract paintings, based on Langerean aesthetics and scale. The chapter builds on Robert Rosenblum's influential account of Romanticism, arguing that the distinctive use of scale in abstract paintings has often been based on the concept of the sublime. The chapter argues that scale represents power, and that one of the principal types of scale exists indeterminately in abstract works – a claim with significant implications for the experiences that these works afford.

The conclusion then outlines the contribution this study has made to Langer studies and as a

synthetic approach of art-historically informed aesthetics, before discussing the new framework for

understanding abstract painting and why it matters.

Chapter 1

Virtual Space: Image, Model and Picture

In this chapter I introduce Langer's framework of representations, endeavouring to understand both what she meant and how her ideas can be usefully applied to contemporary issues. The first section outlines her famous distinction between discursive symbolisms and presentational symbols, looking at its origins in Langer's reactions to both logical positivism and the work of Ernst Cassirer, before arguing that the distinction, while having significant potential for confusion, has little to offer contemporary aesthetics, even properly understood. The following section moves on to Langer's later distinction between image and model, which I argue is a much more helpful distinction for aesthetics today; after introducing images and models as both ontological categories and as functions, I look at a painting and a sketch in order to bring out how these theoretical ideas are actually played out in practice. Following this I introduce Langer's ideas on virtual space, and how Langer analyses visual elements in terms of the *primary illusion* and *secondary illusions*, again looking at specific artworks, both Langer's own examples and exploring my own. After this I outline Langer's account of depiction, arguing that hers is an early experience theory, and comparing it to contemporary accounts. The following section looks at depiction in abstraction and the ways in which this account of depiction relates to that of Richard Wollheim and Michael Newall; I argue that Langer's account is distinct from each, and remains plausible, at least once an intentional standard of correctness is added to it. The final section uses Langer's distinctions introduced thus far to look at a painting by Hilma af Klint, in order to assess whether her paintings ought to be seen as diagrams.

1.1 Symbols – Presentational Symbols and Discursive Symbolisms

Whilst this chapter means to present and explore Langer's ideas on virtual space, images and models, to do so without considering the confused reception of one of her earlier distinctions would leave the virtual space ideas open to criticism regarding the extent to which they are subject to the same challenges. Dengerink Chaplin describes the distorted discourse around Langer as follows:

> Many misinterpretations of her aesthetics could have been avoided if readers had been more aware of her broader intellectual framework as outlined in [her] earlier and later works. This was, of course, not possible until her later works actually appeared. Yet, as [critic Bennett Reimer] put it, 'Few thinkers of Langer's stature were so criticized, and few continue to be as misunderstood, because misconstruals of her earlier work have not been corrected by that which she was to explain later.'[1]

This section introduces presentational and discursive symbols and symbolisms before putting the distinction into the context in which it originated – both logical positivism and the work on myth by Ernst Cassirer. The section ends by arguing that the distinction has little usefulness for aesthetics. The confusion surrounding this aspect of Langer's work, however, has distorted the reception of her ideas, and so will be examined in detail in Chapter 4.

A discursive symbol has a relatively stable, conventional meaning, and works in combination with other symbols – together forming a symbolism.[2] Words, for example, are discursive symbols which operate as part of a symbolism, such as a sentence. Language, in its non-poetic form, is discursive symbolism, "a very high form of symbolism; presentational forms are much lower than discursive, and the appreciation of meaning probably earlier than its expression."[3] Low here means prior in evolutionary terms, presentational symbols being, in Langer's system, a precondition for the later to develop, higher, discursive symbolisms. Meaning is built up *successively* by combining words which have pre-existing associations. Whilst discursive symbols have meaning in isolation, for instance, the meaning of words isolated from sentences, this meaning is relatively simple – it is possible to

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[1] Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p. 2 (quoting Reimer, 1993: p. 49)
[2] Langer, 1942: pp. 81-2
[3] Ibid.: p. 110

compile it with little controversy in dictionaries for natural languages, and the meaning of terms is defined in introducing a proof in mathematics.[4] Discursive symbolism can also be translated.[5]

Presentational symbols, by contrast, are meaningful taken as a whole. They are meant, according to Langer, to be experienced as a singular unity and only then analysed or contemplated, the elements distinguished from the articulate whole.[6] Whilst a presentational symbol, for instance, a map or a painting, can up to a point be cut up into smaller pieces and still function as a representation, the individual elements such as lines and colours do not have such relatively stable independent meaning as words do.

We are generally interested in discursive *symbolisms* – the meaning of an argument, or a proposition, or a fact – rather than discursive symbols, whose meaning is elementary. Conversely, we are generally interested in presentational *symbols* – pictures, graphs, and songs, for example – rather than presentational symbolisms – which would correspond in pictures to iconography (an area which will be returned to).[7]

Langer's account of discursive symbolism is not meant to be controversial, though it has proved to be; Plato makes a similar distinction in the *Cratylus* – with various names being locally appropriate, and so language being translatable, and that 'name-givers' are involved in a different art to those involved in the imitation of sound, figure and colour; and C. S. Peirce's notion of a symbol in his trichotomy also corresponds closely.[8] She gives a sketch account of it, in an early book (*PINK*, 1942), in order to demarcate the approximate area she discusses so as to introduce her main concern –

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[4] Ibid.: p. 94
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.: p. 93
[7] It might be objected that songs have discursive meaning too due to their lyrical content. Langer resists this interpretation, on the basis of what she calls 'the principle of assimilation': "When words enter into music they are no longer prose or poetry, they are elements of the music…" (Langer, 1953: p. 150) For a full discussion, see Langer, 1953: pp. 149-68
[8] Socrates notes that "Even in foreign names, if you analyze them, a meaning is still discernible." See Plato, 388 BCE: p. 74. "…the art of naming appears not to be concerned with imitations of [sound, figure and colour]; the arts which have to do with them are music and drawing…" (p. 95); Peirce: 1991: p. 49

which is presentational symbols. Part of this reason for the sketch account is that Langer is not

unaware of the differences between the thinkers she references in this section; for her to put

forward this section in full would require her to reconcile Gotlob Frege and Betrand Russell and

Ludwig Wittgenstein and Rudolf Carnap. It is certainly the case that Langer does not give a full

account of discursive symbols, but given the complexity involved in doing so, and given that she does

not make new claims within the area, this is not particularly problematic. It has been noted by her

critics that Langer introduces her idea of presentational symbols mainly in contrast to discursive

symbols;[9] whilst this is true it is also misleading - the distinction comes down to discursive

symbolism operating sequentially, with meaning built up progressively, whereas a presentational

symbol operates simultaneously.[10]

"All language," Langer writes, "has a form which requires us to string out our ideas even though their

objects rest one within the other; as pieces of clothing that are actually worn one over the other

have to be strung side by side on the clothesline."[11] This successional quality of language is

uncontroversial, and Langer spends little time on discursive symbols which she says have been

"exhaustively treated by several able men,"[12] - namely Wittgenstein, Russell, Whitehead and

Carnap.[13]

In addition to Langer's ideas having a relationship to the work of the logical positivists however, they

also have a strong relationship to the work of Ernst Cassirer, whose work on discursive symbolisms –

specifically discursive *thinking* – is worth treating in more depth in order to clarify Langer's ideas on

presentational and discursive forms:

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[9] Hagberg, 1984: pp. 327-8; Budd, 1985: pp. 106-7, 110-1
[10] Langer claims that this holds whether the presentational symbol has a temporal form, as in the case of music and film, or not, as in the case of paintings. See Langer, 1953: p. 379
[11] Langer, 1942: p. 81
[12] Ibid.: p.82
[13] By this, Langer is referring to the Tractarian Wittgenstein, Russell & Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*, and Carnaps's *The Logical Syntax of Language*, the last of which she writes: "[it] carries out the philosophical program suggested by [the Tractarian] Wittgenstein. Here an actual, detailed technique is developed for determining the *capacity for expression* of any given linguistic system." See Langer, 1943: pp. 82-3

What distinguishes empirical reality, the constant core of objective being, from the mere world of representation or imagination, is that in it the permanent is more and more clearly differentiated from the fluid, the constant from the variable. The particular sense impression is not simply taken for what it is and immediately gives; instead we ask: will it be confirmed by experience as a *whole*? Only if it stands up under this question and this critical test can we say that it has been received into the realm of reality and determinate objective experience. And in no stage of empirical thought and knowledge is this test, this confirmation, ever at an end; it must always be renewed.[14]

Cassirer here describes the basis of scientific thought – the consistent questioning and re-evaluating of experience. The successional, or discursive, quality of language has a different significance here. Rather than being a limitation of the communicative function of language, it is the enabling characteristic of reason. Cassirer continues:

The *synthesis* toward which empirical thought strives always presupposes a corresponding *analysis* and can only be effected on the basis of such an analysis. Combination presupposes separation, while the separation aims only at making the combination possible and preparing the way for it.[15]

The separate elements of discursive thought allow for analysis, recombination – and ultimately synthesis (or, since this never quite arrives, successive renewed syntheses).

Cassirer then develops a hint in what was quoted above, that there is thought apart from empirical thought - "the mere world of representation and imagination," - mythic thought.

Myth lives entirely by the presence of its object – by the intensity with which it seizes and takes possession of consciousness in a specific moment. Myth lacks any means of extending the moment beyond itself, of looking ahead of it or behind it, of relating it as a particular to the elements of reality as a whole. Instead of the dialectical movement of thought, in which every given particular is linked with other particulars in a series and thus ultimately subordinated to a general *law* and process, we have here a mere subjection to the impression itself and its momentary "presence."[16]

This is a glimpse at one relevant part of Cassirer's project – a project Langer was extremely familiar with – of recognising "general laws of the imagination"[17]:

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[14] Cassirer, 1924: p. 31
[15] Ibid.: pp. 32-3
[16] Ibid.: p. 35
[17] Langer, 1953: p. 236

The characteristic form, or "logic," of mythic thinking is the theme of Cassirer's second volume [of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, quoted above]. It is a logic of multiple meanings instead of general concepts, representative figures instead of classes, reinforcement of ideas (by repetition, variation and other means) instead of proof.[18]

Cassirer explored the logic of mythic thinking – of mythical meaning – rather than treating it as irrational disturbance as it previously had often been dismissed. In doing so he paved the way for Langer's distinction between discursive and presentational symbols.

A presentational symbol, for Langer, shows rather than tells:

The symbolism furnished by our purely sensory appreciation of forms is a *non-discursive symbolism*, peculiarly well suited to the expression of ideas that defy linguistic "projection". Its primary function, that of conceptualizing the flux of sensations, and giving us concrete *things* in place of kaleidoscopic colors or noises, is itself an office that no language-born thought can replace. The understanding of space which we owe to sight and touch could never be developed, in all its detail and definiteness, by a discursive knowledge of geometry.[19]

Langer extends Cassirer's idea of mythic thinking by constructing a theory of symbolic mind within which it sits. Instead of a duality of discursive thought and mythical thought, Langer has presentational thought supplying the raw materials for discursive thought. "Reason," she writes, "is not man's primitive endowment, but his *achievement*."[20]

From discursive and presentational thought, it is a small step to discursive verbal language and presentational art:

Consider the most familiar sort of non-discursive symbol, a picture. Like language, it is composed of elements that represent various respective constituents in the object; but these elements are not units with independent meanings. The areas of light and shade that constitute a portrait, a photograph for instance, have no significance by themselves. In isolation we would consider them simply blotches. Yet they are faithful representatives of visual elements composing the visual object. However, they do not represent, item for item, those elements which have *names*; there is not one blotch for the nose, one for the mouth etc.; their shapes, in quite indescribable combinations, convey a total picture in which nameable features may be pointed out. The gradations of light and shade cannot be enumerated... It is impossible to find the smallest independent symbol, and recognize its identity when the same unit is met in other contexts. Photography, therefore, *has no*

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[18] Ibid.: p. 237
[19] Langer, 1942: p. 93
[20] Langer, translator's preface to Cassirer, 1946: p. ix

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vocabulary. The same is obviously true of painting...[21]

Langer here has justified the distinction between discursive and presentational forms, explaining why pictures cannot be translated into words, and crucially, the simultaneity that characterises pictures.

This simultaneity allows pictures to tackle ideas of a particular *sort* of complexity – a complexity which is inaccessible to discursive language:

> ...the complexity of discourse is limited, by what the mind can retain from the beginning of an apperceptive act to the end of it... An idea that contains too many minute yet closely related parts, too many relations within relations, cannot be "projected" into discursive form; it is too subtle for speech. A language-bound theory of mind, therefore [such as those put forth by Russell, Wittgenstein and Carnap], rules it out of the domain of understanding and the sphere of knowledge.[22]

Pictures therefore have logical potential as bearers of meaning, able to articulate what language is ill-suited to express. The limited utility of the presentational and discursive distinction for aesthetics is due to its grouping of pictures together with, among other kinds of thing, diagrams and maps and graphs. It is helpful to think of pictures operating all at once, in contrast to the successional operation of language; since this is a feature of Langerean images too, however, opposed to models, the latter distinction ought to be allowed to supplant that of the presentational and the discursive. It is to this we now turn.

1.2 Image and Model

This section begins with a discussion of what Langer means by images and models, both as ontological categories and as functions. I then examine a painting by Joseph Turner and a sketch by Harry Beck, discussing each in terms of how they function as images and models in order to bring

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[21] Langer, 1942: pp. 94-5
[22] Ibid.: p. 93

out points regarding the distinction. I end the section by contrasting the distinction with Langer's earlier presentational and discursive distinction, arguing that the image and model distinction is much more useful for aesthetics.

Langer introduces the distinction between image and model into her writings in 1962, and it remains a fundamental distinction up until her final works.[23] Both images and models are virtual, which is to say they exist for perception; images and models are modes of representation, and all representations can be treated within the distinction.[24] The distinction between images and models exists both psychologically and in what Langer calls 'articulate products', the former are mental images and mental models, the latter include, among other things, artworks and scientific writings. An image is an appearance; a model demonstrates how something works. Here Langer describes mental images and models:

> An image is not a model. It is a rendering of the appearance of its object in one perspective out of many possible ones. It sets forth what the object looks or seems like, and according to its own style it emphasizes separations or continuities, contrasts or gradations, details, complexities or simple masses. A model, on the contrary, always illustrates a principle of construction or operation; it is a symbolic projection of its object which need not resemble it in appearance at all, but must permit one to match the factors of the model with respective factors of the object, according to some convention. The convention governs the selectiveness of the model; to all items in the selected class the model is equally true, to the limit of its accuracy, that is, to the limit of formal simplification imposed by the symbolic translation.
>   It is different with images. An image does not exemplify the same principles of construction as the object it symbolizes but abstracts its phenomenal character, its immediate effect on our sensibility or the way it presents itself as something of importance, magnitude, strength or fragility, permanence or transience, etc. It organizes and enhances the impression directly received. And as most of our awareness of the world is a continual play of impressions, our primitive intellectual equipment is largely a fund of images, not necessarily visual, but often gestic, kinesthetic, verbal or what I can only call "situational."…we apprehend everything which comes to us as impact from the world by imposing some image on it that stresses its salient features and shapes it for recognition and memory.[25]

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[23] Langer, 1962: pp 131-5; cf. Langer, 1951: pp. 171-2 for an earlier formulation in terms of abstraction in art and abstraction in science – a related, though more narrowly applicable, distinction
[24] Ibid.: pp. 131-3
[25] Langer, 1967: p. 59

There are seven points to make in relation to this quote.

1) When Langer writes that an image is a "rendering of one perspective," she does not mean to imply geometric perspective but rather point of view.

2) Following on from this, images need not be visual. In *FF*, Langer uses the term *semblance* instead of image due to the latter's visual associations, however the present study largely keeps to image because these associations are untroubling within the visual arts and semblance has its own potentially misleading associations – not least being confused with *resemblance*. Langer, moreover, switches to using the term image rather than semblance in her late career. An image relates to the capabilities of sensation and perception – Langer's ideas on feeling will be examined in Chapter 2, for now it is enough to note that Langer does not see this as a passive process. Human sensory and perceptual capabilities are absolutely built on appearances – but these are not necessarily resemblances. The most salient appearance of a dog might be that it is loud, for instance – but the dog does not resemble loudness. It should be borne in mind that when art *images* are discussed in the present study, these include, for instance, musical works and poems.[26] In the above, Langer notes that images can be "gestic, kinesthetic, verbal, or… 'situational'," this shows that mental images for Langer also need not be visual. To listen to a musical performance or a poetry reading, in Langerean terms, is to experience images. A poem is an image, for Langer, because it presents the way in which things seem, or, more accurately, it presents the appearance of a situation from a particular point of view, usually another person.

The first stanza of 'Caged Bird' by Maya Angelou presents an image, or a part of an art image (the poem is six stanzas long):

> The free bird leaps
> on the back of the wind
> and floats downstream
> till the current ends
> and dips his wings

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[26] Langer, 1953: p. 48

in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.[27]

The point of view in this poem is a third-person perspective, the stanza focused on the situation of a free bird. There is an emphasis on how things seem – descriptive imagery that relates, in particular, to touch, with references to how the free bird "leaps" and "floats", and even the visual imagery of dipping wings "in the orange sun rays" has an element of touch to it, as these rays have a suggestion of warmth. The poem encourages us, by the end of the stanza, to consider the bird in anthropomorphic terms, as it "dares to claim the sky." Note that, in Langerean terms, the discussion so far has not considered the poetic image of 'Caged Bird', which is the entire poem; looking at just one stanza in isolation will give a distorted reading, in this case the poetic fragment has a much more optimistic tone than the poem taken as a whole. The stanza could be read for its model functions – modelling the grammar of hypotaxis, for instance – but its dominant function is as an image, and as part of a poetic image.

3) The emphasis on "salient features" turns out to be quite important – these features vary depending on the context and are qualitative in nature. For example, the smell of a liquid is likely to be more salient if we are planning on drinking it than if we plan to clean with it. The smell might be sharp or sweet or bitter, and by degrees, rather than these qualities being either present or absent in a binary way.

4) Impact from the world is *shaped* for recognition and memory, which follows from the salience property. This is really the origin of Langer's interest in form and problems of form – form determines the type of access we have to the world. The parallel suggested in the introduction between the materialism of St Thomas Aquinas and Langer's interest in form is relevant here: Aquinas justified interest in investigating worldly things as leading to knowledge of God – which otherwise was impossible, except through this attention to 'His works.' In Langer's version, the place

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[27] Angelou, 1983: p. 16

of worldly things is taken by images, the place of God is taken by the world, and the place of the

seeker taken by the mind. She describes the more recent tradition she is part of in this respect as

follows:

> The study of symbols is a philosophical interest of rather recent date. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the era of "sense data" and their "associations," the search for ultimate units or "impressions" to make up the mosaic of knowledge. A few writers, especially in Germany, sensed the inadequacy of the prevalent empirical psychology to deal with art, imagination and many aspects of emotional life. Even the highest intellectual functions seemed to them to entail something more than the recognized contents of the mind, and the simple activities of connecting, dividing and permuting those contents, that were deemed the only functions of the mental organ.[28]

Langer goes on to note that it was especially in the arts that it became clear that an additional

element, other than 'naturalistic' thought, was needed to account for the distinctive strangeness

regularly found there, strangeness that is, nonetheless, not unreasonable – an element both like and

unlike language:

> Here was something like a symbol but not a conventional symbol, and something that was more than a symbol – a form that contained its sense as a being contains its life. So F.T. Vischer wrote in 1863: "Form [in art] has intrinsic expression; everything is viewed as Form, the form expresses its inward content, and so all form is viewed as expression. The peculiarity of the phenomenon lies in a reversal: In ordinary reality a force, the Idea, comes first. It begets the Form. But in the sphere of the beautiful, perception goes backwards from the Form to the force, the Idea of which it [the Form] is the expression. Yet in the course of aesthetic contemplation the reversal is turned back again; feeling, and then judgement, too, have penetrated from the presenting form to its core, and from the core now retrace its configuration."[29]

The difference between the empiricists and Langer here comes down to this *forming*: "the triumph

of empiricism in science is jeopardized by the surprising truth," as Langer writes elsewhere, "that our

sense-data are primarily symbols."[30] As symbols, sense impressions are not neutrally reported but

shaped by, among other things, emotional state, memory, and belief.[31] The final reversal which

Langer quotes Vischer above is the contemplation of the form *with understanding* – having

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[28] Langer, 1967: p. 77
[29] Ibid.
[30] Langer, 1942: p. 21
[31] Langer, 1972: p. 342

understood the Idea, then further contemplating the Form – what might be understood today as a

perceptual feedback loop; the latter part of Chapter 2 will consider how Langer's ideas on

perception relate to work in Predictive Processing, a contemporary account of perception which

maps on to Vischer's idea here well.

5) It should be stressed that, for Langer, both images and models are *logical* – by this she means that

they are relational structures.[32] This may be obvious for models but applies also to images: a logical

appearance need not be a physical appearance. Therefore, it should be noted that whilst Langer

writes that a model 'need not resemble its object in appearance,' her terminology is potentially

confusing as it tends to imply that an image does need to resemble its object. Langer is not

discussing depiction here, but images and models as they relate to mind and art – as will be shown,

she is not arguing for a resemblance theory of depiction, and it is hard to know what a resemblance

theory of art would look like even if she was arguing for it. Elsewhere she explicitly argues against

programme music,[33] and considers resemblance in depiction to be historically important but

inessential.[34] The passage in question seems to be a slip and would perhaps better read: 'A model,

on the contrary, always illustrates a principle of construction or operation; it is a symbolic projection

of its object which need not *share a similar appearance at all*, but must permit one to match the

factors of the model with respective factors of the object, according to some convention.' An

example of such a convention is the Mercator world map projection – Langer writes that "a child

looking at a map of the world in Mercator projection cannot help believing that Greenland is larger

than Australia; he simply *finds* it larger."[35]

[32] Langer, 1951: p. 171
[33] Langer, 1942: pp. 220-1
[34] For instance, Langer, 1942: p.249; 1953: pp. 49
[35] Langer, 1942: pp. 79-80

6) A model applies to all items in a selected class, for instance, a chart showing management hierarchies. It is important to note that the model applies only to the limit of accuracy, which all models will have. Models, therefore, are generalisations.[36]

7) Langer's statement that an "image is not a model," sits uneasily with some of her other pronouncements. Langer writes, repeatedly, that meaning is a function.[37] "A function is a *pattern* viewed with reference to one special term round which it centers; this pattern emerges when we look at the given term *in its total relation to the other terms about it*."[38] Langer is clear in the rest of her works that meaning emerges situationally. Moreover, given that Langer here discusses images and models in a mental context, giving these ontological status rather than functional status is a larger claim – one that goes unsupported. In the context of art, Ivan Gaskell has recently written of this difference – claiming that ontological status cannot be observed or inferred:

> There is all the difference in the world between a thing *functioning as* an artwork and a thing *being* an artwork. This is a distinction that [Nelson] Goodman elided by claiming that 'just by virtue of functioning as a symbol in a certain way does an object become, while so functioning, a work of art'. I prefer to maintain a distinction between *functioning as* and *being*, so... I do not make any ontological claims about what an artwork may or may not be. I make a claim regarding use alone, because that is all anyone can observe or infer.[39]

Having said this, however, Langer is clearly comfortable writing that an image is not a model, and so for her there does seem to be an ontological difference between the two. I will return to this issue at the end of the chapter when considering Langer's theory of depiction.

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[36] Jorge Luis Borges wrote a very short story in which, in a certain Empire, "the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it." This is an elaboration of another fictional 1:1 map found in Lewis Carrol's *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, from 1895. In anything less than a 1:1 map, accurate to a subatomic degree, however, models, including maps, are generalisations. See Borges, 1946 and Carroll, 1893.

[37] E.g., Langer, 1930: p. 106; 1942: p. 55

[38] Langer, 1942: p. 55

[39] Gaskell, 2020: p. 137, Gaskell mentions two additional ways of regarding which are not relevant here; There are significant parallels between the work of Goodman and Langer – many of which are detailed in Innis, 1977: pp 455-76. In connection with 'When is Art?', Langer wrote in the 1933 article 'Facts' that "a correct statement of a contingent fact must include a certain date." (Langer, 1933: p. 186) Whilst Langer is one of four writers on the symbolic Goodman mentions in his introduction to *Languages of Art*, saying he is "by no means ignorant," of their work, Goodman never cited Langer as a philosopher directly in any of his work, although did once as a translator of Ernst Cassirer's 'Language and Myth' (Goodman, 1976: pp. xii, 77)

Moving on from these points, there are further features of Langerean images and models worth highlighting. Langer gives the examples of mirror images and rainbows as examples of pure images – existing without a model function.[40] Ontologically, these are images, with no existence apart from as images. However, in *articulate products*, Langer's term for cultural artifacts, it is much harder, and perhaps impossible, to give examples of pure images or pure models.

Pure images are hard to find because an image, as a presented semblance which is experienced, has parts which are related; every image will have, for instance, a structure containing either the relation equal to or greater than, and so presents a scaffolding on which might be constructed a model.[41] Pure models are also troublesome because it is possible to attend to the phenomenal quality of anything perceptible, and since a model must be perceptible, things which seem like they are pure models, such as mathematical proofs or instructions for putting together furniture, can function as images.

As functions there is, then, considerable overlap – though the core of each function is quite clearly defined. Because of the differences in these core functions, however, makers of models and images generally need to intend to produce one or the other, though examples exist which seem to work equally well as both image and model, some of which this chapter will examine.

Turner's *Rain, Steam, and Speed* (1844, Figure 1) seems at first like a pure image – almost every visual element seems to be flowing, from the engine to the clouds and mist (a case could be made that the stone bridge itself which the train travels along is depicted as flowing or vibrating).

However, it would be perfectly possible to use Turner's canvas to explain how trains travel down tracks, or how a series of arches can be used to support a bridge. Even in a work which seems to be purely an image, latent model functions can be found. Conversely, models can be utilised in the

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[40] Langer, 1957: p. 5
[41] For an image to exist, to be a seems-like-ness, it must have differentiation. Langer, 1942: pp. 227-8; 1953: p. 76; 1967: pp. 59-60

Figure 1: Joseph Turner, 'Rain, Steam, and Speed', 1844, oil on canvas, (National Gallery, London, 910 x 1218 mm)

production of artworks – as Langer mentions that almost anything including "a scientific drawing" can be an artwork.[42] With *Rain, Steam, and Speed*, however, it seems perverse to insist on the canvas being an object that might function either as an image or a model; even disregarding any external evidence, the painting itself shows that considerable care has been taken in the creation of effects which would be difficult to justify if modelling was Turner's main intention in painting the work – the atmospheric effects, taken as a whole, do not demonstrate a functional principle in any clear or coherent sense. Amongst other art historical evidence, we do seem justified in calling it both an image and an artwork. It should be remembered however that this is a contingent fact which might change. If *Rain, Steam, and Speed* were the only artifact to survive from earth and be discovered by aliens millions of years in the future, its image function may be of greatest interest to

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[42] Langer, 1967: p. 64

them, but it is equally possible that the ways in which the painting can be interpreted as modelling might be seen as all the more important – including the way in which an ancient technology, steam travel, functioned. This example is somewhat far-fetched; however, analogous examples turn up frequently when considering artifacts from unfamiliar cultures. When an artifact becomes a locus for arguments about social status and economic history, whenever it is seen as demonstrating the prior existence of states in the world, the artifact functions as a model. The kind of art historical work exemplified by Michael Baxandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* treats paintings very much as models – this is not a criticism of Baxandall's work nor does it imply that Baxandall misunderstands or criticizes the paintings under discussion.[43]

Langer claims that images guide the creation of models – providing the phenomenal scaffolding for the envisagement of the functional principle:

> The imposition of imagery on all materials that present themselves for perception, whether peripheral or intraorganic, enters into the most naïve experience, and into the making of our "empirical" world. It is more primitive than the adoption of any "model." The use of a model belongs to a higher level of conception, the level of discursive thought and deliberate analogical reasoning. But the process of seeing things as exemplifications of subjectively created images gives us the original, objective phenomena that theoretical reasoning seeks to understand in causal terms, often with the help of highly abstract working models.[44]

Images, in other words, are our materials of thought, allowing us to 'see'. Modelling helps us to organise and, in particular, clarify what we have seen, which in turn helps us to 'see better'. The entire process is iterative, with images and models being created and revised more or less constantly.

Looking at Harry Beck's proposal for the London Underground map (1931, Figure 2) can help to further clarify Langer's position on images and models.[45] It models a functional unity by emphasising

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[43] Baxandall, 1972.
[44] Langer, 1967: pp. 63-4
[45] The map shown is the hand-drawn proposal that was initially rejected by Underground Electric Railways Company of London (UERL), which operated the Tube, but two years later the design was salvaged, modified, and published. See Garland, 1969: pp. 69-82
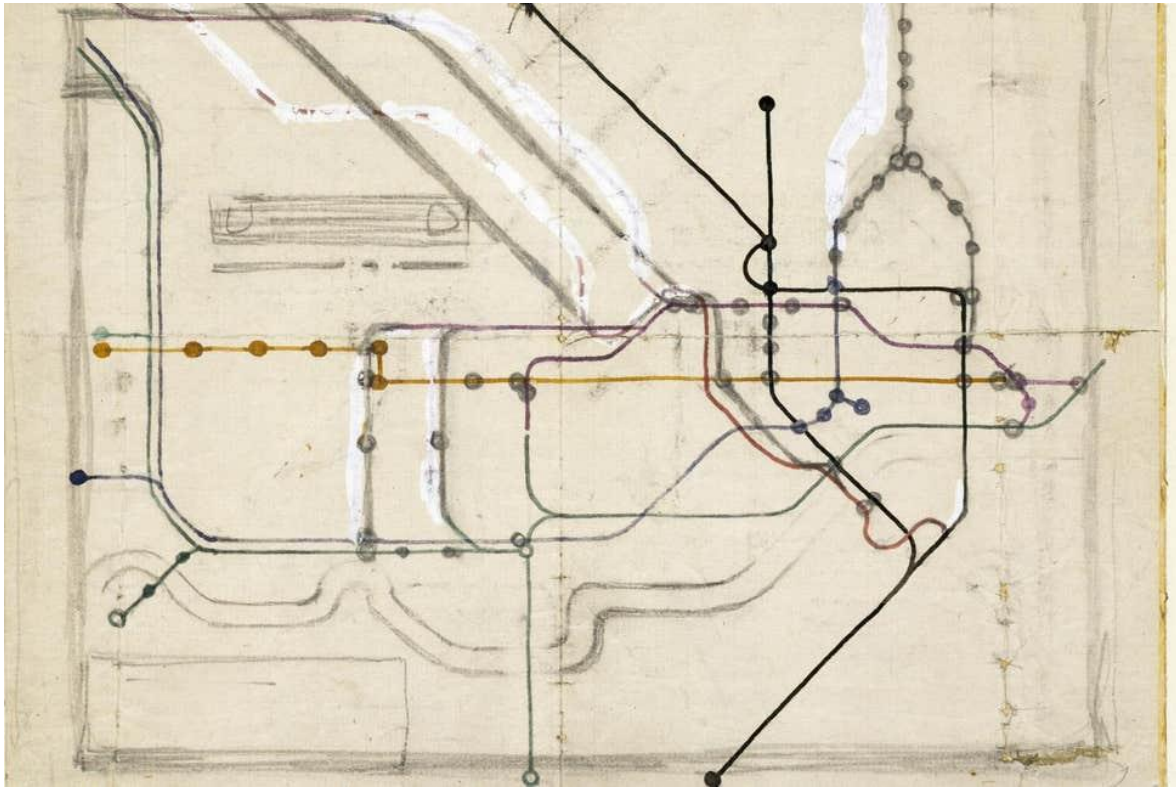
Figure 2: Harry Beck, 'Initial Sketch for London Underground Map', 1931, Pencil and coloured inks on squared paper pasted onto card (V&A Museum, London, 190 x 240 mm)

certain features and ignoring others. It sacrifices accuracy of resemblance for greater clarity. In terms of its model-function, it could still be used today to orientate those travelling between the stations shown. It is also possible however, to see it as an image, to consider its image-function. To do this the phenomenal qualities of the sketch are considered. The sketch represents space in a topographical way – from above and in a distorted manner.

Because it is not a duplicate, a model is always an abstraction from the original, a projection of it or from it, and this is true whether it is modelling a functional unity which actually exists or one which exists only in imagination. The value of these models is that they are clear and specific, the challenge is that these values are often contradictory to the point of being inversely proportional.

In terms of Beck's sketch, its great merit is in reducing the specificity of unneeded relations. Beck's sketch is not a general-purpose map of London Underground stations but a *passenger* sketch map of

the stations – precision has been sacrificed for clarity, and because this precision was unneeded detail the sacrifice is effective.

It should be clear that by model Langer is not referring to artist's models made of plaster, or life models, but to created objects which demonstrate relational structure – such as maps, history books, and the periodic table. Models include many empty relations – in Beck's 1931 tube map sketch, for instance, the cream background colour does not refer to anything. It provides good contrast for the other elements, but different colours could be chosen without changing the meaning.[46] Images, on the other hand, are what Nelson Goodman calls *replete* – they have, at least ideally, no empty relations.[47]

Beck's sketch can function as a model, and can also function as an image. When functioning as an image, its phenomenal character has been promoted, though it need not necessarily be considered an artwork. As an image, the cream background does have further significance beyond clarity of form – associations which, among other qualities, might be characterised perhaps as a certain softness, or mistiness, both characterisations which treat the decision to use a cream background as an aesthetic choice. Langer writes about the way rationality is sometimes presented in the form of images, appearing as "brilliance, perfection of form, a semblance of the tersest economy."[48] Beck's sketch can be seen as possessing these attributes.

Marcel Duchamp's ideas about reciprocal-readymades, such as using a Rembrandt painting as an ironing board, can be seen as working by playing at reversing the primary image-function (not by turning it into a model-function, but by ignoring its symbolic potential completely – its material

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[46] This study will use the common terminology of images having *meaning*, but it is worth noting that, by the time she published *FF*, Langer had changed her terminology, and referred to images having import rather than meaning, elsewhere referring to unconsummated symbols or quasi symbols. Dengerink Chaplin has written about how the terminological changes were motivated by the reception of *PINK* and the misunderstanding of the ideas contained within it, writing that whatever the terminology, the core idea is unchanged. This will be further discussed in Chapter 4. See Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p. 174

[47] Goodman, 1976: p. 230

[48] Langer, 1967: p. 150

properties being most important, though part of the joke could be seen as being that it would probably not even be a particularly good ironing board cover).[49]

To summarize Langer's view of mind (leaving feeling to one side for the moment), Langer sees images and models existing in a hierarchy, where each mind produces images which are the raw materials for thought. Thinking is where the mind attempts to model causal connections between images. Both mental images and models affect perception. Langer's aesthetics are therefore, perhaps uniquely, fundamental to her theory of mind.

In terms of articulate products, a similar hierarchy holds, with religious images making possible scientific conception later on:

> Religious thought, whether savage or civilized, operates primarily with images, by the long-sanctioned "principle of analogy." That this approach to the problems of life and mind does not lead to any exact knowledge need hardly be argued today. Yet there is a value in images quite apart from religious or emotional purposes: they, and only they, originally made us aware of the wholeness and all-over form of entities, acts and facts in the world; and little though we may know it, only an image can hold us to a conception of a total phenomenon, against which we can measure the adequacy of the scientific terms wherewith we describe it.[50]

Robert Innis, in his monograph on Langer, writes about the tremendous "heuristic fertility,"[51] of images in her theory, which present qualities and afford a phenomenal experience with which to construct meanings, which is to say to form understandings, to model. When modelling, the image remains a guiding idea. Langer puts it thus:

> The great value of a permanent image is that one can resort to it to recover an elusive idea, and reorient one's intellectual progress, when enticing simplifications and reductions have turned it away from its long course into shorter alleys that do not really lead to the same goal.[52]

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[49] Duchamp, 1973: p. 32
[50] Langer, 1967: p. xviii
[51] Innis, 2009: p. 149
[52] Langer, 1967: p. xx

This hierarchical relationship, with images facilitating and guiding the creation of models, which in turn effect the way in which images are created, is the crucial representational structure within Langer's theory of mind; the broader theory will be examined in Chapter 2, but for now it should be noted that a distinction such as Langer's between image and model is currently viewed as plausible within cognitive science:

> There is room… for a pluralist position that allows mental representations of different kinds: some with logical structure, some more analogous to pictures, or maps, or diagrams, and so on. The pluralist position is widespread within cognitive science, which posits a range of formats for mental representation…[53]

Langer suggests just this – with the additional claim that our intuitions are images and that logic is a device for leading us between and joining up these intuitions.[54]

Though Langer never explicitly gives up her use of the presentational and the discursive, she transitions to image and model as her career progresses. In fact, the difference between the former and latter set of distinctions really comes down to the property of discursiveness – which discursive symbols need to possess, but models taken more generally need not. The latter distinction, for instance, avoids the odd situation where an algebraic form in mathematics, a discursive form, might be translated into a geometric form, a presentational one, despite presentational forms not allowing for translation. To my knowledge, this objection has not been raised against Langer in the past, and it is certainly no great issue considering she does not raise any new claims in the discursive area, however it is a reason for preferring the image and model distinction, at least when operating within aesthetics. A vector can be defined algebraically, and both the line and the definition of the line are generally seen for their model functions, though each can also be considered as semblances, as images – for their *seems-likeness* appearances. Langer's terminology shifts too because her subject

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[53] Rescorla, 2019.
[54] Langer, 1951: p. 173

shifts, from early work in symbolic logic, where discursiveness was a constant property, to her late work in theory of mind, where it was much less so. Even her early work might be made more consistent however, by making use of the image and model distinction and noting that most models function discursively.

In this section I have introduced Langer's image and model distinction, arguing that it is a useful way of considering the different uses to which mental contents and artifacts are put, and given examples of the situations in which image functions or model functions might be dominant. I have also shown why the distinction is more helpful for aesthetics than Langer's distinction between the presentational and discursive, which it ought to be allowed to replace.

1.3 Virtual Space

This section introduces Langer's idea of virtual space, the experience of which Langer argues that painting, sculpture and architecture must afford.[55] It is not only artworks, however, which can afford the experience of virtual space, as diagrams and architectural models, for instance, also do so. After introducing virtual space and clarifying some terminology, the section discusses Langer's distinction between primary virtual form and secondary virtual forms, before going on to look at some examples of the secondary virtual form of movement – both imaged and modelled. The section ends with a discussion of the image and model functions, and primary virtual form and secondary virtual forms, of Paul Klee's *Twittering Machine*.

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[55] This, incidentally, provides a rationale for art history's almost exclusive attention to these three media, a feature of the discipline seldom defended on other than pragmatic lines, and, without such a rationale, sits uneasily with the much wider spread of media considered within aesthetics. Film, for instance, does not take virtual space as its primary virtual form, with the space as a secondary virtual form "coming and going" unlike its primary virtual form – the *virtual dream*. See Langer, 1953: p. 415

Virtual space is what is created in particular kinds of images and models – pictorial, sculptural, and architectural ones.[56] This chapter will look at Langerean pictures in sections 1.4 and 1.5, and the Langerean notion of sculpture is examined in Chapter 3. Briefly, these "modes of virtual space", as Langer calls them, which are the apparent space behind the picture plane in the case of pictures, the sense of organised space around a sculpture, or the sense of place that accompanies architecture. (Langer notes that a Romani encampment may be physically erected in the same actual space as a former Native American camp, but they are different places, and claims this is so because place is a virtual phenomenon.)

Langer introduces the term *virtual space* in *FF*, where it appears alongside other modes of virtuality – such as virtual time as the primary illusion of music, and virtual powers as the primary illusion of dance. Langer uses the term primary illusion to mean the quality which an artwork must occasion, reserving the term secondary illusion for additional qualities that can but need not be occasioned. Virtual space is the primary illusion of painting, sculpture and architecture.

Langer uses the term illusion extensively, but not to refer to the sort of figurative representation exemplified by tromp l'oeil paintings. For Langer, the subject matter of an artwork is its illusion, by which she means to draw attention to the interplay between materials and virtual form. This is only a terminological issue, but one that nonetheless sits uneasily with Langer's insistence on artworks not needing to resemble what they represent. Fortunately, Langer also uses the concept of the virtual at length. She uses it to distinguish art forms - so painting and sculpture are forms of virtual space, and music is described as virtual time - but it can also be used in place of illusion. For the sake of clarity, unless quoting Langer directly, this study will refer not to illusion but to virtual form, and to primary and secondary virtual forms.[57]

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[56] Virtual space today has strong associations with the internet, associations which do not trouble the use of the term when thinking about depiction – the common root in physics results in the meanings being complementary

[57] In a published lecture, Langer admits that her use of illusion in this way is a "prejudicial word," and so uses primary *apparition* instead. Whilst this forcibly suggests virtuality, it is in a way perhaps more appropriate for a lecture format. See Langer, 1957: p. 81

Despite rarely discussing specific artists, Langer describes the creation of the primary virtual form in a painting by Malevich, in works she considers to be without secondary virtual forms. Whilst discussing artists' tendency to speak of "living form," Langer contends that this "animation" that is said to take place is actually a metaphor for the creation of the primary virtual form – virtual space:

> What is it, then, this process of "animating" a surface that in actuality is "inert"? It is the process of transforming the actual spatial datum, the canvas or paper surface, into a virtual space, creating the primary illusion of artistic vision. This first reorientation is so important that some painters who have become keenly and consciously aware of it tend to be satisfied with the mere creation of space, regardless of anything further to be created in its virtual dimensions—like Malevich, enamored of the magic squares that, after all, yield space and only space.[58]

I take Langer to be discussing works such as Malevich's *Black Square* (1915, Figure 3). Whilst it is not universally accepted that such works create the impression of depth, within studies on abstract painting this generally is accepted.[59] Langer later goes on to differentiate effects of the primary virtual form from secondary virtual forms:

> The primary illusion always determines the "substance," the real character of an art work, but the possibility of secondary illusions endows it with the richness, elasticity, and wide freedom of creation that make real art so hard to hold in the meshes of theory.[60]

This second quote describes why Langer finds Malevich lacking – his art does not have the possibility of richness – it is insufficiently complex. Bear in mind that the primary virtual form of painting, sculpture, and architecture, is always the image of space, whereas the secondary virtual forms are elements – such as depicted objects, colours, or flying buttresses. By describing Malevich as employing only the primary virtual form and suggesting a complete lack of secondary virtual forms, Langer limits the Malevich canvases under consideration to only the sparsest – an unfair charge to

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[58] Langer, 1953: p. 80

[59] See Newall, 2011: pp. 172, 225 n. 6; Wollheim 1987. One implication of this is that works such as Frank Stella's shaped, painted canvases may not be seen as paintings, to the extent that they are seen as without depth. Peter Chametzsky writes about how Stella's works of this kind "make us empirically aware that the painting 'really is an object.'" See Chametzsky, 2010: p. 212. The literality of Stella's work will be considered in Chapter 3

[60] Langer, 1953: p. 118

Figure 3: Kazimir Malevich, 'Black Square', 1915, oil on linen (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 795 x 795 mm)

the painter of *Knifegrinder* (1912) and *Suprematism* (1915), both of which surely employ secondary

virtual forms in Langer's terms. Nonetheless, even *Black Square*, considered perceptually, has a

particular quality which is created with the depiction of space, the black square appearing to float in

front of the white background. Langer bases her concept of virtual space, at least in terms of

painting, on the ideas of sculptor Adolf Hildebrand – though Langer clarifies his ideas, shifting his

terminology from the 'architectonic' to the virtual.[61] From Hildebrand, Langer takes the ideas of

representation of objects being primarily a means of defining spatial relations, and the unity of a

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[61] Ibid.: pp. 72-8; citing Hildebrand, 1932: pp. 11-2, 50-1, 53-5, 60

created space. Langer points out that space in the everyday, practical world, has no shape – whereas

space in a painting does:

> Space as we know it in the practical world has no shape. Even in science it has none, though it has "logical form." There are spatial relations, but there is no concrete totality of space. Space itself is amorphous in our active lives and purely abstract in scientific thought. It is a substrate of all our experience, gradually discovered by the collaboration of our several senses – now seen, now felt, now realized as a factor in our moving and doing – a limit to our hearing, a defiance to our reach. When the spatial experience of everyday life is refined by the precision and artifice of science, space becomes a coordinate in mathematical functions. It is never an entity. How, then, can it be "organized," "shaped," or "articulated"? We meet all these terms in the most serious literature of aesthetics.[62]

Langer's answer is that virtual space is not a recreation of the everyday space in which our bodies

are embedded but instead a creation – operating according to different forces. Moreover, virtual

space exists only for vision – as rainbows or mirror images do:[63]

> The harmoniously organized space in a picture is not experiential space, known by sight and touch, by free motion and restraint, far and near sounds, voices lost or re-echoed. It is an entirely visual affair; for touch and hearing and muscular action it does not exist. For them there is a flat canvas, relatively small, or a cool blank wall, where for the eye there is deep space full of shapes. This purely visual space is an illusion, for our sensory experiences do not agree on it in their report. Pictorial space is not only organized by means of color (including black and white and the gamut of grays between them), it is created; without the organizing shapes it is simply not there. Like the space "behind" the surface of a mirror, it is what the physicists call "virtual space" – an intangible image.[64]

Langer assumes here that the depicted space will be deep, however the statement could be easily

modified to read "for the eye there is a space of depth." Similarly, the pictorial space need not

necessarily be "full of shapes," but so long as the depiction is spatial Langer's conditions are met.

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[62] Ibid.: pp. 71-2

[63] Clement Greenberg may have taken his idea of 'optical illusion' from 'Modernist Painting' from Langer here. (cf. Greenberg, 1960: pp. 309-12) Further support for this comes from Greenberg's discussion of Langer at Bennington College in 1971: "Someone like Susanne Langer says that all works of art create a kind of illusion. The painted cloth creates a pictorial illusion, dance creates the illusion of dance, and so on. I agree with her just as I agree with Sartre that works of art are imaginative entities -- not imagined, imaginative entities. That's his answer to the same question." Greenberg, 1999: p. 85

[64] Langer, 1953: p. 72; It is unclear which physicists Langer is referring to, but the terms *virtual image* and *virtual rays* are both used when discussing Pierre de Fermat's principle of how the path of light varies through media of differing refractive indices. See, for instance, Perlick, 2003: pp. 81-5

This idea that virtual space is not a recreation of the space we live in but something with its own logic, or relational structure, is its most important characteristic. Later, Langer drew support from Gustaf Britsch who observed that "the laws of representation are not the laws of optics which govern our vision."[65] Langer notes too that Rudolf Arnheim uses this idea extensively in *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (1954).

Langer continues to stress the purely visual nature of virtual space:

> Everything that is relevant and artistically valid in a picture must be visual… Where in practical life we employ other faculties than sight to complete our fragmentary visual experiences – for instance memory, recorded measurements, beliefs about the physical constitution of things, knowledge of their relations in space even when they are behind us or blocked by other things – in the virtual space of a picture there are no such supporting data. Everything that is given at all is given to vision; therefore we must have *visual substitutes* for the things that are normally known by touch, movement or inference.[66]

This denial of "supporting data," seems like a rather radical decontextualization: art historians would be unlikely to accept that there is nothing "relevant and artistically valid," apart from the visual, perceptual values of the painting on the wall; we are seemingly being asked to disregard historical context, social context, issues of gender, race, and patronage, not to mention even the titles of paintings.

One way of beginning to resolve this apparent contradiction is to decide Langer is writing only of the primary virtual form when denying anything non-visual. The claim would therefore be that, whilst paintings may refer, and that social and historical significance may be found in them, paintings need not do these things – the presence of social and historical significance would depend on optional secondary virtual forms. This may still be too strong a claim, as merely the possibility of radically decontextualizing an artwork and for it to remain functionally active may seem dubious. Malevich's *Black Square* is, according to my reading of Langer, a painting without secondary virtual forms.

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[65] Langer, 1967: p. 94, quoting Britsch, 1930
[66] Langer, 1953: p. 73

According to this reading of Langer then, any knowledge of the tradition of Russian icon-painting, Malevich's artist's statements about his intentions to produce non-objective painting from internal (presumably meant as spiritual) sources, and the historical situation of the 1905 Russian revolution, the First World War, and the imminent 1917 Bolshevik uprising, are all unnecessary. This would seem to deny the possibility of better understanding the time and place in which the painting was made by attending to it; however, it may be argued, from a Langerean perspective, that to do so is to attend to the painting's model function, in the way outlined in Section 1.2 when discussing Baxandall.

Another way to reconcile this would be to take Langer's own suggestions for how we complete our "fragmentary visual experiences," and apply them to our experiences of artworks as well. Memory, knowledge, and belief would be applicable here – easing at least the majority of concerns just raised.

An interesting implication that arises from Langer's concept of virtual space as a creation rather than a recreation is that technical devices for aiding an artist to make a two-dimensional projection from a three-dimensional form are seen as a "contradiction of art… for they lead to other than artistic achievements."[67] Langer's image and model distinction comes up again, following Britsch, as Langer argues that methods such as those Dürer recommended are making models rather than images – "the projection of its three-dimensional geometric properties into a two-dimensional field."[68] By extension, photography, as a particularly developed form of such technical devices, is ordinarily used for modelling rather than imaging, in Langer's terms, though it is worth bearing in mind her assertion that "almost anything can become a work of art: a bed, a doll, a scientific drawing, a photograph."[69] This is perhaps surprising, but one thing it draws attention to is the extent to which, in Langer's theory, an image-function is not based on visual resemblance but on logical resemblance.

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[67] Langer, 1967: p. 95
[68] Ibid.: pp. 95-6
[69] Ibid.: p. 64

Langer uses the representation of movement as an example to show further what possibilities are available to the makers of models and images, contrasting the representational suggestion of motion with the secondary virtual form of motion, the former modelling movement whilst the latter images it. [70] Figure 4 shows Langer's examples of this.

Of her first image, Merce Cunningham leaping, the claim is that we are not presented with movement but with the rational implication of movement. Because of the viewer's knowledge of the world, the viewer knows that gravity will bring the dancer back to earth soon after the moment arrested in the photograph. Langer's claim really is that this photograph does not provide a sense of movement – the rational implication being deduced or inferred. The claim is not that it is impossible to view this photograph as an image, but that if it is seen as an image it does not contain the secondary virtual form of movement.

In case it seems implausible to interpret this photograph as a model, a defence could be made in the following way. What is being modelled is the functional unity of a dancer's leap, which is to say, how the parts interrelate, for instance, the poise and tensions in the various parts of the body. The abstraction involved in the blank background and not showing the floor give emphasis to this interrelationship of body parts. It bears a partial resemblance to an anatomical drawing, though the dancer is clothed.

Again, the claim is that motion is not *presented* here, in this photograph, as part of the dancer's leap, but is only implied. Because of that, the photograph models motion rather than imaging it.

Quite possibly in order to underline the point that this is not about medium specifity, Langer moves onto another photograph of a dancer, Jacques D'Amboise. In contrast to her first example, Langer

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[70] Ibid.: p. 231

Figure 4: from left to right, top to bottom: 1) 'Dancer's Leap (Merce Cunningham)', "…the photograph arrests a momentary attitude which… suggests a subsequent posture… to the percipient's common sense."2) 'Dancer's Leap (Jacques d'Amboise)', "…a balletic loop, for instance, may appear as soaring flight." 3) 'Greek Cup with Leap Dancers', "…but a freely created plastic image of a dancing figure holds its pose without inviting one to imagine a change, and yet it dances." 4) 'Shiva Nataraja, South India', "…its motion seems perfected, not suspended, in the image." (All images and quotations from Langer, 1967: pp. 232-5)

claims that this photograph does image motion.[71] Langer claims that a balletic leap, such as this,

"may appear as soaring flight." She does not elaborate on this. A defence could again be mounted

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[71] Photographer Galen Rowell claims that blur is necessary in a photograph in order to show movement. See Rowell, 1986: p. 78

that the leaping dancer's relationship to the floor, and indeed the other dancer, is ambiguous, the direction of motion being similarly unclear. Langer claims that the photographer is presenting movement rather than implying it, which is to say that the photographer is imaging it rather than modelling it.

Langer's examples in this case may not be particularly well chosen: Figures 5 and 6 are an attempt to make Langer's case using what I take to be stronger examples. Figure 5 is an anatomical drawing by Leonardo showing the muscles involved in lifting an arm, whilst Figure 6 is a drawing after Leonardo of a roaring lion; the former implying movement, the latter showing movement – containing the secondary virtual form of movement.
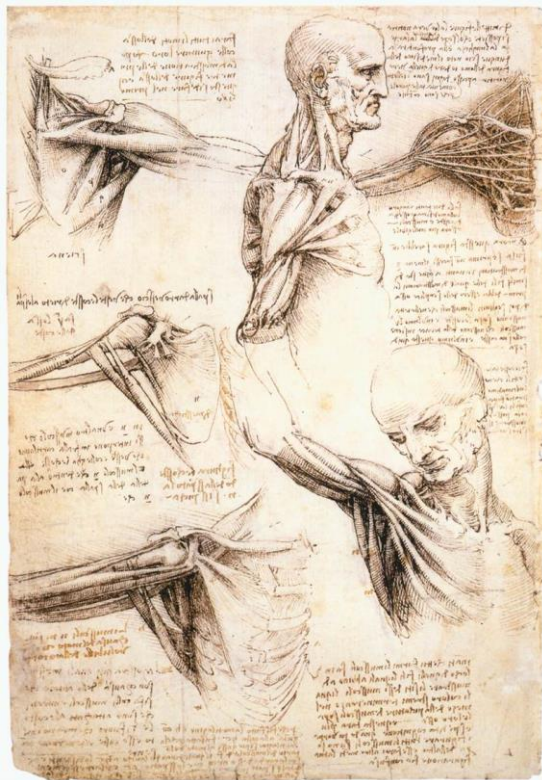
Figure 5 (left): Leonardo, 'Myology of Shoulder Region' Clark 19003v, FA 4v, c. 1510-13, pen and ink with wash, over black chalk (Royal Collection, Windsor, 292 x 198 mm);
Figure 6 (top): Copy after Leonardo, 'Drawing of a Roaring Lion', red chalk on paper (Musée Bonnat Helleu, Bayonne, 180 x 100 mm)

Klee's *Twittering Machine* (1922, Figure 7) is a fitting place to end this section, as, despite its image-function being quite clearly dominant, it references the functioning of models – the handle depicted in the bottom-right of the work is a kind of visual quotation. The handle functions in the same way
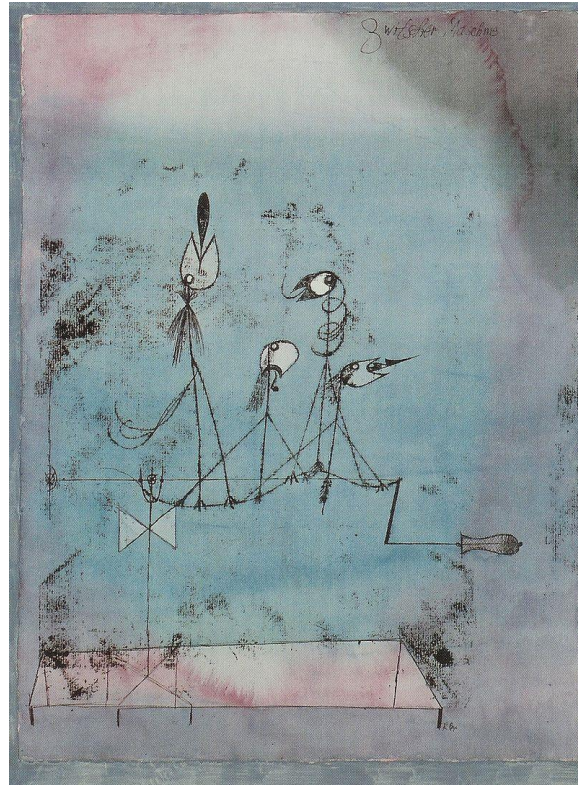
Figure 7: Paul Klee, 'Twittering Machine', 1922, watercolour, ink, and oil transfer on paper,
with gouache and ink borders, on cardboard (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 638 x 481 mm)

Langer argues that Merce Cunningham leaps – it models motion rather than presenting it. The handle's implied motion depends upon the viewer bringing to bear a range of contextual knowledge. Within the painting, this is far from beside the point, as the handle is the single most dominant machine element in the machine of the title. A handle, such as the depicted handle, is meant to move, but as we have seen, Langer would be quite against us claiming that the handle in this case is an example of the secondary virtual form of movement.

When presented with models for machines involving handles, we are used to imaginatively turning them. The handle in *Twittering Machine* is a kind of Gibsonian affordance; it seems available to us, but the implications of what it might mean to turn the handle are unclear. It might be something coercive, or perhaps something closer to a circus amusement, or perhaps both. The interplay of visual modes here suggests that we are being given a power, but without knowledge of the implications of that power, for ourselves or for others. It is a deeply ambiguous work, with various

formal decisions underscoring quite different ways of viewing the work, which might be seen as a painting or drawing, in two or three dimensions, and with its depicted figures perhaps enjoying a game or being coercively subjugated.

In this section I have unpacked, defended and applied Langer's distinction between primary virtual form and secondary virtual forms, arguing that it is a useful way of analysing, in particular, artworks.

1.4 Depiction

In this section I introduce Langer's account of depiction, seeking to understand it against contemporary criteria, as laid out by Catharine Abell. After looking at Abell's criteria, Langer's ideas are unpacked and interpreted, as there is reason to believe that her use of the term recognition differs from contemporary usage. Arguing that Langer's account of depiction is a version of an experience view, I then contrast Langer's ideas with more recent accounts by Richard Wollheim and Robert Hopkins.

Both this and the following section introduce Langer's account of depiction, which will be seen to have a surprising amount in common with contemporary accounts. This is not to say, however, that Langer's account is unproblematic, and, whilst examining it, elements from more recent theories will be incorporated in order to bolster Langer's account. Once this is done, however, it will be seen that Langer's account of depiction provides a not implausible way to think about what pictures are and how they operate – though some will find her definition overly inclusive.

In her 2013 summary of contemporary work on depiction, Abell distinguishes between two linked yet distinct questions, one metaphysical and the other epistemological. The former asks, "What is it for one thing to depict another?" and the latter asks, "How are we able to work out that one thing

depicts another?" Langer does not give an answer to the second of these directly.[72] On the first question, Abell further divides accounts on depiction into those which 1) seek to specify pictures as distinct kinds of representations or 2) seek to specify pictures as distinct kinds of things. Langer's account should be seen as an example of the latter. By Abell's criteria, Langer ought to be judged in the following by how clearly she is "explaining how pictures come to have the representational content they do."[73]:

> What property must a picture have in order to represent its object? Must it really share the visual appearance of the object? Certainly not to any high degree. It may, for instance, be black on white, or red on grey, or any color on any other color; it may be shiny whereas the object is dull; it may be much larger or much smaller than the object…
>   The reason for this latitude is that *the picture is essentially a symbol, not a duplicate, of what it represents*. It has certain salient features by virtue of which it can function as a symbol for its object. For instance, the childish outline drawing (fig. 1) is immediately recognized as a rabbit, yet it really looks so unlike one that even a person nearly blind could not for a moment be made to think that he saw a rabbit sitting on the open page of his book. All it shares with the "reality" is a certain *proportion of parts* - the position and relative length of "ears," the dot where an "eye" belongs, the "head" and "body" in relation to each other, etc. Beside it is exactly the same figure with different ears and tail (fig. 2); any child will accept it as a cat. Yet cats don't look like long-tailed, short-eared rabbits, in reality. Neither are they flat and white, with a papery texture and a black outline running round them. But all these traits of the pictured cat are irrelevant, because it is merely a symbol, not a pseudo-cat.

FIG. 1   FIG. 2

> Of course, the more detail is depicted by the image, the more unequivocal becomes the reference to a particular object. A good portrait is "true" to only one person. Yet even good portraits are not duplications. There are styles in portraiture as there are in any other art. We may paint in heightened, warm, melting colors, or in cool pastels; we may range from the clean line drawings of Holbein to the shimmering hues of French impressionism; and all the time the object need not change. Our presentation of it is the variable factor... The only characteristic that a picture must have in order to be a picture of a certain thing is an

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[72] Langer does write about the way in which both artistic and real-world form is understood, but does not distinguish between depiction and other relations. See Chapter 3 for further discussion
[73] Abell, 2013: p. 364

arrangement of elements analogous to the arrangement of salient visual elements in the object.[74]

Already we have the evidence here to begin to characterize Langer's account. She argues against the idea that resemblance is necessary for depiction and whilst she does not mention convention in the quote above, it is clear from her examples here and from comments elsewhere that a conventional relationship is not what she has in mind. Langer states that "the childish outline drawing is immediately recognized as a rabbit, yet it looks so unlike one that even a person nearly blind could not for a moment be made to think that he saw a rabbit sitting on the open page of his book." Seeing a picture of a rabbit then, for Langer, involves having a visual experience of a rabbit that is, at least in this example, not an illusion.[75] What may be a surprise when looking at this part of Langer's account is that as well as prompting a visual experience, Langer's example functions by recognition – her example is a picture of a rabbit because it can be recognized as a rabbit.

Langer continues her account of depiction, putting forward her ideas of the proportion of parts, salience and recognition in more detail:

> The picture is a symbol, and the so-called "medium" is a type of symbolism. Yet there is something, of course, that relates the picture to its original, and makes it represent, say, a Dutch interior and not the crucifixion. What it may represent is dictated purely by its logic - by the arrangement of its elements. The disposition of pale and dark, dull and bright paints, or thin and thick lines and variously shaped white spaces, yield the determination of those forms that mean certain objects. They can mean all those and only those objects in which we recognize similar forms. All other aspects of the picture - for instance, what artists call the "distribution of values," the "technique," and the "tone" of the whole work - serve other ends than mere representation. The only characteristic that a picture must have in order to be a picture of a certain thing is an arrangement of elements analogous to the arrangement of salient visual elements in the object. A representation of a rabbit must have long ears; a man must feature arms and legs.[76]

Some of Langer's examples here seem not to have been carefully chosen. Christofano dell'Altissimo's portrait of *Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici* (Figure 8, 1560), for instance, clearly portrays

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[74] Langer, 1942: pp. 68-9
[75] Langer does not mention tromp l'oeil paintings; it is clear from her writings that she does not consider illusion to ordinarily be a feature of pictures
[76] Langer, 1942: p. 70

a man without showing his arms and legs. Johann Georg Seitz's *Still Life with Rabbits* from 1870 portrays rabbits with long ears, but in an occluded version (Figure 9) where the ears are not visible it is still easy to recognise the animals as rabbits. These objections are minor – in both cases there remains a configuration of parts which is analogous between subject and picture.

A key phrase in the above quote is that pictures "can mean all those and only those objects in which we recognize similar forms." Because of this, Langer's account might be seen to partly anticipate the tradition of recognition accounts, which have been argued more recently by Flint Schier and Dominic Lopes.[77] In both Schier and Lopes' accounts, however, there is a dependence of pictorial experience upon recognition. Langer's account is, at a minimum, extremely unclear on this subject, and she is perhaps better read as collapsing recognition and experience into one, which is to say that when she writes "in which we recognize similar forms," she is really writing about experiencing similar forms. Langer's also differs from these accounts in the terms in which it is presented and the emphasis on the space which is created:

> So far we have been concerned solely with the "visual projection" in which space is perceived as a relation among things at the distance of some particular focus, and beyond it, behind the focal point. The picture plane counterfeits this pattern. But it does not simply substitute its surface for other impressions we might have. Physically, a picture is usually one of several things in our sight; it is surrounded by a wall, furniture, windows, etc. Very few pictures are so large as to fill our physical field of vision completely at normal distance, i.e. at a distance that lets us see the forms presented in them to best advantage. Yet a picture is a total visual field. Its first office is to create a single, self-contained, perceptual space, that seems to confront us as naturally as the scene before our eyes when we open them on the actual world. That is to say, the illusion created in pictorial art is a *virtual scene*. I do not mean a "scene" in the special sense of "scenery"—the picture may represent only one object or even consist of pure decorative forms without representative value—but it always creates *a space opposite the eye and related directly and essentially to the eye*. That is what I call "scene."[78]

Objects such as rabbits or even decorative forms may form part of the content, but the only

[77] Schier, 1986; Lopes, 1996
[78] Langer, 1953: p. 86

Figure 8: Christofano dell'Altissimo, 'Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici', 1560 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 590 x 430 mm)

Figure 9: Occluded Version of Johann Georg Seitz, 'Still Life with Rabbits', 1870 (Private Collection, 440 x 540 mm)

essential feature for depiction in Langer's account is virtual space. This is created with the first mark

on the picture surface:

> The primary illusion of virtual space comes at the first stroke of brush or pencil that concentrates the mind entirely on the picture plane and neutralizes the actual limits of vision. That explains why Redon felt driven, at the sight of a blank paper on his easel, to scrawl on it as quickly as possible with anything that would make a mark. Just establish one line in virtual space, and at once we are in the realm of symbolic forms.[79]

Depiction, for Langer, is a matter of experiencing a virtual scene in virtual space.[80]

This means that Langer's is also an early experience account of depiction, which is to say that she

emphasises the appearance of visual features for human observers rather than pointing to objective

properties shared by picture and object. The experience view first came to prominent view in *Art*

and Illusion by Ernst Gombrich, who argues that naturalistic pictures produce the illusion of being

confronted with the picture's subject matter in the mind of the observer.[81] Richard Wollheim

disagrees with this characterisation, putting forward his own phenomenological account:

> [M]y claim is that… when [an artist] aims to produce content or meaning, which is his major aim, he also paints so as to produce a certain experience. He does so because this is how pictorial meaning is conveyed, and this is so because of what pictorial meaning is…
>   In the first place, the experience must be attuned to the intention of the artist where this includes, I have stressed, the desires, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, emotions, commitments that motivate the artist to paint as he does…
>   Secondly, the required experience must come about through looking at the picture: it must come about through the way the artist worked. The spectator's experience is irrelevant to the understanding of the picture if it comes about solely through hearsay, or through having independent knowledge of what the artist intended. Of course, such knowledge can, it very often will, serve as background information in shaping or forming how the spectator sees the painting. But – a point to which I shall return – it oversteps its legitimate role when it leads the spectator to say or think things about the painting that he does not see when he looks at it.[82]

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[79] Ibid.: p. 84
[80] This is the theoretical reason the present study does not consider monochrome paintings – Langer's theory is unable to account for them
[81] Gombrich, 1960: p. 184
[82] Wollheim, 1987: p. 44

Further to this, Wollheim says that depiction is a matter of seeing-in, coupled with an appropriate standard of correctness.[83] Most, if not all, contemporary accounts add this additional condition in order to deal with the issue of accidental depictions, either following Wollheim's idea that this is based on the intention of the maker or citing another standard by which depictions can be sorted from non-depictive patterns.[84] Seeing-in is a well-known phenomenon – for instance, seeing a giraffe in the shape of a cloud or human figures in cracks in a wall – Wollheim was, however, the first to use it to explain depiction. So far, Langer's account fails to exclude accidental depictions – whilst her examples all involve intentional depictions, nowhere does she explicitly say pictures must be intentional. Putting photographic pictures to one side, Abell writes of this standard of correctness that "something must have been intended by its maker to bear the relevant phenomenological, recognitional or resemblance relation to an object if it is to depict it."[85] On the face of it, Langer's account seems to lack a standard of correctness; however, adding it to her account is easily done. Abell writes that whilst Wollheim's account is plausible in its phenomenology, it is insufficiently informative because it does not specify how the folds of seeing-in are related to each other or in what respects they are analogous to the subject matter.[86]

Robert Hopkins' account of depiction is presented as an attempt to do just this – building upon and detailing Wollheim's view in what he termed the experienced resemblance view. It is distinct from Langer's in the detail of its discussion of the problem, and also by specifying a stable aspect of resemblance: outline shape. For pictures made using any form of perspective, Hopkins's account provides a much finer-grained account than Langer's, however, with the focus on abstract painting which this study means to pursue, outline shape is a problem – for abstract works, this is not

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[83] Ibid.: pp.60
[84] E.g., Wollheim, 1987: pp. 52; Lopes, 1996: p. 164; Hopkins, 1998: pp. 71-6; Abell, 2009: pp. 207-9; Newall, 2011: pp. 55-61. I follow Wollheim and Hopkins in taking intention to be the basis of a standard of correctness; Lopes takes the source of information in a picture to determine it
[85] Abell, 2013: p. 367
[86] Ibid.: pp. 365-6

preserved, and may not even exist to begin with. This is clearly Langer's view, as she writes that "even a non-representational [abstract] picture is an image… of inward tensions…"[87]

In this section I have argued that Langer's extremely brief presentation of depiction stands up well once an intentional standard of correctness is incorporated into it as an early version of an experience view, and that a more recent account by Hopkins maps well onto it. As a final note in this section, despite Langer existing within the tradition of experience accounts, it is worth stressing that her account does not involve either seeing-in or seeing-as.

1.5 Depiction and Abstraction

In this section I look at the more controversial issue of depiction in abstract painting. Abell's helpful lead must be abandoned at this point, since she denies that abstract works are depictions. Building on Wollheim's discussion of abstract depiction and incorporating the views of Michael Newall, I look at how Langer understands the connection between pictures and virtual space. After considering Langer's view of pictures which meet the threshold of representation only quite minimally, the section ends by defending the idea from Langerean aesthetics that graphs and diagrams are also pictures and making clear the distinction between pictorial images and pictorial models.

Wollheim was the first to explicitly tackle depiction in abstract works – claiming that most abstract paintings depict, and depict abstract concepts such as irregular solid, sphere and space:

> The two kinds of case [figurative and abstract painting] differ primarily in the kind of concept under which we bring that which we see in the differentiated surface. In the kind of case I have so far been considering, we use 'boy', 'dancer', 'torso': we use figurative concepts. In the new kind of case, we use 'irregular solid', 'sphere', 'space': we use abstract concepts... One paves the way for a representational art that is figurative, the other for a representational art that is abstract.[88]

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[87] Langer, 1967: p. 146
[88] Wollheim 1987: p. 62

Abell, however, asserts that abstract works cannot depict – abstract works may represent but not depictively. "A slash of red may symbolize lust," she writes, but this does not count as depiction – since the representation is not one of visual resemblance.[89] Abell's view is a problem for studies like the present which seek to understand abstract paintings – understanding them as a type of picture. If abstract paintings are not pictures, then they do not, presumably, have picture planes – an implication I wish to resist.

Michael Newall disagrees with Abell's narrowing of depiction's scope: he has two conditions for the depictive scope of abstraction, the first is the commonly accepted condition that abstract paintings do not depict objects – though they can depict some (though not all) properties and kinds.[90] In particular, abstract paintings are seen, in Newall's account, as depicting particular kinds of spaces – Newall calls these abstract spaces (Newall notes that not all abstract paintings depict abstract spaces – such as the monochromes of Yves Klein – but nonetheless claims that most abstract paintings depict in this way). In Newall's account, depiction of these abstract spaces follows from the depiction of certain properties – including transparency, overlapping, shadowing and illumination, and texture – that engage our visual recognition faculties.[91] Of key importance in Newall's account is that abstract paintings frustrate our recognition of the specific property of volumetric form (this is the second condition for depicting abstract spaces).[92]

Newall's position is that whilst resemblance generally does occur in pictures, no resemblance of any kind need occur for depiction to take place – instead Newall places the burden on the human recognition system:

> If our visual processing happened to be sensitive to different properties of occlusion shape and aperture colour, then pictorial resemblances would differ correspondingly. It follows that we should prefer theories of depiction that, rather than affirming that pictures depict their subject matter partly in virtue of sharing certain colour properties, hold that these

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[89] Abell, 2013: p. 362
[90] Newall, 2011: p. 177
[91] Ibid.: p. 178
[92] Ibid.

pictures depict partly in virtue of engaging visual recognitional abilities engaged by their subject matter.[93]

Newall refers to his theory as a mixed theory, incorporating aspects of both experience and recognition. Newall resists incorporating resemblance into his account since, as noted above, the aspects of resemblance depicted are not stable.

Langer's remarks on depiction can be seen as a barebones version of the sort of account Newall offers. What in Newall's account is 'non-veridical,' (a term taken over from Gombrich), in Langer is 'virtual'. Newall criticizes Wollheim for an account of depiction in which twofoldness reliably occurs – Newall notes that what Wollheim calls the configurational aspect (the material picture surface) is not always seen, for instance in tromp l'oeil paintings or in a painting such as Jan Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*.[94] As mentioned, Langer's incorporation of experience into her account does not depend on seeing-in. Langer's remarks on picture space are less clear and leave much unsaid, however, like Newall's account, they concentrate attention on what is virtual or non-veridical in a picture:

> From the first line of decorative drawing to the works of Raphael, Leonardo, or Rubens… [the] picture space, whether conceived in two dimensions or three, dissociates itself from the actual space in which the canvas or other physical bearer of it exists…
> The primary illusion of virtual space comes at the first stroke of brush or pencil that concentrates the mind entirely on the picture plane and neutralizes the actual limits of vision… Just establish one line in virtual space, and at once we are in the realm of symbolic forms. The mental shift is as definite as that which we make from hearing a sound of tapping, squeaking, or buzzing to hearing speech, when suddenly in midst of the little noises surrounding us we make out a single word. The whole character of our hearing is transformed… Exactly the same sort of reorientation is effected for sight by the creation of any purely visual space.[95]

Unhappily, the picture space is personified in Langer's account, and there is inconsistency in the above as to whether it is the picture-maker who effects the transition or the perceiving viewer. However, Langer's description of the switch from seeing the physical bearer of the picture to seeing the symbolic content of the picture establishes her position – a "mental shift," or a "reorientation" –

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[93] Ibid.: p. 93
[94] Ibid.: pp. 25-6
[95] Langer, 1953: pp. 83-4

a shift in the kind of visual attention given, from seeing a physical thing to seeing a virtual form. This is consistent with the rest of her position.

Newall carefully distinguishes and then unifies recognition and experience as they occur in depiction.[96] This means that the informational processing of the visual system is distinct from the conscious awareness of a visual experience; the latter depends on the former though the former can take place without the latter – Newall argues that both are necessary for seeing.[97] In doing so, Newall introduces experiments, such as those on blindsighted individuals, which had not taken place when Langer was writing; Newall's account of the structure of this relationship between recognition and experience in depiction is certainly preferable to Langer's sometimes unclear and sometimes absent words on the matter. Similarly, Newall is able to give to a more satisfactory account of what it might mean for pictorial seeing to be visual – what Langer describes above as a "purely visual space" – drawing on the work of philosopher of perception Mohan Matthen.

Matthen notes the evidence for two streams of simultaneous processing in the human visual system – what Matthen calls motion-guiding vision and descriptive vision.[98] The former relies on largely unconscious and fast processing that helps us to navigate objects in the world; the latter processing is consciously available, slower and more detailed. Ordinarily both streams of processing operate on the same objects – Matthen suggests that in seeing-in a picture, motion-guiding vision processes the picture surface whilst descriptive vision processes the depicted content.[99] Newall notes that Matthen's account is not completely satisfactory since it is possible to be simultaneously aware of details in the picture surface – brushwork, for instance – as well as be aware of depicted content; this implies that descriptive vision is capable of registering both folds of the picture at the same time.[100] Nonetheless, the account is an improvement on Langer's explanatory gap.

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[96] Newall, 2011: pp. 21-2
[97] Ibid.
[98] Matthen, 2005: p. 311
[99] Ibid.
[100] Newall, 2011: pp. 36

The importance of a standard of correctness – present in Newall's theory and needing to be added to Langer's – is made clearer by considering pictures which seem to meet the threshold of representation only relatively minimally. Figure 10 shows still frames from the film *The Hudsucker Proxy*: within the film, the six drawings shown picture different objects – a hula hoop in frames 1-4, a drinking straw in frame 5, and a frisbee in frame 6. The problem with these very minimal representations, with minimal detailing, is that intention is seemingly removed because they have the potential to represent a huge variety of things, including things that the maker did not intend. Moreover, the same artifact, for instance the drawing shown in Frame 1 can function in three ways 1) as a minimal depiction, for instance of a hula hoop or a straw, 2) it can be a non-depictive representation, as in the traditional iconographic significance of the Chinese Taoist primordial chaos symbol,[101] or it can 3) be a model, in which case it is not the visual attributes of the represented objects which are presented but a functional principle – in this case the artifact might perhaps model a motorway ring road around a city or a geometrical region. This last, in addition to the first way, in which the artifact might function would also be seen as depiction in the Langerean sense, because it is a visual representation with a structure of elements analogous to the structure of elements of the object, and moreover these elements are salient.

It is unclear the extent to which this last point may be controversial – one may think that including what are essentially diagrams as pictures is overly inclusive. It is clear, however, that this is Langer's view:

> One step removed from the "styled" picture is the diagram. Here any attempt at *imitating* the parts of an object has been given up. The parts are merely indicated by conventional symbols, such as dots, circles, crosses, or what-not. The only thing that is "pictured" is the relation of the parts to each other. *A diagram is a "picture" only of a form.* Consider a photograph, a painting, a pencil sketch, an architect's elevation drawing, and a builder's diagram, all showing the front view of one and the same house. With a little attention, you will recognize the house in each representation. Why? Because each one of the very different images expresses the same relation of parts, which you have fastened on in formulating your conception of the house. Some versions show more such relations than

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[101] This will be explored in Chapter 5, especially Section 5.3

Figure 10: Within the film, the drawings seen in frames 1-4 refer to a hula hoop, whilst the one in frame 5 refers to a drinking straw and frame 6 to a frisbee. Robbins, Tim, and True, Jim, 'The Hudsucker Proxy', DVD. Los Angeles: Warner Bros. Directed by Joel & Ethan Coen, 1994.

others; they are more detailed. But those which do not show certain details at least show no others in place of these, and so it may be understood that the details are there left out. The things shown in the simplest picture, the diagram, are all contained in the more elaborate renderings.[102]

Depictions, for Langer, really can be so minimal that they are diagrams. There are hints too here about context – the architect's elevation drawing would rarely be intended to function in the world

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[102] Langer, 1942: pp. 70-1

without context, the observer fumbling to establish reference. Pictures are introduced to observers within many contextual frameworks.

Newall, by contrast, explicitly excludes diagrams from his account of pictures.[103] Newall does not mention graphs in his account but seems unlikely to include them as pictures: to non-veridically see them implies that it is possible to veridically see their content. Newall claims that, "seeing is always of things – objects, properties and kinds."[104] Pictures, for Newall, are therefore not only visual themselves, but ultimately have visual subject matter – he notes that abstract paintings depict kinds and properties, and both of these will be visual, for instance the kinds of sphere and plane, and the properties of transparency and overlapping.[105]

For Langer however, any configuration of elements can be depicted – so subject matter need not be visual, it need only be made visual when depicted. Non-visual subject matter could potentially be subject matter invisible to human vision, but could also include patterns of visible phenomena which cannot be seen in a single act of vision – patterns of fluctuating high and low tide, for instance, are admissible subject matter for depiction in Langer's account – pointing the way not only towards diagrams, as in the previous section, but also towards graphs.

Ending up with graphs as pictures may seem counterintuitive, but it is really only a very small step from outline drawings which, on a computer at least, are produced by vectors or plotting spatial coordinates, to plotting other variables. Ending up with a graph and a Rembrandt etching in the same category, however, is undesirable – this is where image and model start to help again: a graph, for Langer, is a pictorial model, a Rembrandt is, among other things, a pictorial image.

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[103] Newall, 2011: p. 1. Newall also excludes maps and insignia which Langer would include
[104] Ibid.: p. 4
[105] Ibid.: p. 177

It is often possible to recognise the shapes of graphs – an x^2 curve or the standard deviation of a bell

curve – in such cases, the pattern is seen first as a whole, and then further detail is observed. This is
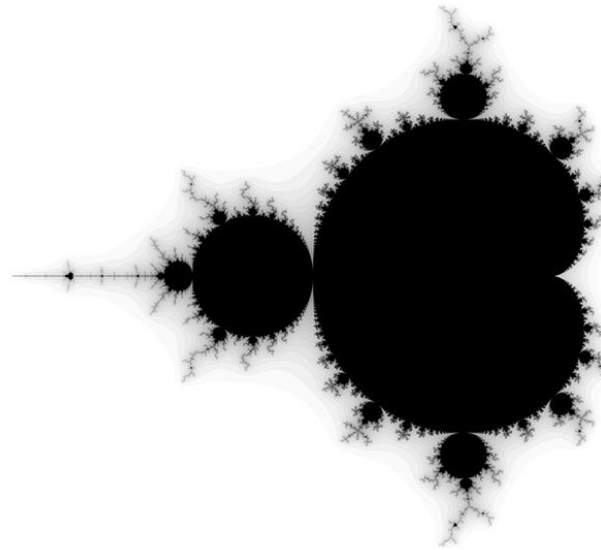
Figure 11: The Mandelbrot represents the behaviour of the series $z_{n+1} = z_n^2 + z_0$ where z is a complex number. Each point on the complex plane sets the initial term of the series, namely z_0. If the series diverges (escapes to infinity) for a particular point z_0 then it is coloured white. If the point doesn't escape the point is shaded black and is said to be inside the Mandelbrot set. This image is centred on (-0.75,0.0); the left most point of the Mandelbrot is at (-2,0) (image and text from Paul Bourke, 2002)

the opposite direction from the sequential building up of meaning from elements to larger units

typified by language. Moreover, complex graph shapes, such as the Mandelbrot Set (Figure 11),

generally are seen as pictures and certainly occasion visual experiences. It seems odd to include

some graphs but not all.

In this section I have argued that Langer's account of depiction is profitably read as part of the

history of considering depiction in abstract works, and that her account is distinct from both

Wollheim and Newall's. I have argued that combining her image and model distinction with her

account of pictures gives a helpfully nuanced version of pictorial representation.

1.6 Hilma af Klint

The final section in this chapter will take Langer's ideas introduced so far – image, model, and picture – and apply them to a painting by Swedish artist Hilma af Klint. After briefly introducing af Klint's life and work, including her exhibition history, I look at criticism of af Klint which focuses on the claim that what she has produced are theosophical diagrams rather than artworks. I investigate this claim with a Langerean toolset, looking to see if one of her paintings is properly seen as a pictorial image or a pictorial model. Drawing on biographical information, detailed formal analysis, and af Klint's notebooks, I argue that the painting in question, whilst diagram-like, is best seen as a pictorial image, the argument for which can be used to rebut af Klint's critics and help to justify af Klint's inclusion in the early history of abstract painting. Finally, I consider the ways in which Langer and Newall's views of the painting would differ, bearing in mind their accounts of depiction.

Af Klint is an unusual figure in that during her lifetime she was known almost exclusively as a figurative artist despite the majority of her production being abstract or semi-abstract works. She studied at art school in Stockholm in the 1880s and made figurative works to support herself throughout her life.[106] She exhibited regularly, including with Wassily Kandinsky in 1914, but it seems the only time she exhibited any abstract work was in London in 1928 – it is unknown which paintings were exhibited and reviews of the show completely ignored her contribution. This is particularly striking since af Klint was making fully abstract paintings as early as 1906, fully five years before other pioneers of European abstraction – František Kupka, Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian and Malevich. Af Klint felt that her contemporaries were not ready for her paintings which would be better received by the future.

She appears to have been correct, and her abstract works were first given attention in the 1986 LACMA exhibit *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, and then in two more recent

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[106] Voss, 2018: pp. 24, 28 for this and other biographical information in this paragraph

exhibitions – Moderna Museet's 2013 *Hilma af Klint – A Pioneer of Abstraction* and the Guggenheim,

New York's 2018 *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*. Af Klint has understandably been the

subject of much recent art historical attention, given that her works have been neglected for so long

and the potential they have to disrupt the standard narrative of the early years of abstraction,

particularly in terms of gender and network. As Daniel Birnbaum puts it:

> [Af] Klint demands that we reinvent or at least reconsider the seemingly fixed formalist
> trajectory of abstraction, creating another art history that permits creative realities that
> have systematically been made invisible. This will not be a history of exclusion. Not the
> history of purification that elides all forms of otherness in the search for pure form and the
> conditions of possibility of the painterly medium itself. Rather, it will have to be a genealogy
> of multiple forms of contamination and alterity, one that reintroduces the inventions of truly
> great women artists and visionary forms of thought that the ossified formalist account has
> no reason to champion and rather must dismiss.[107]

The recent reception of af Klint's work has, however, not been without controversy. Critic Hilton

Kramer criticized af Klint's inclusion as one of the pioneers of abstraction:

> As documents in the history of abstraction they have a certain interest, to be sure, but it is
> not an aesthetic interest; af Klint's paintings are essentially colored diagrams. To accord
> them a place of honor alongside the work of Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich and Kupka in
> the section of exhibition devoted to the pioneers of abstraction is absurd. Af Klint is simply
> not an artist in their class, and dare one say it, would never have been given this inflated
> treatment if she had not been a woman.[108]

Others have gone further, doubting that af Klint's work deserves to be given the status of art –

despite her formal training, exhibition history, and extensive documentary evidence of her intention

to create artworks; Amy Sillman reports a teacher from the Swedish Royal Academy telling her that

af Klint was not an artist but, instead, "some sort of mystic."[109] The 2012-13 *Inventing Abstraction*

exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, which did not include af Klint, was curated

with the view that "theosophical and mediumistic images… may resemble abstract art. But these are

not art at all, for despite any formal similarity they were intended to produce meaning in other

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[107] Birnbaum, 2018: p. 214
[108] Kramer, 1987: p. 3 in Birnbaum, 2018: p. 210
[109] Birnbaum, 2018: p. 211; Sillman, 2018: p. 35

discursive frameworks."[110] Such a view, taken seriously, would seem to disqualify not only much

early abstract work from Kandinsky, Mondrian and Malevich, but any work which operates within a

framework other than avant-garde artistic production, including any kind of religious or political

artwork.

Quite how af Klint's work relates to diagrams is a live issue in art history. The term diagram has been

picked up by numerous writers, including Briony Fer and Helen Molesworth – since Kramer, mostly

as a positive rather than pejorative description of the work.[111] However, if af Klint's works are just

diagrams then the Royal Academician would seem to be correct – these are not artworks; this would

be the case despite some canonical Modernist artworks, such as Duchamp's *Large Glass*, or Klee's

Twittering Machine, discussed earlier, partially resembling diagrams.

The status of af Klint's works as art does not depend just on whether they are seen as images or

models, however the issue does partly rest on this, and diagrams are a type of model. Langer,

moreover, as mentioned above, sees artworks as images. This section tries to negotiate and situate

an example of af Klint's work within and using these concepts, not so as to deny af Klint's status as

an artist, but to see whether Langer's ideas have explanatory power on unresolved issues.

This approach is attractive partly because it utilises the account of a philosopher who has been, in

part, overlooked due to her gender in order to better understand an artist who has been overlooked

due to her gender. Figure 12 shows *Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 6, Adulthood* (1907); af Klint

worked in series, this painting was meant to be part of a Temple installation.[112] Much has been made

of the resemblance between af Klint's work at this time and illustrations from Theosophical

literature, including from *Thought Forms* by Besant and Leadbetter.[113] The painting does indeed bear

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[110] Dickerman, 2012: pp. 13-4
[111] Fer, 2018: pp. 164-9; Molesworth, 2018: p. 38
[112] Almqvist, 2018: p. 7. Almqvist notes that contemporary Anthroposophists in Järna, Sweden have plans to build this temple
[113] Bashkoff, 2018: p. 22; Bashkoff, 2020: pp. 42-5; Fer, 2018: p. 167; Bauduin, 2018: pp. 187-90; Dalrymple Henderson, 2020: pp. 75, 79, 86

a similarity to an annotated Theosophical diagram, the visual elements are idealised geometrical

forms, ovals, spirals, and intersecting circles. Many of af Klint's family members served in the

Swedish Navy and a connection has been made between the dotted lines that can be seen in *No. 6,*

Adulthood and the nautical paths shown on sea maps.[114] This is a plausible and illuminating

connection as these nautical paths cannot be seen in the world, the sea maps make an ideal path of

a journey others have previously taken visible for the use of followers – revealing the invisible as af

Klint believed she was doing. The text can be partially decoded by consulting af Klint's voluminous

notebooks.[115] The 'wu' are most visible in *No. 6, Adulthood* due to their size and repetition, one of af

Klint's notebooks lists fifteen meanings for this combination of letters.[116] The visual elements near

the top of the work seem to describe trajectories, in the sense of the nautical maps as mentioned,

but also numerous natural forms, such as flower petals, eggs, and cycles of various kinds. All of these

aspects listed are diagrammatic.

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[114] Voss, 2020: p. 37

[115] "At the time of her death in 1944, she left behind a vast body of work: paintings and works on paper as well as 126 annotated notebooks, a dictionary to her own work, and more than twenty thousand pages of text describing her spiritual investigations." Burgin, 2018: p. 8

[116] "wu = the color is pink
wu = the chain of evolution that takes place during the struggle inside and outside of humanity, also faith in development
wu = pink rose and white lily
wu = duty that is partly Ysseian and partly Spartan
wu = the mystic name of the temple
wu = w = lighthearted
         u = fighting spirit
wu = image of the struggle in the middle ages
wu = logos; 'w' has the meaning here as Eoames, i.e., the bond between heaven and earth. u = the bond between the god within us and our selves
wu = indescribable, inscrutable. The sacred vessel is invisible, it contains and encompasses 'aH'
wu = what could be the pioneering garment of lustrum
wu = unfathomable is   } the prayer of Ararat's chalice
wu = sacred is   ¦
wu = eternal is   ¦
wu = God is   ¦
wu = aH"
There are more listings for 'wus' and other variations. See Burgin, 2018: pp. 283-4

Figure 12: Hilma af Klint, 'Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 6, Adulthood', 1907, tempera on paper, mounted on canvas (Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm, 3,150 x 2,350 mm)

However, the painting, taken as a whole, is not a diagram: it is neither clear nor specific in

demonstrating a functional principle. Even with the voluminous notebooks which af Klint clearly

wanted posterity to consider alongside her paintings, the work will not resolve into a demonstration – in the way, for instance, that the illustrations in *Thought Forms* are meant to, illustrating the way in which the material, transcendental and astral realms were thought to relate.[117] Eknath Easwaran describes the Upanishads as "form a kind of ecstatic slide show – snapshots of towering peaks of consciousness taken at various times by different observers and dispatched with just the barest kind of explanation," this description seems similarly appropriate for af Klint's practice.[118] Despite letters 'wu' and others seeming like annotations, they function so ambiguously that their use is closer to poetry. An absolutely key part of the analysis so far is that the elements *seem* diagrammatic, af Klint is using these associations as part of a semblance, as part of her image making – image used, of course, in a Langerean sense. Af Klint has her own detailed explanations of what she was doing with this series of paintings and the way in which she felt she was, at this point, a medium for spirits working through her; however, in Langerean terms, the painting can be seen as showing what is seems like to be confronted with secret knowledge of the invisible and occult, often in diagrammatic form. Tracey Bashkoff summarises the painting's divergent subject matter:

> The cycle [*The Ten Largest*, of which *No. 6, Adulthood* is a part] focuses on the stages of life and humanity's connections to the universe. The mix of floral, geometric, and biomorphic forms with letters and invented words creates a vocabulary of complex and shifting meanings with which af Klint herself appears to have grappled. In these works a plant tendril may become a spiral, which in turn unfolds into a coiling line that then scribes a calligraphic letter – codes and words from an unknown language. Two pulsing orbs are, at the same time, microscopic eggs and intersecting solar systems. These forms continue to evade singular or stable interpretations – evolution, continuity, growth, and progress all coexist with a return to the beginning or the oneness of the spirit. Science and spirit, mind and matter, the micro and the macro are simultaneously present.[119]

Rather than a diagram of an occult subject, *No. 6, Adulthood* is an image of what it feels like to pursue the occult. The Royal Academician's scorn, therefore, seems parochial; we do not have to share af Klint's beliefs in order to experience her art.

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[117] Bashkoff, 2018: p. 22
[118] Easwaran, 1987: p. 8
[119] Bashkoff, 2018: pp. 23-4

Moving on to depiction, Newall's view of experienced non-veridical seeing seems to give a good account of *No. 6, Adulthood*. Visual properties, including transparency, overlapping (and therefore depth) and illumination are shown, and, overall, the work depicts an abstract space. Langer's account presents us with *No. 6, Adulthood* as a virtual space which must be experienced as having depth and having the capacity for viewers to recognize logical (structural) elements within it. This visual experience following the recognition of logical objects (patterns) is equivalent to seeing.

A question remains regarding the dotted lines – which Kern identifies as referring to electromagnetic waves and which have also been identified as suggesting shipping routes. These are only interpretations of the lines in the af Klint, but, nonetheless, a painting could be made which used similar dotted lines in reference to trajectories and invisible waves. Newall claims that seeing is always of objects, properties and kinds. A trajectory is not an object or a kind, it can be seen as a property, more specifically as a relation; the trajectory of a boat is a relation to the water, defined by its angle of turn. In the imaginary painting of a trajectory, however, there is no boat and no water, only the angle remains, shown by the dotted line. If it is a property, it is a property that does not belong to an object or objects. Such a thing cannot be seen in the world – though it is seen in the picture. Langer, by contrast, presents her account in terms of logical form, which more straightforwardly explains how a trajectory can be depicted – a relational structure has been given visible form. In Langer's account, there are possibilities available in virtual space which are not available in everyday space.

Overall, however, Langer's and Newall's accounts give similar views of *No. 6, Adulthood* – though the views might well diverge if it were not an artwork under consideration. As noted however, Langer's account is extremely brief, and Newall's account, like Abell's and Hopkins', benefits from being much more detailed and explicit. Langer's account leaves too much unclear and uncertain, though it is nonetheless impressive how well it holds up in comparison to contemporary accounts.

In this section I have argued that Langerean aesthetics can be profitably brought to bear on live art historical issues, in this case whether af Klint's diagram-like paintings ought to be considered as diagrams or artworks. Whilst helping to adjudicate the art historical evidence, this section has also given an example of making use of aesthetics without it being necessary to put aside other forms of evidence.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced Langer's basic visual taxonomy. Numerous threads have been left, to be taken up in the following three chapters; Chapter 2, looking at Langerean feeling, will also bring up the material alluded to in the current chapter on predictive processing; Chapter 3 will go more into the detail of virtual space *tensions*; and Chapter 4 will examine critics of Langer on the question of the influence of the Tractarian Wittgenstein on her thought.

Langer's visual taxonomy is coherent. It is not the only way that these issues could be understood, and it is significant that she never claimed sole correctness for her solutions,[120] but Langer's account, taken as a whole, is a helpful way of thinking about visual representation. Questions remain, for despite the broad coherence of her account, there are gaps. Some of these can be plugged by borrowing elements from other thinkers, as I have done in the sections on depiction. In other areas work remains to be done – in particular, a detailed account of salience as a criterion is still lacking. The remainder of the present study is largely concerned with images, and art images at that; however, it is useful to bear in mind throughout the heuristic facility of images and the interplay of image and model in Langer's theory. These art images have distinctive phenomenologies, leading to potentially new understanding of the world – updating our mental models.

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[120] Indeed, she explicitly denies sole correctness of her views. See Langer, 1967: pp. xxii-xxiii

The chapter has shown that Langer's image and model distinction is valuable and flexible, both in its own right and particularly when considered in terms of pictorial images and pictorial models. This image model distinction does not distinguish between art and non-art, but it does provide a key component of a Langerean view of art, which is that artworks are images – that is, they offer an appearance. I have argued that Langer's account of depiction is an early experience account, and that this neglected account has useful applications in visual arts today.

Chapter 2

Feeling and Emotion

This chapter begins by discussing Langer's account of feeling and emotion, which has not been done justice in aesthetic scholarship. This is in contrast with studies in neuroscience, where Langer's ideas on, in particular, feeling, have gained traction in the last twenty years. That several neuroscientists find Langer's concepts useful and plausible is no guarantee that aestheticians should, but it is a necessary test that the aesthetic concepts be plausible when judged by the standards of current science. Philosopher of music Charles Nussbaum calls this the "*epistemological* thesis: [that] all material descriptive knowledge claims must in principle be empirically testable, that is, evaluable before the tribunal of sensory experience, and that any such claim must cohere with (minimally, be consistent with) evolving scientific theory."[1] This chapter means to show that Langer's philosophical framework on feeling passes this test, something not generally known within aesthetics. It is not possible in a study such as this to evaluate the neuroscience; the aim is to present Langer's ideas and to show where they are explicitly and implicitly used in contemporary emotion theory, and, furthermore, to show how some recent neuroscientific ideas are giving a more detailed version of what remains a fundamentally Langerean view of feeling. Neuroscientist Fred Levin writes that, "Susanne Langer… anticipated long ago, where we have just arrived regarding emotion."[2]

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[1] Nussbaum, 2007: p. 3

[2] Levin, 2009: p. xx in Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p. 223 (Dengerink Chaplin refers in her text to the work having been written in 2018, but it was only reprinted then). Levin works, more precisely, in Neuro-Psychoanalysis, an area of study which aims to bridge neuroscience and psychology and within which work has been done for a little over twenty years. As the name for this sub-discipline suggests however, those working in the area are heavily influenced by Freud, much more than seems to be common in contemporary psychology. For a critique of Neuro-Psychoanalysis which focuses on the negative ramifications of this Freudian focus see Ramus, 2013: pp. 170-1. Other neuroscientists and psychologists made use of in this chapter working within or partly within with subdiscipline include Mark Solms, Jaak Panksepp, and Margaret Browning

By contrast, those working within aesthetics have largely dismissed Langer's account. In his

influential account of musical expression, Steven Davies claims that Langer presupposes a theory of

emotion which is inadequate, and Saam Trivedi's 2018 book *Imagination, Music, and the Emotions*

simply refers readers back to Davies.[3] In *Theories of Art Today*, Noël Carrol notes that Langer claimed

that an artwork is a form of feeling but does not comment on this except to note that this was

meant to be a real definition in the classificatory sense.[4] In the same volume, Peg Zegland Brand

later mentions Langer in two footnotes in a discussion of 'Glaring Omissions in Traditional Theories

of Art', one of which notes that Langer "is rarely taught in aesthetics classes or included in aesthetics

anthologies."[5] Charles Nussbaum in *The Musical Representation: Meaning, Ontology, and Emotion*

lists Langer in two footnotes referring to signs and signals but does not refer to her ideas on feeling

or art.[6] The edited volume *Emotion and the Arts* (1997) does not mention Langer, nor does

Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art (2006), despite that latter including

sections on artistic expression and emotional responses to fiction.[7] The *Stanford Encyclopedia of*

Philosophy entry for emotion does not mention Langer, despite mentioning many of the

psychologists and neuroscientists discussed in the present chapter, including Carrol Izard, Jaak

Panksepp, and Antonio Damasio – who, as will be shown, all explicitly endorse Langer's core

philosophical framework.[8] (The *SEP* is also missing a dedicated entry on Langer.) *The Routledge*

Companion to Aesthetics does not mention Langer in articles on 'Expressivism: Croce and

Collingwood', 'Definitions of Art' or 'Art, Expression and Emotion';[9] Andrew Kania's survey of music

in the same volume mentions Langer but dismisses her account based on a misunderstanding of the

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[3] Davies, 1994: p. 127; Trivedi, 2017: p. 78
[4] Carroll, 2000: p. 5
[5] Zegland Brand, 2000: pp. 196-7. Zegland Brand's point is that the work of female aestheticians is under-represented, and that Langer does not merit consideration as a counter-example because of her marginal presence in aesthetics classes and anthologies
[6] Nussbaum, 2007: pp. 326n38, 345n61
[7] Hjort, Laver (eds.), 1997; Kieran (ed.), 2006.
[8] Scarantino & de Sousa, 2021.
[9] Graham, 2013: pp. 106-15; Davies, 2013: pp. 224-34; Matravers, 2013: pp. 404-14

morphology of feeling by which gradients would be presented only singly.[10] As with every other

aesthetician mentioned, Kania does not make use of Langer's *Mind: an Essay on Human Feeling*. The

edited volume *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology* was meant explicitly to address "how

– if at all – can the empirical work of the sciences be integrated with the more a priori investigations

which have traditionally characterized philosophy, and vice versa?"[11] Langer's potential contribution

to this project were ignored.[12]

Part of the reason for the widespread mischaracterisation and ignorance of Langer's mature position

is that critics have not read Langer's *Mind* trilogy – at least they do not refer to it. *PINK* and *FF*, and,

to a lesser extent, *Problems of Art* are assumed to be Langer's works within aesthetics. A biologically

grounded theory of mind is perhaps thought not necessary or particularly relevant. However, the

subtitle – *an essay in human feeling* – already suggests the emphasis on subjectivity and feeling that

will be found within. The final chapter in this thesis will come back to an alternative view of feeling

and emotion popular within contemporary aesthetics, considering Langer's account alongside that of

Jenefer Robinson – and, crucially, the perspective her account gives of artworks; this chapter largely

puts the art to one side in order to consider Langerean feeling.

The first section introduces Langer's concept of feeling, which is based on her concept of the act.

With special consideration given to the appearance of feeling, the section also considers some

objections. Section 2 looks at correspondences between Langer's ideas on feeling and emotion and

those in contemporary neuroscience. Beginning with Langer's idea of feeling as process and its

explicit use by contemporary neuroscientists and psychologists, the section moves on to consider

the importance given in contemporary neuroscience and psychology of differentiating between

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[10] Kania, 2013: p. 642
[11] Schellekens, Goldie (Eds.), 2011: p. 1
[12] The volume contains three references to Langer: i) an unexplained epigraph, suggesting the cognitive value of the arts is in providing self-knowledge, ii) a five-word quote from Langer on dance which is taken out of context (p. 339) and iii) Langer's name in a list of those who have offered theories of music and emotion, the theory not given (p. 363)

emotions and emotion schemas. Langer did not distinguish between these two explicitly, though her writings make clear she is aware of both. After an interlude considering Langer's idea of continuous feeling and how it relates to contemporary accounts, the section ends by looking at how Langer's account of emotion deals with a particular thought experiment. Section 3 looks at a recent proposal in philosophy of mind and theoretical neuroscience, predictive processing, and how this relates to and integrates with Langer's more barebones account of cognitively integrated perception. After discussing Langer's account of perception and contemporary accounts of predictive processing, the section ends with a discussion of the viability of Langer's ideas on perception, given more recent developments. The final section of the chapter goes back to look at the idea of salience, brought up in Chapter 1, looking at it with the benefit of the more rounded concept of feeling developed in this chapter. The section argues that not only Langer's ideas, but a Langerean philosophical framework of feeling which incorporates the PP framework, makes possible insights into characteristics of certain paintings.

2.1 The Act Concept

This section introduces Langer's concept of feeling and how it depends on her concept of the act. After describing these, Langer's idea of phases of an act is discussed. The section then considers a challenge from Malcolm Budd, that the forms of feeling have no special form which separates them from other kinds of phenomena.

Langer regularly describes feeling as "whatever can be felt."[13] This rather circular definition has likely hindered attempts to understand Langer's idea – feeling is a process rather than a product, an important component of Langer's mature account of feeling.[14] Langer's concept of feeling is indeed

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[13] Langer, 1962: p. 16; 1967: pp. 4, 21

[14] Jenefer Robinson has taken up this idea from Langer – crediting her directly in Robinson, 2006: p. 300. Robinson additionally quotes Langer in a chapter entitled 'Emotion as Process' (pp. 47-99), has separately published a book chapter under the same name (2018: pp. 51-70) and is working on a book of the same name

unusually broad – and, confusingly, she notes that what she calls feeling is exactly what William

James decided to term *thinking*.[15] Both James and Langer admit discomfort in their usage of their

respective terms, but settle on them as the best available choices. Langer's choice is partly

motivated by her wish to situate human experience within the broader context of animal life – the

entire second volume of her biologically grounded theory of mind is given over to explaining 'The

Great Shift' from animal mentation to human mentality. Unlike thinking, feeling, as a term, applies

as much to the responsiveness of simple organisms as it does to human perception and emotion.

Langer begins her discussion of animal feeling by discussing the movement of plankton – and noting

how it is very much like internal homeostasis between organs in more complex animals. Plankton

can only drift horizontally but have control over their vertical movement, and, since different depths

of water are usually moving at different speeds, this provides "the mechanism *for changing that*

environment for another."[16] Langer notes the responsiveness of the plankton, its presentness (it has

no plan to find better waters), and its physiological need to stay within certain states, which drives

its behaviour:

> This is a truly primitive form of behaviour, induced by a general influence (temperature, light, chemical state of the water) on the tiny agent as a whole, which goes into the highest activity possible to it, either rising or sinking, according to its own chemical state. It has no goal, but comes to rest when its situation becomes sufficiently tolerable in some other medium; it was not enticed by better conditions known through previous experience. If it continued (say) to rise from the dark depths higher than the level of its optimum illumination, the excess of light in the daylit surface water would send it down again. This is very much like the homeostatic influence of organs on each other by means of their respective products or activities, except that the two nocent extremes between which the congenial balance (not necessarily 50-50) obtains are external to the organism and motivate its counteraction as a whole, i.e., by locomotion or change of posture.[17]

(as mentioned in Maes, 2017: p. 176). Robinson's views are, however, distinct from Langer's – and will be returned to in Chapter 6 of this thesis

[15] James' definition is for "mental states at large, irrespective of their kind." See James, 1890: p. 186 in Langer, 1967: p. 21

[16] Langer, 1972: p. 4

[17] Ibid.: pp. 4-5

Feeling can be simple and still benefit the organism, increasing its ability to stay within its viable bounds. In the plankton example, this negotiation occurs with the external environment, but, according to Langer, a similar negotiation occurs between the states and processes of interdependent organs as homeostasis. Langer writes that, "Feeling, in the broad sense of whatever is felt in any way, as sensory stimulus or inward tensions, pain, emotion or intent, is the mark of mentality."[18] This is not, as will be seen, to deny automatic or unfelt responses. Langer notes however that, as in the example of the plankton, "[i]n its most primitive forms [this] is the forerunner of the phenomena that constitute the subject matter of psychology."[19]

In describing feeling as whatever can be felt, Langer includes both feeling arising from within, termed *autogenic feeling*: including emotion, spontaneous memory, and imagination; and feeling felt as impact in the form of perception, termed *exogenic feeling*.[20] Dengerink Chaplin writes that, "Langer locates reason in the organism's affective engagement with the world. Feeling, in turn, is a form of embodied cognition."[21] Moreover, there are unconscious processes, but there is not unconscious feeling: whatever can be felt is felt consciously.[22]

For Langer, the basic unit of measurement for living organisms is the *act*, her term for a natural event or process, which underlies her concept of feeling. Langer introduces acts by first noting that it is impossible to draw the line between stages in organic events. The solution, for Langer, is to consider these natural events not from the edges but from the centre, which can be found because a centre is a "peak of activity":[23]

> A phenomenon viewed from its center has to be treated as indivisible, or its center as such would be lost. For the same reason these units cannot be homogenous, but must have internal structure. A homogenous quantity is always theoretically divisible; if it is taken as a unit, it is so by fiat, and then the analytic procedure has an arbitrary basis and is to that extent "artificial." Units by virtue of inviolable structure, on the other hand, are not

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[18] Langer, 1967: p. 4
[19] Ibid.: p. 4
[20] Langer, 1967: p. 23
[21] Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p. 226
[22] Langer, 1967: pp. 22-3
[23] Ibid.: pp. 259-60

unanalysable, though they cannot be divided without losing their identity. They may be great or small, permanent or transient, their limits may be sharp and clear, or obscure, untraceable beyond some vague and variable point. But a structural center determines and locates each unit.

   Obviously we are not dealing with material parts of a living thing, but with elements in the continuum of life. Those elements may be termed "acts."[24]

An act not only has a centre but a structure, necessarily so, as Langer explains above. Langer goes on to outline this structure, which has four stages or *phases*. These phases are i) *inception*, ii) *development*, iii) *climax*, and iv) *cadence*, with the climax being the consummation of the act.[25] Langer notes that acts may subsume or span other acts and may jointly give rise to subsequent acts. Each phase of an act itself embodies the act structure in miniature; likewise, each act is part of larger acts. The act concept is extremely elastic in terms of scale. Importantly, the elements of acts may, in certain conditions, "attain the phase of being felt," which Langer would call a *psychical phase*.

Langer describes how a phase is not a thing but a "mode of appearance," and gives two metaphorical examples of what she means by this.[26] The first is that when iron is heated to become red hot, redness is a phase, a mode of appearance, rather than being a new entity. When the iron is cooled the redness vanishes. Langer's second example is a drawing by Rutherford Boyd (Figure 1), who noted that "in constructing the diagram, only triangles were drawn, yet the weird spade-like shape so dominates the result that the triangles pass unnoticed."[27] Langer writes that constituents of one kind – in this case the triangles – are "brought together in a special combination" which appear to "produce a new ingredient which is however a phase of their own appearance."[28]

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[24] Ibid.: pp. 260-1
[25] Ibid.: pp. 259-61
[26] Ibid.: pp. 21
[27] Ibid.: pp. 20
[28] Ibid.: pp. 21
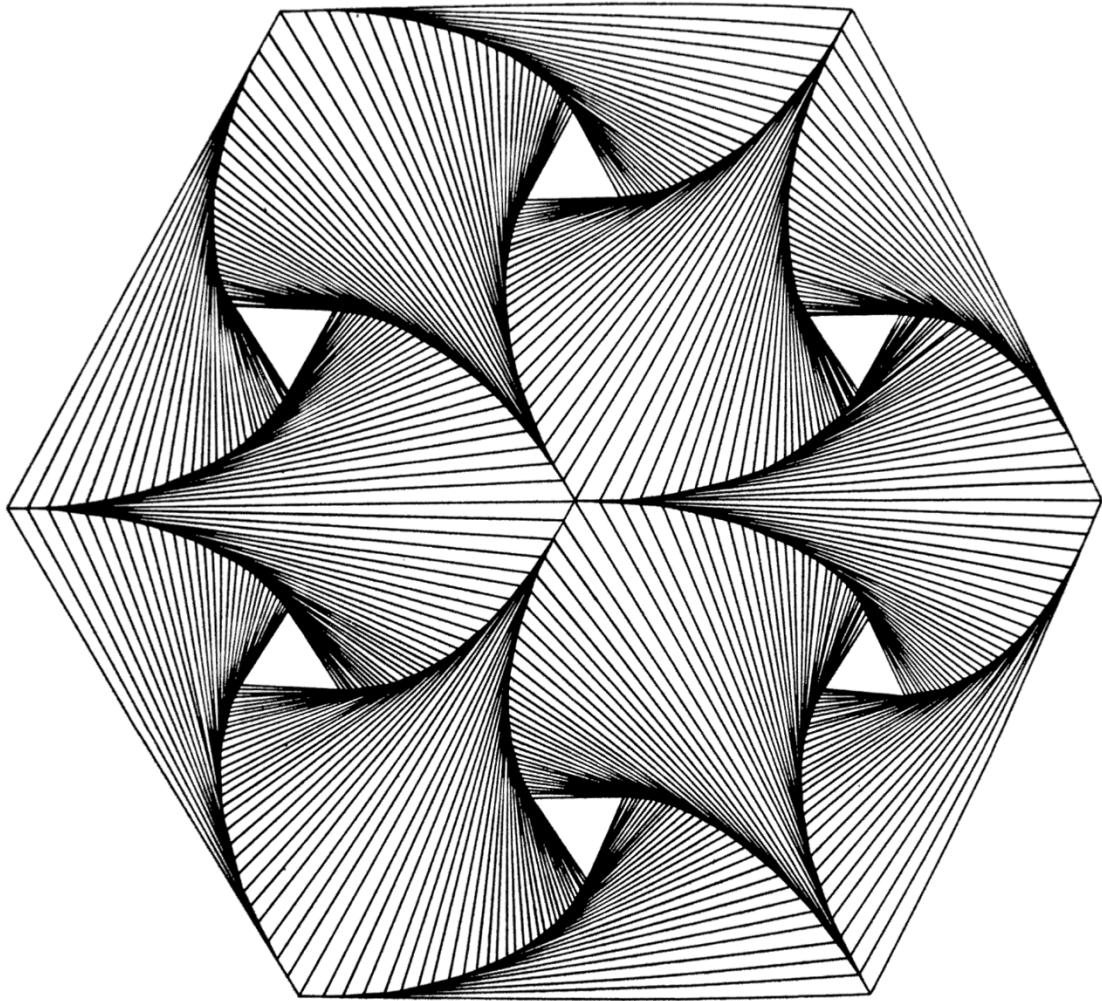
Figure 1: Rutherford Boyd, 1948 (from Langer, 1967: p. 20)

Similarly, Langer questions the ontological status of feelings:

> The vexing question in the philosophy of the biological sciences is how something called "feelings" enters into the physical (essentially electro-chemical) events that compose an animal organism. The presence of such intangible entities, produced by physical (especially nervous) activities, but themselves not physical, not occupying space, though (according to most theorists) they do have temporal character, is hard to negotiate in the systematic frame of anatomy, physiology or the more circumscribed, physiological study of nervous process, neurology. Feelings, considered as entities or items, are anomalies among the scientifically acceptable contents of the skin.[29]

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[29] Ibid.: p. 4

Langer sees feeling, instead, as like the redness of hot iron or the spade-like shape in Boyd's drawing – a phase or mode of appearance – and thinks it likely that the reification fallacy is based on the linguistic tendency to make verbs into nouns.[30]

Langer goes on to describe how pervasive the use of the act concept is, in "the working vocabulary of our research biologists, geneticists, physiologists, evolutionists and the field zoologists who observe the behaviour of higher animals, birds and mammals, in the wild."[31] Whilst the term act will not be used identically in all these fields, broken down into Langer's four phases, the basic notion of process ought to be stable. Moreover, "Among those who work with the human nervous system, too, the act is regarded as a basic phenomenon, potential or realized, complete or incomplete, overt or covert, equally exemplified in elaborate performances and in practically momentary events such as catching sight of something."[32] Much of the recommendation for the term then comes from its adoption from various life sciences – in contrast with adopting terminology from physics, a strategy of which Langer is dubious, at least when the application is unthinking. Langer has rejected a scale-specific unit of basic study – perhaps the organism or the ecosystem or the cell – so that by using the act concept she might study, and interrelate, all three, and keep the theoretical flexibility to frame any question concerning life:

> Vital working systems have no inanimate solid parts assembled and adapted. They show rhythms within rhythms, interlocking timed sequences of chemical changes, electrical fields and currents that induce the chemical actions or, conversely, are generated by them, the most elaborate physical processes under a network of homeostatic controls; the sum total is a matrix of acts within acts, organizing previously unrelated material units at the molecular and atomic levels in an unbroken continuum of activity that builds itself up into the incredible dynamism called a living body, which disintegrates if the creative activity stops.
>   The study of living functions as acts thus leads backwards into the physical sciences without

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[30] Ibid.: pp. 19-20. Langer's examples here could be seen under the framework of supervenience – as the phenotype of an organism supervenes on the genotype, so the spade-like appearance of Figure 1 supervenes on the triangles, and so the redness of the iron supervenes on the arrangement of iron atoms. For a recent philosophical overview of supervenience, see McLaughlin & Bennett, 2021.
[31] Langer, 1967: p. 264
[32] Ibid.: p. 268

coming to any dividing line that has to be crossed by a *saltus naturae*.[33]

Dengerink Chaplin helpfully points out that, for Langer, rhythm "is primarily a relation between tensions than a matter of equal divisions of time."[34] The human heartbeat fluctuates, for instance, and does so *in rhythm with* other chemical and electrical fluctuations in the body. This passage justifies the act concept as both integrating the processes of a living being and integrating with physics. Langer's project in *Mind* is to produce a biologically grounded conception of mind – the act concept is the most crucial grounding she gives.

Malcolm Budd criticizes Langer's idea that artworks must express forms of feeling on the grounds that other processes have similar forms – and so the forms of feeling are far from unique:

> The justification for Langer's emphasis on the forms of feeling is weakened by the fact that feelings have no special forms which distinguish them from many other kinds of phenomena… The ways in which emotions and feelings can develop have nothing distinctive about them that is not shared with the modes of development of the rising and setting of the sun, the mounting of a storm, the explosion of a volcano and countless other natural and artificial processes.[35]

Langer partially pre-empts this challenge, and partially agrees:

> It is, in fact, noteworthy that there are rather few elaborate lifeless mechanisms in nature. Geysers and blowholes, volcanoes, tides and whirlpools, the variable and yet generally patterned dynamisms that effect cyclonic storms, are spectacular mechanisms, but they are simple; all very intricate natural mechanisms that we know are alive.[36]

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[33] Ibid.: p. 274; The ambition of Langer's conceptual work here is enormous – and in this her work echoes her doctoral supervisor, Alfred North Whitehead, who in his *Process and Reality* (1929) attempted to "frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted." (Whitehead, 1929: p. 4). Donald Dryden has looked at the Whiteheadian impact on Langer's work and concluded that "Langer regarded Whitehead's metaphysics as richly suggestive but did not take his categoreal scheme as the basis for her work. She did not offer a Whiteheadian psychology, a Whiteheadian evolutionary biology, or a Whiteheadian foundation for the cultural and social sciences." (Dryden, 1997: p. 83)

[34] Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p. 213

[35] Budd, 1985: p. 114

[36] Langer, 1967: p. 274. Langer includes a footnote here: "More accurately, in sublunar nature; solar systems are, of course, vast natural mechanisms, and their complexity may be little known to us."

These natural mechanisms, like feeling, are marked by a pattern of building up and then releasing

tension; Budd is right to make this parallel, though, as Langer notes, the complexity of these

processes is low in comparison to even simple life forms – which, crucially, strive to maintain their

functioning; homeostasis requires some degree of feeling in order for action to be directed. The

appearance of secondary virtual forms being interdependent or individuated is a major way in which

artworks project the quality of feeling, a subject which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Langer

argues that there is value to being presented with the forms of feeling in isolation; no longer

embedded in the practical situations of the world, but framed, isolated and clarified.

To summarize, the act is Langer's basic unit of dynamic form, especially living form. An act has four

phases, and a psychical phase, if it occurs, is felt. Feeling is therefore a process, as well as being a

phase *within* a process, rather than a distinct ontological entity.

That psychical phases are felt can be rephrased: feeling is a conscious process. Langer, indeed, goes

further: "Organic activity is not "psychological" unless it terminates, however remotely or indirectly,

in something felt."[37] Feeling, in this account, is *a part of* all consciousness – there is no consciousness

without feeling. This is not to deny thinking or to equate feeling and thinking (James' definition of

thinking is a special and limited term). In fact, for Langer, both emotion and thinking – which she

calls reason here – are complex developments of feeling:

> Emotion as we know it is not even a primitive form of feeling; it is not a rudimentary nervous
> process, such as fairly simple organisms might exhibit, in psychical phase. Human emotion is
> phylogenetically a high development from simpler processes, and reason is another one;
> human mentality is an unsurveyably complex dynamism of their interactions with each
> other, and with several further specialised forms of cerebral activity.[38]

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[37] Ibid.: p. 4
[38] Ibid.: p. 23

Considering Levin's statement quoted earlier in the chapter, that Langer anticipated where neuroscience has just arrived regarding emotion, Langer writes directly on emotion, as here, surprisingly infrequently. What Langer provides is a framework, specifically, a way of structuring the relationships between perception, feeling, emotion and thinking that remains adequate to structure the findings of contemporary neuroscience. As will be shown in the following section, there is considerable extra detail but, remarkably, no change to the overall structure that Langer proposed.

2.2 Correspondences

Langer's most recent relevant book for considering feeling on the level of the organism was published almost fifty years ago, before many of the developments which have informed current research, such as functional MRI machines enabling continuous scanning of a brain, which have given researchers a much better idea of which brain regions are correlated with tasks such as language and object recognition. Psychologist Margaret Browning, indeed, notes that some of Langer's science is outdated, but claims that this does not undermine the use of Langer's conceptual framework.[39]

This section examines the correspondences between this conceptual framework and contemporary findings in philosophy of mind, psychology, and neuroscience. I begin with a look at how Langer's concept of feeling has been taken up in these areas before moving on to look at the relationship of feeling to consciousness. Langer's ideas on feeling tone are related to Antonio Damasio's on background feeling and Christine Tappolet's on mood. This then leads on to a discussion of the importance of the distinction between basic emotions and emotion schemas in current emotion research, looking at how Langer's ideas treat a situation described in the literature on emotion, both when she is read to be referring to basic emotion and when she is interpreted to mean emotion

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[39] Browning, 2006: pp. 1132-3

schemas. After considering Langer's thoughts on the emotional content of fantasy, thoughts which, by necessity, relate to emotional content which is cognitively complex, the section ends with reconsidering criticism by Stephen Davies of Langer's position.

Most crucial of all the correspondences between Langer's work and contemporary neuroscience is Langer's idea of feeling being a felt phase rather than a product. Psychologist Carroll Izard explicitly cites Langer on this, noting that this view is in line with those of biologist Gerald Edelman and affective neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp (Panksepp notes the connection of this aspect of his work to Langer himself in his final work);[40] Browning and Levin also explicitly cite and support Langer's view here.[41] Neuroscientist Mark Solms does not cite Langer but defines feeling as "any aspect of an emotion (or any affect) that you *feel*," and notes how heavily his ideas on feeling have been influenced by Panksepp.[42] On a related point, Panksepp and Davies quote Langer that feeling as a noun is a dangerous reification, whilst Edelman notes that "confusions may arise because of the reification as things, of properties and processes. Consciousness is not a thing, it is a process."[43]

Despite this last quote referring explicitly only to consciousness rather than feeling, the two are very often connected in contemporary neuroscience, Solms writing, for instance, that "[a]pparently alone among mental functions, feeling is *necessarily* conscious. Who ever heard of a feeling that has no subjective quality?"[44] Izard, specifically citing Langer, notes that in the evolution of consciousness,

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[40] Izard, 2009: pp. 4-5; Panksepp and Davies, 2018: p. 267. Edelman, 2006: p. 76 quotes Langer on art, but on p. 103, uses her presentational/discursive distinction without a reference, showing familiarity with her ideas: "The important point is that this selective system allows enormous combinatorial freedom for thought and imagery, and even for logic and mathematical calculation. Sequences of thought can be presentational, as in the linkage of visual images, or discursive, as in thinking based on language, where imagery is not necessarily involved."

[41] Browning, 2019: p. 27, 39; Levin, 2018: p. 182

[42] Solms, 2021: p. 87

[43] Panksepp and Davies, 2018: p. 1; Edelman, 2006: p. 41

[44] Solms, 2021: p. 87; Solms', unlike his colleagues who cite Langer, tends to reify feeling, for instance writing on p. 99 that "feelings are always conscious," where Langer might say that 'feeling is always a conscious process.' This is a minor point – Solms' work brings together strands of research from cognitive neuroscience,

the "emergence of the capacity to experience and respond to emotion feelings may have been the

most critical step (cf. Langer, 1967/1982)."[45] Browning, distinguishing between the subcortical

brainstem, which is shared by all vertebrates, and the cerebral cortex, which is greatly enlarged in

humans, notes how feeling facilitates not only agency and subjectivity but also our understanding of

the external world:

> Affectivity is the *sub-cortical* core of subjectivity apparent even in the newborn when the
> infant is awake and alert, which rapidly underwrites the "objectivity" of the experienced
> world in the process of the child's cognitive (sensorimotor) *cortical* development. Susanne
> Langer equates this core subjectivity and its underwriting of objectivity with the capacity to
> feel. For Langer, feeling includes both the capacity to experience the world through our
> various external sensory systems as well as the capacity to experience our own agency…[46]

Feeling is what Solms calls the "currency of consciousness,"[47] and Browning stresses here how the

subcortical core of feeling is present from birth and facilitates the development of the cortex. Solms

asks, rhetorically, "How can you make choices without them being grounded in some evaluative

system that tells you which option is better or worse? It is these values that feeling contributes to

behaviour."[48] Browning's statement about Langer's concept of feeling including both external

sensory systems and internal sense of personal agency refers to Langer's exogenic and autogenic

feeling respectively – whether action is felt to originate from outside or inside of us.

In Panksepp and Davies' discussion of personality, too, feeling is discussed as the prime mover –

again, looking to Langer for the core framework:

> It is our premise that all the emotional affective systems that evolution… constructed within
> the subcortical brain are the primary causal mechanisms underlying our personalities that
> consistently guide emotional and other motivated actions. In the colorful words of the
> epigraph's author, they are evolved affective designs for having "a psychical entity pushing a

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affective neuroscience, psychoanalysis, philosophy of mind and computational neuroscience into a coherent
and plausible unity, as this chapter will demonstrate

[45] Izard, 2009: p. 11

[46] Browning, 2019: p. 27. In isolation this quote could be taken to suggest that a person must be *awake* to feel;
however, feeling occurs in dreams also – otherwise they could not be experienced. See Solms, 2021: pp. 108,
229

[47] Solms, 2021: p. 144. The phrase is originally attributable to neuroscientist Bjorn Merker

[48] Ibid.: p. 120

physical one around" (Langer, 1988, p. 4).[49]

There is significant consensus in contemporary neuroscience and psychology – evidenced here with

quotes from Solms, Izard, Browning, Panksepp & Davies – that simple feeling drives the

development of more complex cortical thinking, cortical feeling and behaviour; this is a Langerean

position.

That we feel continuously is a key claim of Langer's, mirrored by neuroscientist Antonio Damasio.

Damasio's work holds a significant place within contemporary philosophy of emotion and aesthetics

as he is the main psychologist used by both Jenefer Robinson and Jesse Prinz in their influential

accounts.[50] Langer here describes feeling tone, a continuous background awareness to which small

bodily, emotional, and sensory tensions contribute:

> Emotional reactions are always to our own impulses in situations which do not immediately
> let them pass into action, that is, obstructions, long or briefly unmet needs, and especially
> conflicting motivations, which may be large or almost imperceptibly small. The small ones
> are the neglected ones, of which we may take no notice at all. They just belong to the fabric
> of the ever-moving situation in which one lives. Yet they may summate to impart a general
> feeling tone to the passage of life in its situational context.[51]

What Langer calls feeling tone, or tonus, Damasio calls background feeling:

> I am postulating another variety of feeling which I suspect preceded the others in evolution.
> I call it background feeling because it originates in "background" body states rather than in
> emotional states… We are only subtly aware of a background feeling, but aware enough to
> be able to report instantly on its quality. A background feeling is not what we feel when we
> jump out of our skin for sheer joy, or when we are despondent over lost love; both of these
> actions correspond to emotional body states. A background feeling corresponds instead to
> the body state prevailing between emotions. When we feel happiness, anger, or another
> emotion, the background feeling has been superseded by an emotional feeling.[52]

Damasio apparently developed background feeling independently, but, after learning of Langer's

work, acknowledged that her work pre-empted his: "My notion of background feeling… was first

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[49] Panksepp and Davies, 2018: p. 3. The authors refer to the abridged version of *Mind* (1988)
[50] Robinson, 2006; Prinz, 2004
[51] Langer, 1967: pp. 277-8
[52] Damasio, 1994: p. 150

hinted at by the remarkable but unsung American philosopher Susanne Langer, a disciple of Alfred

North Whitehead."[53] Damasio also thanks readers of his previous book, *Descartes' Error* (1994), for

calling his attention to Langer, but cites *PINK* rather than her more relevant and developed work in

the *Mind* trilogy – the latter of which, as shown, is much more than just a hint. In the first volume

she also rejects the Cartesian dichotomy of *res extensa* and *res cogitans* – the dichotomy referred to

by Damasio's title.[54] Langer's development of feeling tone beyond a mere hint can be seen in the

above quote regarding acts of which the organism is not consciousness, with the intensity of these

acts rising, and so becoming felt. Langer continues:

> The normal substrate of "feeling-tone," from which the more acute tensions build up into
> specific experiences, is probably a dynamic pattern of nervous activities playing freely across
> the limen of sentience.[55]

The phrase "substrate… from which the more acute tensions build up," describes feeling-tone as the

ambient or situation for more differentiated events. Characterised as 'vague' and alternately

'gradual' and 'fleeting', feeling-tone is better known as mood. In a recent review of the metaphysical

literature on mood, Christine Tappolet stresses the continuity of mood, writing that, "shifting from

one mood to another, we seem to be in a mood or another most if not all of the time," and notes

that "most accounts of mood can be cast as variations on theories of emotions… [as] prolonged

emotions… low-intensity emotions… objectless emotions… [or that] moods are emotions that have

more general objects – all things in your environment or even the whole world."[56] Langer's concept

of feeling therefore has the ability to integrate separate areas of research, as a philosophical

framework ought to. Here Langer claims that what is important is not only feeling but the life of

feeling, what it is to be conscious:

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[53] Damasio, 1999: p. 287
[54] Langer, 1967: p. 274. In this she followed the example of her doctoral supervisor – Alfred North Whitehead.
See Whitehead,1929: p. 246. For a discussion of Whitehead's influence on Langer, see Dengerink Chaplin,
2019: pp. 99-132
[55] Langer, 1967: p. 22
[56] Tappolet, 2018: p. 169

Pure sensation—now pain, now pleasure—would have no unity, and would change the receptivity of the body for future pains and pleasures only in rudimentary ways. It is sensation remembered and anticipated, feared or sought or even imagined and eschewed that is important in human life. It is perception moulded by imagination that gives us the outward world we know. And it is the continuity of thought that systematizes our emotional reactions into attitudes with distinct feeling tones, and sets a certain scope for an individual's passions. In other words: by virtue of our thought and imagination we have not only feelings, but a *life of feeling*.[57]

Again, Langer's ideas are distinguished from those of the Classical Associationists; feeling is far from being a passive or neutral process as Langer here stresses the feedback loop of imagination and perception in giving us access to the world. In stressing the continuity of the life of feeling, Langer is stressing the continuity of consciousness – not entirely unbroken in human experience, but normatively present. Feeling is the driving force of consciousness, motivating, among other functions, imagining and seeking and remembering. Whilst life of feeling is clearly a more global concept than mood, or feeling tone, Langer does not discuss them together. Nonetheless, the framework is there to integrate more work in both areas, on the one hand the scope of an individual's passions, and on the other, the normal substrate of awareness.

Moving from feeling to emotion, Izard claims that there remains significant confusion in contemporary work on emotion – caused in large part by conflating so-called basic emotions and emotion with cognitive content:

Emotions can be usefully divided into two broad types or kinds – basic emotion episodes and dynamic emotion-cognition interactions or emotion schemas. Failure to make and keep the distinction between these two types of emotion experiences may be the biggest source of misunderstandings and misconceptions in current emotion science.[58]

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[57] Langer, 1953: p. 372. Langer reifies feeling here – from the 1960s onwards she would not
[58] Izard, 2009: p. 7

Izard goes on to give examples of basic emotion episodes ("an infant's interest activated by the human face," and that a "man who stumbles upon a viper will jump aside,"[59]) and emotion schemas, which are "emotion interacting dynamically with perceptual and cognitive processes to influence mind and behaviour," and can be seen, for instance, in Homer's *Iliad*: "…[the son of] Peleus… lashed out at him, letting his anger ride in execration…"[60] In this last example, Izard is suggesting that Achilles' basic emotion feeling – the anger – expresses itself too in the curses he piles upon Agamemnon, with the entirety of the complex episode being an emotion schema.

Regarding basic emotion, Solms acknowledges that there is "no generally agreed upon classification of affects… [but] Jaak Panksepp's taxonomy… is widely – but not universally – accepted."[61] Whilst not generally agreed upon and still provisional in nature, this taxonomy is supported by empirical findings linking specific neuromodulators to each basic emotion.[62] This is an area where significant progress has been made since Langer wrote. Panksepp's taxonomy lists seven instinctual programmes – seven basic emotions – capitalised to remind readers that each modulates the activity of the entire brain in a rather blunt way – 1) LUST 2) SEEKING 3) RAGE 4) FEAR 5) PANIC/GRIEF 6) CARE 7) PLAY.[63] These seven basic emotion programmes are in addition to bodily affects and sensory affects. Examples of sensory affects include pain, disgust and surprise. Panksepp writes:

> Of course, emotions without cognitions are rather coarse tools of mind. It is when our primary-process emotional feelings get embedded in our secondary and tertiary cognitive processes, that new levels of complexity emerge…[64]

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[59] Ibid.: pp. 7-8
[60] Ibid.: p. 8. Izard has apparently mistaken the attribution of the *Iliad* as having been written in approximately 700 BCE for 7000 BCE – in addition to writing the latter date, he lists it, mistakenly, as being amongst the "earliest written records."
[61] Solms, 2021: p. 102. An alternative view can be found in the work of Lisa Feldman Barrett – See Feldman Barrett, 2017.
[62] Panksepp, 1998: pp. 84, 103, 133, 181, 203-31; Panksepp, 2005 pp.46-9, 52-6, 60; Friston, 2009: p. 293-301; Solms, 2021: p. 108, 132
[63] Solms, 2021: pp. 105-20 (citing Panksepp, 1998)
[64] Panksepp, 2005: p. 62

Panksepp is separating basic emotions from emotion schemas as Izard suggests. Working

independently, Paul Ekman has worked to identify emotion based on human facial expressions,

working with groups across the world. He has concluded that there are a number of basic emotions

which are universally expressed and understood: i) happiness, ii) sadness, iii) anger, iv) disgust, v)

contempt, vi) fear, and vii) surprise.[65] Whilst anger and RAGE are closely related, and fear appears on

both lists, the other five differ – though Panksepp includes disgust and surprise as sensory affects

rather than basic emotions. This is not altogether surprising given the differing research

methodologies used. The contrast of research methodologies in fact epitomises Langer's image and

model distinction nicely: work on facial expression focuses on how emotions seem, whilst

Panksepp's work on neuromodulators (and other neural mechanisms) focuses on the functional

principles behind them. Whilst Ekman's work is perhaps better known, certainly within philosophy,

due to the greater use of Panksepp in the neuroscientific community and this chapter's focus on

neuroscience, Panksepp's taxonomy will be used.

Solms describes sensory affects:

> Sensory affects are simultaneously internal feelings *and* external perceptions; they are
> inherently valenced perceptions qualified by specific feelings. So, for example, pain feels
> different from disgust, and you respond to them differently, withdrawing or retching,
> depending on which one you have.[66]

Bodily affect most obviously concerns homeostasis, though increasingly it is argued that homeostasis

is the basis of all affect. Browning notes that Solms and Panksepp (2012) and Rolf Llinás (2001),

among others, argue that homeostasis is the main task of the brain and the basis on which it is

organised.[67] Solms' recent work, too, emphasises the central importance of homeostasis, which he

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[65] Ekman has an expanded list which includes emotions not correlated with facial expression: i) sadness, ii)
agony, iii) anger, iv) surprise, v) fear, vi) disgust, vii) contempt, viii) joy ix) sensory pleasures, x) amusement,
xi)contentment, xii) excitement, xiii) relief, xiv) wonder xv) ecstasy or bliss, xvi) pride or 'fiero', xvii) parental
pride or 'naches', xviii) elevation, xix) gratitude, xx) gloating or 'schadenfreude', xxi) Facial Expressions. This list
seems to necessarily confuse basic emotions and emotion schemas however. See Ekman, 2003.
[66] Solms, 2021: p. 143
[67] Browning, 2019: p. 33

defines as the principle that "living organisms must occupy a limited range of physical states."[68] Here

Solms describes breathing in a notably Langerean manner – an automatic action until a threshold of

intensity is crossed, provoked by normal bounds being passed:

> Respiratory control is normally automatic: so long as the levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in your blood stay within viable bounds, you don't have to be aware of your breathing in order to breathe. When blood gases exceed these normal limits, however, respiratory control intrudes upon consciousness in the form of an acute feeling called 'air hunger'. Unexpected blood gas values are an indication that *action is required*. It is urgently necessary to remove an airway obstruction or get out of a carbon-dioxide-filled room. At this point, respiratory control enters your consciousness, via an inner warning system that we experience as *alarm* – specifically, in this case, suffocation alarm.[69]

In this example, automatic respiratory control occurs with the rate of respiration adjusted

automatically to keep blood gas values within viable bounds: this is a paradigm of homeostasis.

Solms helpfully gives a reason for this transition from automatic to felt respiratory control – action is

required, and is context dependent, and so conscious processing is needed. Whilst Solms has a little

more detail, this is extremely similar to Langer's explanation:

> Millions of processes – the whole dynamic rounds of metabolism, digestion, circulation and endocrine action – are normally not felt. One may say that some activities, especially nervous ones, above a certain (probably fluctuating) limen of intensity, enter into "psychical phase." This is the phase of being felt. It may develop suddenly, with great distinctness of quality, location and value-character, for instance, in response to a painful stimulus; or similarly, only with less precise location in the organism, like a shock of terror; or a deeply engendered process may go gradually, perhaps barely, into a psychical phase of vague awareness – come and gone – a sense of weariness or a fleeting emotive moment.[70]

The reason the suffocation alarm is felt rather than processed automatically is that appropriate

behaviour is context dependent – it matters whether the cause is an airway obstruction or the

building is on fire. Langer notes the suddenness of the transition to conscious processing for "a

painful stimulus," such as Solms suffocation alarm example.

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[68] Solms, 2021: p. 154
[69] Ibid.: p. 96
[70] Langer, 1967: p. 22

When Langer writes, quoted earlier in this section, of perception moulded by imagination, she might, on a contemporary view, be taken to refer to two distinct but related processes. She may be writing about how our perceptual experiences are structured through our imaginative expectations of the world, based on our understanding and model of the world – this will be discussed shortly along with contemporary ideas on predictive processing. She may, however, also be taken to be discussing emotion schemas.

Langer's account would seem to be deficient if it denied emotion schemas. Separately, for instance, Mette Hjort and Sue Laver stress them:

> In most cognitive accounts of emotion, a crucial causal role is attributed to agents' *evaluations* of relevant states of affairs. For example, a mother who learns that her child's teacher intends to break her contract in the middle of the school year can be expected to experience certain negative emotions if she believes that the sudden change will be harmful to her child.[71]

The example brings up a distal situation which provokes negative emotion – it is the cognitive understanding of the situation which prompts the emotion, and this cannot be reformulated in terms only of perception and emotion.

Langer writes that "[e]motional reactions are always to our own impulses in situations which do not immediately let them pass into action…"[72] So long as situation here is understood as encompassing a person's wider matrix of involvements rather than being limited to only their immediate sensory environment, Langer's formulation here quite accurately matches the example given by Hjort and Laver: the situation is the child's teacher planning to leave mid-year, the mother's emotional reactions are the negative emotions, experienced as negative because the mother believes the plan to be harmful to her child, and experienced emotionally because she is obstructed from immediate action. Langer seems here to account for emotion schemas; however, she is guilty of Izard's criticism

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[71] Hjort & Laver, 1997: p. 6
[72] Langer, 1972: p. 277

since she could equally be writing about basic emotions. Moreover, Langer seems only to account for negative emotions here.

More systematic and clear, however, is how Langer's account distinguishes between autogenic and exogenic feeling – the former originating inside the organism, felt as action. This distinction remains valid, though exogenic feeling would now normally be termed exteroception, and autogenic feeling broken down further into proprioception and interoception. "Emotions," Langer writes, "are felt as actions originating within us."[73] The following quote lends support to both treating situations as distal as well as immediate and also gives a clearer view of Langer's emphasis, rather than avoidance, of cognitive evaluations – here presented under the heading of fantasy:

> Certainly in our history, presumably for long ages – eons, lasting into present times – the human world has been filled more with creatures of fantasy than of flesh and blood. Every perceived object, scene, and especially every expectation is imbued with fantasy elements, and those phantasms really have a stronger tendency to form systematic patterns, largely of a dramatic character, than factual impressions. The result is that human experience is a constant dialectic of sensory and imaginative activity – a making of scenes, acts, beings, intentions and realizations such as I believe animals do not encounter. In fact, it is only in human life that I think one can really speak of "experience." And it is experiences that make up human memory, a psychical background of each normal* person's current consciousness and future envisagement. It is this structure that constitutes what we mean by the "life of the mind."
>   The dialectic which makes up that life is a real and constant cerebral process, the interplay between the two fundamental types of feeling, peripheral impact and autonomous action, or objective and subjective feeling. As fast as objective impingements strike our senses they become emotionally tinged and subjectified…[74]

Langer here clearly believes cognitive evaluations matter – beliefs, whether about ghosts and monsters and gods or about why the bus is late and what might be done about it, and especially expectations, which determine to a surprising extent what is perceived. Langer also stresses here the dynamic real-time mixing of sensory and imaginative activity, disposing the holder of these

[73] Langer, 1967: p. 89
[74] Langer, 1972: p. 342. * according to Merriam-Webster's, the preferable term 'neurotypical' was first used in 1994

expectations towards certain kinds of experience. This insight has been considerably fleshed out recently with work on predictive processing (PP).

To return to Davies' criticism of Langer – that she presupposes a theory of emotion which is inadequate – this criticism can be seen as an example of what Izard means by a misunderstanding caused by confusing basic emotion episodes and emotion schemas (albeit in philosophy of emotion rather than emotion science). Davies claims that Langer ignores the cognitive content of feeling, and in doing so, "when all the 'concomitants' are ignored, it seems not so much that we are left with the essential form of feelings as that the feelings themselves have been dispensed with."[75] These concomitants Davies lists as including objects that feelings are about, beliefs about these objects, behavioural expressions and causal contexts. The Pankseppian view would be that Davies' examples are of emotion schemas. Davies claims that, "Emotions are conceptually much richer than Langer allows."[76] As shown above, Langer does not deny that emotions can be conceptually rich – in the following are all the concomitants Davies lists:

> …most animals seem to be indifferent when no exciting situation evokes their emotions, while human beings generally exhibit some degree of elation or gloom, readiness to be touched in one way or another by everything around them; and the waves of feeling elicited by trivial events are greater than any practical response requires, especially where the most appropriate behaviour is to desist from any overt action.[77]

What is "around them" in this corresponds to objects that feelings are about and causal contexts, with being touched by "some degree of elation or gloom" corresponding to beliefs about these objects, since it is only by having beliefs about the objects that a positive or negative valence would be attached to awareness of them. Langer mentions "appropriate behaviour" where Davies lists behavioural expression. A helpful interpretation of the Langerean position is not that emotion

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[75] Davies, 1994: p. 128
[76] Ibid.: p. 129
[77] Langer, 1962: p. 69

cannot be cognitively complex, but that basic emotion action readiness programmes are not cognitively complex, a position corroborated by the work of Panksepp and Izard.

This section has shown a number of areas in which Langer's ideas on ideas on feeling are explicitly and implicitly used by current neuroscience, to the extent that Langer's philosophical framework of feeling remains an adequate account. This section has also noted how Langer's account of emotion is less detailed, but is capable of being integrated with contemporary accounts of emotion once the distinction between basic emotion and emotion schemas is incorporated.

2.3 Predictive Processing

This section looks at a proposal that has been developed over the last ten years as a way of explaining how perception functions and guides human action. Initially focussing on attention in the work of theoretical neuroscientist Karl Friston and philosopher Andy Clark, the account has more recently been expanded by Solms & Friston to include feeling.[78] The account goes well beyond what Langer offered; however, it is consistent with her more bare-bones account, with Langer writing of "perception moulded by imagination" and that "[o]ur sense organs are 'processing mechanisms."[79]

I begin by looking at Langer's account of seeing, and sensing more generally, and how sensation is processed, before contrasting it with contemporary accounts by Clark and Solms. I then argue that there is one crucial element in these contemporary PP accounts – known as confidence or precision weighting – which is absent in Langer, and which is crucial for a fuller understanding of why we feel. The section ends by discussing Langer's account of perception and cognition in relation to contemporary PP accounts.

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[78] Friston, 2009; Clark, 2013; Solms & Friston, 2018. In Friston's original formulation the term predictive coding was used instead of predictive processing
[79] Langer, 1967: p. 27; 1953: p. 372

As early as 1942, Langer offered an account of perception in which a subjective reality is actively

formed (bear in mind that Langer sees perception as a kind of feeling – exogenic feeling):

> The nervous system is the organ of the mind; its center is the brain, its extremities the
> sense-organs; and any characteristic function it may possess must govern the work of all its
> parts. In other words, the activity of our senses is "mental" not only when it reaches the
> brain, but in its very inception, whenever the alien world outside impinges on the furthest
> and smallest receptor. All sensitivity bears the stamp of mentality. "Seeing," for instance, is
> not a passive process, by which meaningless impressions are stored up for the use of an
> organizing mind, which construes forms out of these amorphous data to suit its own
> purposes. "Seeing" is itself a process of formulation; our understanding of the visible world
> begins in the eye.[80]

Langer here clearly sets up the idea of different levels of mental processing – sense organs do not

simply neutrally transmit sense data, but actively process the impinging alien world. Seeing, for

Langer, is a continuous matter of both abstracting forms from the visible world and modelling the

world based on these abstractions.[81] Langer would expand on this; this is how she describes human

mentality in 1962:

> …manipulation [of symbols] goes on almost all the time, either as reflective judging,
> predicting, and planning, or as free imagination, fiction, dramatic fancy, and – most
> effectively – new abstract formulation of facts, i.e., interpretation. This sort of thing does not
> result from filtering and scanning, or consist in making response combinations appropriate
> to a stimulus situation. Symbolic activity arises mainly within the organism, especially from
> within the brain itself.[82]

Note the continuity of this activity in Langer's formulation, and the emphasis on modelling the

world. Judging may be an executive function, but it is a bottom-up process in the sense that it is

generally led by evidence from the world; predicting, by contrast, is a top-down process in that it is

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[80] Langer, 1942: p. 90. Langer credits psychologists from "the school of [Max] Wertheimer, [Wolfgang] Köhler, and [Kurt] Koffka," active in the 1920s and 1930s, for this idea (p. 91). Contemporary psychologist Gustav Kuhn notes however that in the 1860s Hermann von Helmholtz "proposed that perception is a process of unconscious inference, in which we automatically and unconsciously come up with a best guess about the structure of the world that is consistent with both the retinal image and our past experience." See Kuhn, 2019: p. 104. Clark also notes it was Helmholtz who pioneered 'perception as a process of probabilistic, knowledge-driven inference.' See Clark, 2016: p. 19. Solms too notes Helmholtz's seminal work on "unconscious inference". See Solms, 2021: p. 218

[81] Langer, 1967: pp. 59-64

[82] Langer, 1962: p. 70

led by a model of the world – given that I know *x*, I expect *y* to happen. Langer's statement also makes clear that whilst symbolic activity is broadly continuous, at any one time we may be more preoccupied by judging and predicting or other kinds of symbolic manipulation. All of these elements exist in contemporary accounts by Clark and Solms albeit with a much greater emphasis on the continuity of the predictive processing that minds are engaged with.

This is Clark's 2016 version of perception:

> Perception is indeed a process in which we (or rather, various parts of our brains) try to guess what is out there, using the incoming signal more as a means of tuning and nuancing the guessing rather than as a rich (and bandwidth-costly) encoding of the state of the world.[83]

And Solms in 2021:

> [The brain's] task is to use [incoming] signals to create a probabilistic *model* of the regularities that exist in the real world (or, rather, between itself and the world) which it then uses to generate inferences that guide its actions – actions which must ensure its survival in that world. The actions, in turn, generate new sensory samples, which are used to further update the model, which it must do because models are imperfect things. This leads to new actions; and so on… the world as we experience it is literally generated from cortical representations. Within the predictive coding framework, odd as it seems, what we perceive is a *virtual reality* constructed from the mind's own building materials [84]

Across Langer, Clark and Solms the account given of perception is that it is mainly a matter of what Jacob Hohwy calls 'predicting the present' – anticipating the present situation based on a detailed mental model of the world.[85] Quite how this is done is not elaborated upon in Langer's account. In Clark and Solms' PP account however, there is a detailed explanation, a brief version of which will be included here.[86]

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[83] Clark, 2016: p. 27
[84] Solms, 2021: pp. 185, 213
[85] Ibid.: p. 142, citing Hohwy, 2013
[86] My gloss of Clark and Solms excludes discussion of free energy and Markov blankets, but otherwise contains all the functional elements of PP. For discussion of these see Clark, 2016: pp. 264, 305-6 and Solms, 2021: pp. 148-77

Under PP, the brain and nervous system are constantly involved in both top-down processing, where we use our model of the world to predict what is happening, and bottom-up processing, in which sensory cues (including interoceptive and proprioceptive cues) produce error signals if and only if the sensory signal is not accurately predicted. This is computationally efficient because only deviations from the expected situation are up-propagated, meaning the quantity of information processed is kept at a minimum.[87]

The structure of our expectations is our model of the world.[88] The only error signals which are up-propagated, which is to say the only perceptions which are fed forward to subsequent levels of processing, are those which do not conform to our expectations at each level. This greatly reduces the quantity of information which needs to be processed – Solms estimates that, ordinarily, the ratio of top-down model to bottom-up error signal is roughly 10:1.[89]

There is, however, another crucial element in the PP account: the level of confidence in our expectations needs to be encoded. Predictive processing is, as Solms notes above, probabilistic. To use a betting analogy – we need to know both the content of a bet and the odds. Solms explains the level of confidence in our expectations as expected uncertainty:

> The brain's internal model is the map we use to navigate the world – indeed to *generate* an expected world. But we can't take all our predictions at face value. There are in fact two aspects to the 'expected context' that the internal model generates: on the one hand we have the actual content of our predictions, and on the other is our *level of confidence* about their accuracy. Since all predictions are probabilistic, the degree of *expected uncertainty* attaching to them must also be coded. The predictions themselves are furnished by the forebrain's long-term memory networks, which filter the present through the lens of the past. But the second dimension – the adjustment of confidence levels – is the essence of the work that is performed by modulatory arousal.[90]

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[87] Solms, 2021: p. 184
[88] Clark, 2016: p. 127
[89] Solms, 2021: p. 142
[90] Ibid.: p. 144

By arousal Solms means feeling, which modulates both behaviour and potential behaviour. This additional element of expected uncertainty and its modulation is new to PP, and is essential to its explanation of consciousness. Langer does not hint at such a thing – that, for instance, I have a high level of confidence the doorbell will not ring in the middle of the night, but a much lower level of confidence that it will not ring in the daytime. Note that this does not mean my prediction has failed if the doorbell rings at midnight – what this high precision rating means is that I experience a precise error, meaning a very unexpected one, and I should act accordingly. A daytime doorbell is much less unexpected, or in the language of PP, a low precision error. Clark gives two contrasting examples of this modulatory arousal, in terms of attention when driving a car (the level of confidence or expected uncertainty are also known as weighting, or, most commonly, *precision*):

> Driving along a very familiar road in heavy fog, it can sometimes be wise to let detailed top-down knowledge play a substantial role. Driving fast along an unfamiliar winding mountain road, we need to let sensory input take the lead. How is a probabilistic prediction [PP] machine to cope?
> It copes, PP suggests, by continuously estimating and re-estimating its own sensory uncertainty. Within the PP framework, these estimations of sensory uncertainty modify the impact of sensory prediction error. This, in essence, is the predictive processing model of attention. Attention, thus construed, is a means of variably balancing the potent interactions between top-down and bottom-up influences by factoring in their so-called 'precision', where this is a measure of their estimated certainty or reliability (inverse variance, for the statistically savvy). This is achieved by altering the weighting (the gain or 'volume', to use a common analogy) on the error units accordingly.[91]

Here, then, we see that Solms' 10:1 ratio of top-down to bottom-up processing is in fact only a very rough estimation – designed to show the extent to which perception is driven by expectation but in fact highly variable:

> Attention, if this is correct, is simply a means by which certain error unit responses are given increased weight, hence becoming more apt to drive response, learning, and… action.[92]

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[91] Clark, 2016: p. 57
[92] Ibid.

Clark writes very little about feeling in his work on PP – one of his few references is that "the feeling of surprise… might be a way of preserving useful information that would otherwise be thrown away."[93] Whilst not implausible, this is far from an integrated account of feeling in perception. Langer's formulation here is in fact much fuller and more helpful, writing that feeling, "is the constant, systematic, but private display of what is going on in our own system, the index of much that goes on below the limen of sentience, and ultimately of the whole organic process, or life, that feeds and uses the sensory and cerebral system."[94] This is the sense in which she claims that consciousness is "'feeling', in the broadest sense."[95]

Similarly, writing of affect, Solms writes that "pleasure and unpleasure tell you *how you are doing* in relation to your biological needs."[96] Langer writes that perception needs an emotional element in order to make concepts and that "only a highly emotional creature could have developed the talent of abstract thought."[97] As noted in this chapter's introduction, Langer's is a biologically grounded theory of mind – in neurotypical, healthy individuals, our emotions are based on our feelings, and our feelings tell us how we are doing in biological terms (when such information might be useful to us). Solms' idea of feeling as the currency of consciousness corresponds to Langer's account – feeling motivates.

Clearly Langer's remarks here fall some way short of the outlining the PP framework, or indeed committing her to it, as Langer only mentions prediction occasionally and has no component similar to precision weighting. Other than this, however, it is remarkably consistent with PP, with feeling driving the functioning of concepts.[98]

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[93] Clark, 2016: p. 79
[94] Langer, 1967: p. 58
[95] Ibid.: p. 444
[96] Solms, 2021: p. 96
[97] Langer, 1962: pp. 68, 73
[98] Solms writes that consciousness itself is a matter of adjusting precision "to optimally match the amplitude of the incoming prediction errors." (Note these are proprioceptive and interoceptive as well as exteroceptive – or autogenic as well as exogenic, in Langer's terminology). This can also be framed as a process of disambiguation, or optimisation of confidence. Neuroscientist Aikaterina Fotopoulou was the first to suggest,

We are back at a Langerean idea of feeling being the driving force of consciousness, but with a new

account of why we feel:

> …affects make demands upon the mind, and… cognition performs the work so demanded. To be more precise, *conscious* cognition performs the work; for once it has been performed, and confidence in the (prioritised) belief that had become uncertain is restored, the generative model resumes its automatic mode of operation, below the threshold of awareness. Here once again is the mechanism of *learning from experience* that I have described repeatedly. This is the whole point of consciousness in cognition. You arrive in a situation in which you aren't sure what to do. Consciousness comes to the rescue: you feel your way through the scenario, noting the voluntary actions that work for you. Then, gradually, the successful lessons become automatised and consciousness is no longer needed.[99]

This is a compelling account of the integration of feeling and thinking, one that remains theoretical

though it is worth stressing that the increased energy consumption and decreased speed of thinking

relative to feeling, and feeling relative to automatic processing, lends support to such an account.

Solms notes that emotional needs can be managed automatically too "by means of behavioural

stereotypes such as 'instincts'."[100] This, indeed, according to Solms, is the theoretical justification for

consciousness – we must deal with competing needs, and weighing them automatically would be

impractical, so we must weigh them consciously – we must feel them – and the needs must feel

categorically different to each other – qualitatively different:

> The answer starts from the fact that needs cannot be combined and summated in any simple way. *Our multiple needs cannot be reduced to a single common denominator; they must be evaluated on separate, approximately equal scales, so that each of them can be*

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in response to Solms' earlier work, that consciousness itself is precision optimisation (rather than hedonic valence). Solms' response was that hedonic, or affective valence is identical to precision optimisation: precision is optimised as we feel our way through situations. So long as it is remembered that feeling can be simple, involving only the brainstem, or complex, involving the cortex, then 'feeling', the 'process of consciousness', and 'precision optimisation' are synonymous terms. Solms does not refute Clark's idea that attention is the driving engine of optimisation of precision, nor does he integrate it with his own idea that affective valence is this optimisation of precision; one suggestion that seems implicit in the work of Clark and Solms is that attention might profitably be seen as neutrally valenced affect. There is little real tension between Clark and Solms' ideas here. Indeed, Clark notes how an unexpected tractor will involve a rapid switching of the mental model used which provokes not only neutrally valenced attention, but quite likely negatively valenced attention, or negative affect. See Solms, 2021: pp. 200, 207, 347; Fotopoulou, 2013: p. 35; Clark, 2016: p. 58

[99] Solms, 2021: p. 220
[100] Ibid.: p. 99

given its due. You cannot simply say that '3/10 of hunger plus 1/10 of thirst equals 4/20 of total need; and then try to minimise the total sum, because each need must be satisfied in its own right. Energy metabolism is not the same as hydration is not the same as thermoregulation, and so on; each of them is essential. As the behavioural neuroscientist Edmund Rolls puts it: 'If food reward were to *always* be much stronger than other rewards, then the animal's genes would not survive, for it would never drink water.'

Taking these factors together, it makes sense for biological self-organising systems to distinguish their needs (their error values) *categorically*. The distinction between categorical variables is *qualitative*. Since error type A of 8/10 cannot be equated with error type B of the same value, for the reasons I have just explained, they must be treated as categorical variables. This enables the system to give each of them its due in the long run *and* to prioritise them contextually. That is why it makes sense for complex self-evidencing systems to categorise (to 'colour-code' or 'flavour') their multiple homeostats, so that they may compute them independently of each other and prioritise the outcomes.[101]

Solms acknowledges that it is possible that automatic action prioritisation could be developed, but stresses how expensive, both in terms of processing delay and the energy needed to do it, such a system would be. A much more time and power efficient organisation is to process needs separately and to have a way of weighing them against each other situationally, which is what Solms suggests.[102] Langer does not have a model involving precision weighting, but she does note that "value exists only where there is consciousness. Where nothing ever is felt, nothing matters."[103] Feeling tells us what is important, in relation to homeostatic needs of different kinds, and the fact that competing needs exist makes the capacity to flexibly prioritise valuable. But this last point must be read into Langer – who does not touch on the kind of compartmentalization that Solms discusses here, a compartmentalisation that leads to the "fact that each affect possess not only a *continuous* hedonic valence (a *degree* of pleasure and unpleasure, which is something common to all affects) but also a *categorical quality* (so that, for example, thirst feels different from separation distress, which feels different from disgust, and so on). These are the essential features of affective qualia, the elemental form of all qualia: they possess both quantity *and quality*."[104] Feeling, in other words,

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[101] Ibid.: pp. 192-3
[102] Ibid.: p. 194
[103] Langer, 1967: p. 444
[104] Solms, 2021: p. 194

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allows us to weigh our competing needs against each other in an efficient way which takes into account the proprioceptive and, especially, interoceptive context (the strength of each of our needs), and the exteroceptive context (environmental affordances, near and far, with the potential to help meet our needs).

PP is an ongoing project: Clark notes that recent work, by cognitive and computational neuroscientist Anil Seth (2013) and cognitive scientist Giovanni Puzzulo (2013), integrates PP more fully into emotion schemas.[105] These accounts centre on the match or mismatch between top-down and bottom-up signals regarding our interoceptive states, which is then contextualised further upstream with interoceptive, proprioceptive and exteroceptive signals in generating perceptual predictions. Differing perceptual expectations therefore play a large role in the interpretation of identical bodily stimuli – Clark notes that a 'brute signal' such as an injection of adrenaline "combine[s] with contextually induced 'cognitive appraisals' leading us to interpret the very same bodily 'evidence' as either elation, anger, or lust according to our framing expectations."[106]

This kind of bodily evidence, that can be various interpreted, matches well to Langer's claim for there being forms of feeling, a morphology of feeling which is at once specific and applicable to more than one emotion:

> …the same process of excitation may occur in entirely different circumstances, in situations that build up to disaster and in others that dissolve without practical consequences. The same feeling may be an ingredient in sorrow and in the joys of love. A work of art expressing such an ambiguously associated effect will be called "cheerful" by one interpreter and "wistful" or even "sad" by another. But what it really conveys is just one nameless passage of "felt life…"[107]

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[105] Clark, 2016: p. 233
[106] Ibid.: p. 234
[107] Langer, 1953: p. 374

Contemporary neuroscience finds that there are forms of feeling, which can then be thought about –

brute signals such as the adrenaline injection that are consequently subject to cognitive appraisals.

On this, not only is contemporary neuroscience making us of Langer, it is corroborating her.

This section has essentially sought to modernize Langer's account of feeling, bringing it up to date by

integrating recent work on PP. Fascinatingly, only one functional element needs to be brought in to

Langer's account in order to do this – that of confidence or precision weighting. I have argued that

Langer's account absorbs this element very easily, and that it profits by it. The added element of

precision weighting justifies what Solms calls the colour-coding or flavouring of homeostats – why

our different streams of perception feel different, and indeed why we feel, or why we are conscious:

in order to flexibly prioritise based on the expected uncertainties attached to contents of our mental

models.

2.4 Salience Reconsidered

In Chapter 1, Langer's ideas on salience were outlined, but found to be lacking detail. Langer writes

that, "we apprehend everything which comes to us as impact from the world by imposing some

image on it that stresses its salient features and shapes it for recognition and memory."[108] Salience is

context-dependent, and, when present, qualities occur by degrees. Whilst intuitively plausible, and

coherent within Langer's wider ideas, questions remain regarding how salience operates – in

particular how a feature or quality is determined to be salient. This is another area where more

recent work can be used to elaborate on Langer's ideas.

The section begins by considering salience from a neuroscientific perspective, before bringing Langer

back into the discussion of both salience and images. This leads into a discussion of artworks,

considering the varying degree of detail in works by Rembrandt van Rijn and M. C. Escher, in which I

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[108] Langer, 1967: p. 59

argue that considering salience from the perspective of PP provides a more convincing reading of these works than a formal reading in isolation.

Solms writes that prediction errors are "the salient part of the data."[109] Writing about PP, Clark writes that, "[this] is a world in which unexpected absences are every bit as salient as that which is real and present."[110] A model such as PP seems necessary in order to account for unexpected absences, which are clearly salient in everyday life. This section looks at salience in contemporary neuroscience and philosophy of mind – going well beyond Langer in detail but, remarkably, without needing to change Langer's conceptual framework.

Edelman claims that the ability to establish salience is instinctive, and, alongside punishment and reward, is regulated by neuromodulators:

> …selectional brains necessarily must operate under constraints imposed by value systems. These are evolutionarily inherited structures in the brain that establish salience, punishment, and reward… value systems consist largely of diffuse ascending neural networks that modulate synaptic responses by releasing specific neuromodulators or transmitters in a broadside fashion. One example is the system in the basal ganglia and the brain stem that releases dopamine. Release of dopamine during training is critical to the anticipation of rewarding acts.[111]

Edelman writes of value systems establishing salience, punishment and reward – Solms writes very directly of these being established by *feeling* as the 'currency' of consciousness; in this case, dopamine, the "command neuromodulator" of the SEEKING system, modulates the activity of the brain so that it is "action ready" for "problem-solving activities" (other neuromodulators could ready the brain for other tasks – for instance, opioids "shut down dopamine...[which is] why depression is characterised by the mirror opposites of the feelings that characterise SEEKING).[112]

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109 Solms, 2021: p. 188
110 Clark, 2016: p. 239
111 Edelman, 2006: p. 59
112 Solms, 2021: pp. 108, 115, 140, 204. Solms also notes, on p. 133, that neuromodulators "can only modulate (upwards or downwards) signals that actually exist – i.e. currently active channels. They are released diffusely but they influence only those neurons which 1) have the relevant receptors and 2) are currently active."

Solms sees salience very much as assisting in meeting current needs (these can be bodily or emotional):

> A prioritised need… is the currently most salient source of uncertainty. Inferences about its causes become conscious as affect, because fluctuations in your confidence level concerning the possible actions required to meet this need must be modulated by feelings. The feelings tell you how well or badly you are doing. The unfolding context giving rise to the fluctuations must become conscious too, for the same reason… All of it is just felt uncertainty.[113]

In life, the perceptual situations which are least certain - about which our models have least to say - have the greatest *surprisal*, a measure of surprise which closely corresponds to prediction error (the other perceptual situations with large surprisal are when we get precise error signals - huge blundering errors).[114] This means they are most worth thinking about - using the cortex to navigate the uncertainty, teasing apart the information dense experience. Of course, these perceptual experiences are also the hardest to keep hold of, because we have the least understanding of them, the least conceptual scaffolding to support our memory of the experience.

Langer claims that most people are too preoccupied by the practical significance of feeling, which blinds us to the nature of feeling itself; feeling's reference distracts us from the affective state in itself:

> What is felt, what feeling is like, how human activity appears within the agent himself…[is known only] vaguely, except for the acute states which have names such as indignation, anxiety, relief, terror, pain, joy, etc. The real patterns of feeling – how a small fright, or "startle," terminates, how the tensions of boredom increase or give way to self-entertainment, how daydreaming weaves in and out of realistic thought, how the feeling of a place, a time of day, an ordinary situation is built up – these felt events, which compose the fabric of mental life, usually pass unobserved, unrecorded, and therefore essentially unknown to the average person.[115]

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[113] Ibid.: pp. 204-5
[114] Clark, 2016: p. 25
[115] Langer, 1967: p. 57

Langer describes different feeling states mixing into each other, existing against a backdrop of a certain amount of emotional stimulation. Langer claims that these experiences are difficult to notice and keep hold of:

> It may seem strange that the most immediate experiences in our lives should be the least recognized, but there is a reason for this apparent paradox, and the reason is precisely their immediacy. They pass unrecorded because they are known without any symbolic mediation, and therefore without conceptual form. We usually have no objectifying images of such experiences to recall and recognize…[116]

Whilst most people do not notice these patterns of feeling, Langer claims that artists do, and that they generally have "a naïve but intimate and expert knowledge of feeling."[117]

This is suggestive for thinking about artworks - particularly artworks which present uncertainty. With this more fleshed out notion of salience as it concerns perception, salience in artworks can now be reconsidered. Rembrandt scholar Ernst Van De Wetering notes that Rembrandt often completes works in varying degrees of detail - a device which focuses the viewer's attention on certain aspects of the work:

> It has on occasion been said that Rembrandt could not paint hands. The explanation for this mistaken idea probably lies in the fact that whenever he painted figures with their hands visible, Rembrandt usually toned these down and gave as little detail as possible, apparently observing his own deliberate hierarchical ordering of tonal values and attention-drawing detail in a painting.[118]

> [In reference to *Bust of a man in oriental dress*, shown in Figure 2] These pearls and the fur cape were later covered by a brownish, simpler garment… Where such toning-down interventions are seen in works that are unquestioningly by Rembrandt they appear to have been introduced in order to enhance indirectly the effect of other lit parts in the painting, in this case probably of the turban. Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719), who knew several of Rembrandt's pupils, referred to this particular type of intervention by Rembrandt in his own works when he reports that the latter 'is said to have tanned over (overpainted with brownish paint) a beautiful Cleopatra in order to give full effect to a single pearl.'[119]

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[116] Ibid.: p. 57
[117] Ibid.: p. 64
[118] Van de Wetering, 2017: p. 581
[119] Ibid.: p. 551

Figure 2: Rembrandt van Rijn, 'Bust of a Man in Oriental Dress', 1635, oil on panel
(Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 720 x 545 mm)

> …Rembrandt subordinated the degree of elaboration and lighting of the elements of his images to the pictorial role the relevant elements play in the painting *as a whole*.[120]

These remarks by Van de Wetering show that it was common practice for Rembrandt to modulate both the tonality and degree of elaboration in his paintings. Whilst this is often understood in formal terms of subject isolation and emphasis, it can also be understood using the PP framework. If, in a work such as *Bust of a man in Oriental Dress* (Figure 2), we are being presented with not only subject matter but also a *point-of-view*, then the "deliberate hierarchical ordering of tonal values and attention-drawing detail" can be seen as presenting the viewer with regions of high precision and regions of low precision – the latter, for instance the dark background in the upper third, are areas which PP suggests are much less likely to reward sensory sampling (attention) than the turban and face. Few viewers pay much attention to areas such as this, and those that do generally do so after first paying attention to the areas which are more elaborated. Perceptually, the background and garment are not salient parts of the painting; relative clarity is guiding the viewer's attention.

Consider Figure 3, Rembrandt's *A Woman Wading in a Pool*. If we consider it only visually, the fact that the hand is not finished, that it is sketchy and cartoonish, ought to be distracting because of its departure from naturalism. If, however, we consider information more generally, then the low degree of elaboration can be seen in two ways – with one possibility seeing it as analogous to fog in Clark's driving example, where Clark called it "a noisy and unreliable guide to the state of the distal realm." In the case of 'A Woman Bathing in a Stream', however, it is difficult to imagine atmospheric features which might cause such an effect, in an illuminated and foregrounded part of the figure. The other option is that, more plausibly, the arm with the low degree of elaboration has been given a low precision weighting. If the viewer is being presented with a perceptual experience (perception

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[120] Ibid.: p. 643

Figure 3: Rembrandt van Rijn, 'A Woman Wading in a Pool', 1654, oil on panel (National Gallery, London, 618 x 470 mm)

in the Clark and Solms sense discussed in this chapter rather than passive bottom-up processing), then this low degree of precision weighting could indicate a lack of attention on the behalf of the beholder. The hand is not salient.

This is as much as to say that, if the line of argument is correct, Rembrandt uses the device of hierarchical ordering of attention drawing detail to convey information about the gaze of the point-of-view of the picture (possibly himself). As noted, the PP framework goes considerably beyond Langerean ideas, but it is possible that Langer has something like this in mind when she remarks, when discussing the modelling function of perception and the emphasising function of emotion, "Consequently the form seems to emerge from a rich background of vaguer details that may attain varying degrees of importance, and it may be their fluctuation which makes the stable lines strong by contrast."[121]

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[121] Langer, 1962: p. 71

M. C. Escher can be seen to employ this device to quite different effect. In his woodcut *Sky and Water 1* (1938, Figure 4), the topmost bird and bottommost fish are printed with most detail, with a hierarchy of attention drawing detail so that the least detailed animals occur at the depicted waterline. This hierarchy means that, unusually, it is difficult to focus attention on the animals in the middle of the image compared to when attending to either the top bird or bottom fish. It can be done, but there is a pull to other, most detailed, parts of the image. This is not the case, however, with the waterline itself, which might be said to be the area of greatest surprisal, where there is great uncertainty. It is one of the vaguest waterlines in art history. Because of this the waterline, like
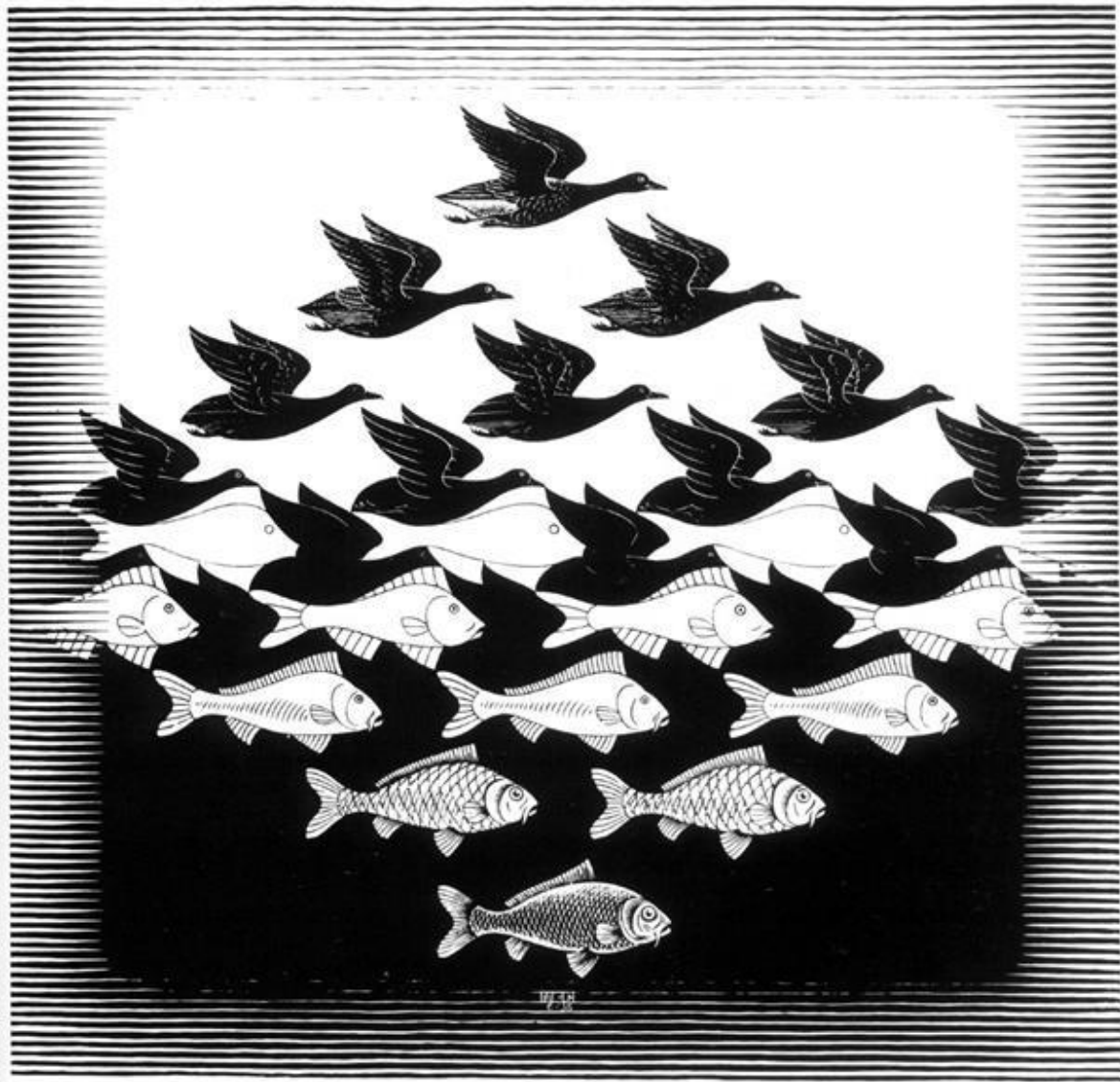
Figure 4: M. C. Escher, 'Sky and Water 1', 1938, Woodcut Print (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 520 x 520 mm)

the top bird and bottom fish, are salient, and draw the viewer's gaze. Note that the black areas to the right and left of the bottom fish are not areas of great surprisal – the lack of differentiation there means that they do not promise to reward attention.

In this section I have argued that Langer's somewhat vague account of salience can be remedied by recourse to some of the work in PP, which has benefited from her work. I have applied this way of understanding salience to specific artworks, arguing that these works can be usefully read as presenting the viewer with areas of high precision and low precision.

Conclusion

This chapter has made a case for the Langerean framework of feeling as a coherent and fertile account which integrates precisely with contemporary neuroscientific findings and philosophical work on PP. In contrast to Davies' characterisation of Langer's account of feeling as presupposed and inadequate, Langer's framework has been argued to be carefully thought through and remains adequate. In the context of this thesis, what it means to be an image of feeling will be explored in the following chapter, however, Solms' quote regarding multiple streams of colour-coded or flavoured homeostats is a good jumping off point from this chapter. Each of these homeostats is a gradient, and, if the argument of this chapter is correct, then the entire point of being aware of them is to consider them alongside each other, weighing correlation and value.

This chapter has argued that Langer's ideas on feeling remain relevant – that they are logically coherent, remain scientifically plausible, and indeed are being used in current scientific study, and that they are useful for thinking about the way things seem – with this meant to apply both to the experience of consciousness and to the structure of artworks.

This conclusion will sketch some connections between Langer's philosophical work on mind and her ideas on human culture – between subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

Langer's philosophy of art was written before her philosophy of mind, but, as numerous commentators have written, her position remains remarkably consistent throughout.[122] One major advantage, for aesthetics, is that what Langer means by terms such as feeling and imagination and tension is unusually clear – even when not strictly defined her framework has a functional place for the various elements.

It may be thought at this point that, whilst Langer seems to have been of importance in clarifying certain concepts and setting contemporary neuroscience into a fertile framework of investigation, her importance is historical – that both empirical findings and theoretical work done since has made Langer's account obsolete. This would be misguided, since it ignores the connections Langer made explicit between feeling and cultural forms; Langer's account of feeling underpins, for instance, her account of art – the subject of the following chapter – and rival accounts are neither as plausible nor as integrative. My use of PP to consider Rembrandt and Escher in this chapter, for instance, yields a promising but isolated insight; Langer's framework promises to coordinate such insights.

There are accounts of art on offer from neuroscientists. Damasio, for instance, has a few pages in his most recent book linking art appreciation and homeostasis; he does not cite Langer, but has a Langerean thrust of argument (taking Damasio's use of the term 'signposts' loosely to mean representation):

> How can we imagine the birth of the arts and not picture the reasoning of one individual working on the resolution of a problem posed by a feeling – artist's own or someone else's?... Paintings, and far later texts, provided signposts and pauses for reflection, warning, play and enjoyment. They provided attempts at clarifications for what must have been confusing confrontations with reality. They helped sort out and organize knowledge. They provided meaning.[123]

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[122] For instance, Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p. 1; Innis, 2009: p. 252
[123] Damasio, 2018: pp. 179-82

This approach can be broadly labelled Langerean, and is not an attempt to supplant accounts of art but rather to show how these might integrate with his wider project of considering feeling in human life.

Leading neuroscientist Eric Kandel has written a book which, much like Langer's *Mind*, seeks to gain insight into the mind from close attention to artworks. He does in fact indirectly reference Langer, though only *PINK*, a pity since the project is thoroughly Langerean in general character. Contrasting art with science, Kandel writes that art "provides insight into the more fleeting, experiential qualities of mind, what a certain experience feels like."[124]

Kandel has another book which focuses very much on the neuroaesthetics of abstract painting.[125] The strange feature of his text is that whilst Kandel tells the reader his argument, he fails to make it convincing. The thesis is that most of the history of Western painting has relied heavily on bottom-up processing, because the demands made on the visual system are similar to those made on us by the world, whereas beholding of an abstract painting relies much more on top-down processing. The thesis, however, remains unsupported – to the extent that the opposite thesis could also be the case. Kandel fundamentally underplays the role of top-down perception in figurative work and fails to recognise the emphasis on materiality which has been such a focus of modernist works – the physical experience of them, perhaps most obvious with the emphasis on viewing conditions in Abstract Expressionist painting – which would not be the case if Kandel's argument here were the whole story. Kandel's work exists within neuroarthistory, a sub-discipline which has only recently been formalized in the work of John Onians, who claims nonetheless that work on looking at how neural difference is expressed in art has been going on since at least Aristotle.[126] Onians writes that "Neuroarthistory is not a theory, but an approach. Its defining feature is only a readiness to use

[124] Kandel, 2012: pp. xvi, 562
[125] Kandel, 2016.
[126] Onians, 2007: p. 18

neuroscientific knowledge to answer any of the questions that an art historian may wish to ask."[127]

Whilst Langer's ideas could help here, helping art history and neuroscience under a shared philosophical framework of feeling, Onians does make use of the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on metaphor which has been connected to Langer.[128]

Neuroaesthetics, meanwhile, has been criticized for not having a philosophical framework. Reviewing an edited volume on neuroaesthetics, Vincent Bergeron writes that there is little convergence amongst contributors regarding what they are trying to explain, and "virtually no discussions of classical and contemporary philosophical theories of aesthetics."[129] Langer's framework has the advantages of being simple and already well integrated into contemporary neuroscience and psychology and appears to have substantial integrative potential.

Part of the content of this chapter depends on certain positions within neuroscience being substantiated – for instance that consciousness depends on the brainstem rather than the cortex, a position that the majority of neuroscientists discussed in this chapter hold but is not generally accepted. Anil Seth, for instance, is sceptical:

> Typically, the brainstem has been thought of as an 'enabling factor' for consciousness, much like a power cable is an enabling factor for a TV. But the brainstem plays a highly active role in physiological regulation, leading some to suggest that this is where consciousness arises – with no need for cortex [Seth cites Solms and Merker here]. I think this is extremely unlikely, given the weight of explanatory evidence linking cortex (and thalamus) to conscious states. Having said this, the brainstem may play a more decisive role in shaping conscious states than suggested by the power cable analogy.[130]

Despite a few references to cortical and subcortical processes, Langer's framework is separable from this issue. What is potentially worrying, however, is that because so much of the use made of the

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[127] Ibid.: p. 17
[128] Onians, 2016: pp. 71-2, 109, 149. After drawing connections between a text by Johnson and Langer, Dengerink Chaplin concludes, "Indeed, there is not much in Johnson's book that had not already been said by Langer." See Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p 246
[129] Bergeron, 2010: p. 192
[130] Seth, 2021: p. 304

Langerean framework is within Neuro-Psychoanalysis, with much less use made outside the sub-discipline, that Langer's fortunes may be somewhat tied to those of the discipline.

Citing Langer, Browning stresses how, unlike animals, human affect initially *inhibits* behaviour:

> Whereas animal affect leads to learned sensorimotor behavior, behavior that is indirectly communicative when other animals interpret it as meaningful, in the case of human social activity affect is launched into a symbolic way station entailing an initial inhibition of behavior.[131]

Another way to understand this is that the first symbolic projection is from the brainstem to the cortex, where thinking occurs, driven by feeling. Browning quotes Solms as noting that this inhibition of behaviour requires that frustrated emotions be tolerated.[132] As noted earlier in the chapter, thinking slows down behaviour:

> Both Solms and Panksepp identify, as [neuroscientist Terrence] Deacon does as well, a process of inhibition enabling the recoding of cognition into a symbolic system of reference. Langer's relatively simple but powerful insight is her recognition that feeling is really what we mean by consciousness, affective consciousness as we now understand it. Whereas consciousness is easily construed as something animals *have*, it is better to understand feeling as something animals *do*… In the case of the human species what we in turn *do* with feeling is to render it into forms that temporally halt our activity, thus allowing our species to fashion intentions *to act* rather than intentions *in acting*.[133]

Whereas animal feeling directly effects behaviour, human feeling generally effects behaviour indirectly, with symbolic mediation. It is Browning who most clearly connects the neuroscientific with the cultural significance of Langer's work:

> Feeling is a thoroughly organic phenomenon associated in Solms' and Panksepp's work with the subcortical structures of our brains that we share with other mammalian species. This capacity to feel grounds us in the natural world, as indeed it grounds all mammals. Yet feeling is what the human species utilizes in its unique fashion to create symbols – symbols that embed us in a culture mediated by these very symbols themselves. Creatures of the natural world, we yet carry out our intentions in a projected theatre of our own devising, an intersubjective stage upon which we collectively examine our external world and learn to

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[131] Browning, 2019: p. 38
[132] Solms, 2013: p. 13 in Browning, 2019: p. 39
[133] Browning, 2019: p. 39

understand the worlds inside us.[134]

Feeling, in other words, powers both subjectivity and intersubjectivity, the latter through shared symbolic forms. Browning does not mention articulate products other than language, but it is clear from her presentation of Langer's views that she also thinks intersubjectivity is made possible through artworks as well as language.

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[134] Ibid.: p. 43

Chapter 3

The Qualitative Theory of Art

Langer writes that "art is essentially qualitative."[1] Her theory of art is a version of an expressivist

theory, a group of theories which state that artworks are defined by being expressive of human

feeling or emotion. To be plausible, an expressivist theory of art needs to coherently explain the

sense in which and the process by which feeling or emotion are contained in artworks and account

for why the experience of being presented with feeling and emotion in the form of artworks is

valuable. In these, Langer's resembles R.G. Collingwood's in several respects, whilst being unique in

others. This chapter aims to introduce Langer's theory of art and examine its conceptual building

blocks.

The chapter begins with three sections which first present an overview of Langer's account of art

before secondly moving onto looking at how this works in the case of painting and then, thirdly,

sculpture. Two sections follow comparing Langer's ideas with those of Collingwood and then

Heinrich Wölfflin. The following section considers Langer's theory of art in relation to the criteria set

out by Stephen Davies in his overview of definitions of art, situating Langer's account and

considering how it holds up against Davies' objections to functionalist accounts such as Langer's.

Additional objections are then considered, before the final section of the chapter, which looks at the

claim that inexpressive artworks exist.

The reception of Langer in relation to Anglo-American readings of both early and late Wittgenstein

will take up the first half of Chapter 4. As Paul Guyer notes, quoted in the introduction to this study,

theories that place expression at the centre of accounts of artistic value declined in popularity from

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[1] Langer, 1951: p. 182. Langer does not give this name to her theory, which is done here to draw attention to
both the qualities of feeling that artworks are about in Langer's account, and the qualities of form they are
projected through

the mid-twentieth century; however, work has continued within analytic aesthetics on theories of expression, particularly musical expression, with the difference that these are not meant as expressivist theories of art but only accounts of expression if and when it occurs. Philosopher of art Noël Carroll notes that neo-Wittgensteinian objections, derived from readings of the *Philosophical Investigations*, interrupted the project of defining art altogether in the middle of the century.[2] The two major objections were 1) that since art must be capable of expansion it cannot be defined and, furthermore, 2) that artworks are recognised through a 'family resemblance' to each other rather than by being defined by necessary and sufficient conditions.[3] Scepticism later emerged towards these objections, the first due to an equivocation between art-practices and art-works, and the latter due to so-called 'family resemblances' being more accurately called resemblances, begging the question of which resemblances are relevant since everything resembles everything else in at least some aspects.[4] Carroll accounts for the emergence of theories by George Dickie and Arthur Danto as partly responding to this call, as in their accounts various social, cultural and theoretical practices confer the status of art – that artworks are defined by artworlds.[5] A complementary view is that this shift in theories of art towards an emphasis on artworlds coincides with the emergence of the 'New Art History' which had a similar emphasis on conditions of production, replacing an earlier 20th Century emphasis on manifest properties of artworks.

Langer criticizes, "the tacit assumption that what is expressed in art is always an emotion, when in fact it may be the mere feeling of vitality, energy or somnolence, or the sense of quietness, or of concentration, or any of the countless inward actions and conditions which are felt in the living fabric of mental life…"[6] These qualitative gradients in what Langer calls the life of feeling have been discussed in Chapter 2. Because artworks need only express feeling, Langer's version of expressivism

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[2] Carrol, 2000: p. 3
[3] Ibid.: pp. 6-12
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.: pp. 13-5
[6] Langer, 1967: p. 84

is shielded from a frequent criticism of expressivist theories – that emotion need not be expressed in all artworks, a judgement Langer clearly agrees with. Dominic Lopes, for instance, writes that "there are art traditions which quite intelligibly make inexpressive pictures the ideal," – though he does not give examples.[7] From his examples of expression, it is clear he, unlike Langer, considers expression in art to solely refer to the expression of emotion. Langer's expressivism, therefore, needs to pass a slightly less stringent test in this regard – that all artworks need to be expressive of feeling, which may include but is not limited to emotion.

3.1 The Qualitative Theory of Art

This section introduces Langer's theory of art. Beginning with a discussion of what Langer says art is, and how it functions, I go on to look at Langer's justification for the purpose of art, contrasting Langer's expressivism with Jenefer Robinson's ideas on expressiveness. The section ends with a discussion on Langer's views of projection and the qualitative.

Langer's theory states that artworks present forms of feeling.[8] These forms are images, in the Langerean sense discussed in Chapter 1 of reified semblances. This is possible because both feeling and artistic elements are experienced as qualitative gradients; the forms of each are congruent.[9] Feeling may be complex or simple – more or fewer gradients can be experienced simultaneously; artworks, similarly, may present many gradients at once or very few.[10] In either case, there is a unity to the feeling or artwork – an overall quality.[11] It is this quality of feeling that an artist tries to express when creating a work, negotiating the artistic elements.[12]

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[7] Lopes, 2005: p. 2; Jenefer Robinson agrees with Lopes on this point, see Robinson, 2017a: p. 249
[8] Langer, 1953: p. 40
[9] Langer, 1951: p. 182
[10] Langer, 1967: pp. 103, 159
[11] Ibid.: p. 101
[12] Langer, 1953: p. 59

Artists work by weighing qualities in the forming artwork – a formulation that seems to capture practices as diverse as traditional easel painting or the selection of Readymades, a composer writing a symphony or a rock band writing a song, or theatre directors giving feedback to actors on blocking or actors improvising a scene of street theatre.[13] "Artistic forms," Langer writes, "are more complex than any other symbolic forms we know. They are, indeed, not abstractable from the works that exhibit them. We may abstract a shape from an object that has that shape, by disregarding color, weight and texture, even size; but to the total effect that is an artistic form, the color matters, the thickness of lines matters, and the appearance of texture and weight."[14] The value of art is intrinsic to the work, rather than being a communication medium, and it is the sensuous qualities of the work which give the viewer access to the meaning (literary work being experienced in the sensuous imagination).[15]

The purpose of art is to facilitate learning – to clarify and strengthen our intuition.[16] Knowledge of feeling captures what artworks are meant to help us with educationally, socially, and cross-culturally. We have access, in life and in art, to forms only, from which we extrapolate meaning.[17] In life, the forms of feeling are too embedded in practical situations for us to contemplate them. When art is viewed as art, the experience of them is disinterested, the forms are isolated from practical situations. Art educates us about feeling:

> What discursive symbolism – language in its literal use – does for our awareness of things about us and our own relation to them, the arts do for our awareness of subjective reality, feeling and emotion; they give inward experiences form and thus make them conceivable. The only way we can really envisage vital movement, the stirring and growth and passage of emotion, and ultimately the whole direct sense of human life, is in artistic terms. A musical person thinks of emotions musically. They can not be discursively talked about above a very general level. But they may none the less be known – objectively set forth, publicly known –

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[13] Some artworks are not properly considered as objects, such as literature; in such cases Langer states that the work is given directly to the imagination, rather than perception. See Langer,1953: pp. 217, 226, 397
[14] Langer, 1957: pp. 25-6
[15] Langer, 1953: pp. 31, 284-5, 385-6
[16] Ibid.: p. 397
[17] Ibid.: p. 49

and there is nothing necessarily confused or formless about emotions.[18]

Langer's expressivism, moreover, does not insist on melodrama and high emotion. Jenefer Robinson has written of the difference between being 'an expression of' and being 'expressive of' which makes sense in its own terms but is both antithetical to Langer's ideas and to any attempt at an expressivist definition of art.[19] The problem is both that 1) the notion of emotion underlying Robinson's ideas is strong emotion, which as noted is much different from Langer's more inclusive notion of feeling and 2) greater articulation of the artistic idea, or greater expressiveness, is seen as better in Robinson's formulation. Robinson writes that "People's expressions of emotion can be more or less expressive. In ordinary life often all that matters is that I pick up on what emotion you are expressing, whether cheerfulness or anger. The expression does not have to be very expressive. A smile is enough to indicate that you are friendly and not a threat to me; you don't have to fall down before me and clutch my knees."[20] For Robinson, greater expressiveness is better – which leads to the conclusion that there are inexpressive artworks whose value must lie elsewhere, for otherwise they would not have value. Langer similarly equates artistic quality with expressiveness, but because she does not base her account on strong emotion, much subtler states are expressible, and expressivism can account for works which for Robinson would be thought inexpressive, so long as they have a particular quality that can be felt.

Langer holds that artworks are each a symbol expressive of human feeling.[21] As seen in Chapter 1, artworks seen as artworks are images rather than models, so an artwork is an image expressive of human feeling. By expression – to press out – Langer means projection, she uses the example of

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[18] Langer, 1957: p. 71
[19] Robinson, 2007: p. 265
[20] Ibid.: p. 30
[21] Langer, 1957: p. 125

horns projected from the head of a reindeer.[22] An art image is therefore a projection of feeling, not spontaneous feeling – but the artist's knowledge of feeling.

Langer writes that artists try to express a unitary gestalt:

> What any true artist – painter or poet, it does not matter – tries to "re-create" is not a yellow chair, a hay wain or a morally perplexed prince, as a "symbol of his emotion," but that quality which he has once known, the emotional "value" that events, situations, sounds or sights in their passing have had for him. He need not represent those same items of his experience, though psychologically it is a natural thing to do if they were outstanding forms; they rhythm they let him see and feel may be projected in other sensible forms, perhaps even more purely. When he finds a theme that excites him it is because he thinks that in his rendering of it he can endow it with some such quality, which is really a way of feeling.[23]

Langer believes that people have feelings, and artists have special sensitivity to feeling, and when working in an artistic mode, seek to articulate feelings, so that the resulting artwork *seems to* possess the same quality as the feeling the artist has in mind. Langer stresses that the artist need not have experienced the feeling, but they must be capable of imagining it:

> 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 than 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.[24]

In this section I have introduced the major elements of Langer's theory of art, that artworks are forms of feeling which function through the presentation of qualitative gradients with the purpose of giving those who experience art knowledge of what feeling is like.

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[22] Langer, 1967: p. 74
[23] Ibid.: pp. 118-9
[24] Langer, 1953: p. 374

3.2 Gradients

This section unpacks the way in which the gradients function in Langer's account of pictorial art .

After introducing the term space tensions, I use as an example a painting by Edgar Degas, discussing

how space tensions might be seen to operate within the painting. This then leads into a discussion

on how, for Langer, the space tensions found in artworks do not exist in common space; there are

notable exceptions to this – in childhood, for artistic consciousness, and for religious consciousness.

After exploring these, the section makes the link back to qualitative gradients, looking at some of

Langer's examples of how these function.

To take the special cases of painting, sculpture and architecture, Langer's notion of virtual space that

is a creation, not a recreation, and functions according to rules other than those of the everyday

space in which we live, prompts her to introduce the idea of space-tensions:

> Plastic art, like all other art, exhibits an interplay of what artists in every realm call
> "tensions". The relations of masses, the distribution of accents, direction of lines, indeed all
> elements of composition set up space-tensions in the primary virtual space. Every choice the
> artist makes – the depth of color, the technique – smooth or bold, delicately suggestive like
> Japanese drawings, full and luminous like stained glass, chiaroscuro or what not – every such
> choice is controlled by the total organization of the image he wants to call forth. Not
> juxtaposed parts, but interacting elements make it up. Their persistent contrast affords
> space-tensions; but what unites them – the singleness of quality that pervades any good
> work – is space resolution. Balance and rhythm, the recession and fusion of supporting
> elements which takes place so naturally and perfectly that one does not know what makes
> the decision between design and background, every device that integrates and simplifies
> vision, creates the complement to space-tensions, space-resolutions. If that complement
> were not steadily apparent, the whole system of tensions would go unperceived; and that
> means it would not exist, for "space-tension" is an attribute belonging only to virtual space,
> where esse est percipi. In actual, common space there is no such thing.[25]

Langer acknowledges that the term space tensions is metaphorical.[26] In Edgar Degas' *l'Absinthe*

1875-6 (Figure 1), part of how the effect of the painting has been achieved is in the distances

between various depicted elements, for instance between the woman and the man, between her

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[25] Ibid.: pp. 370-1
[26] Langer, 1967: p. 104
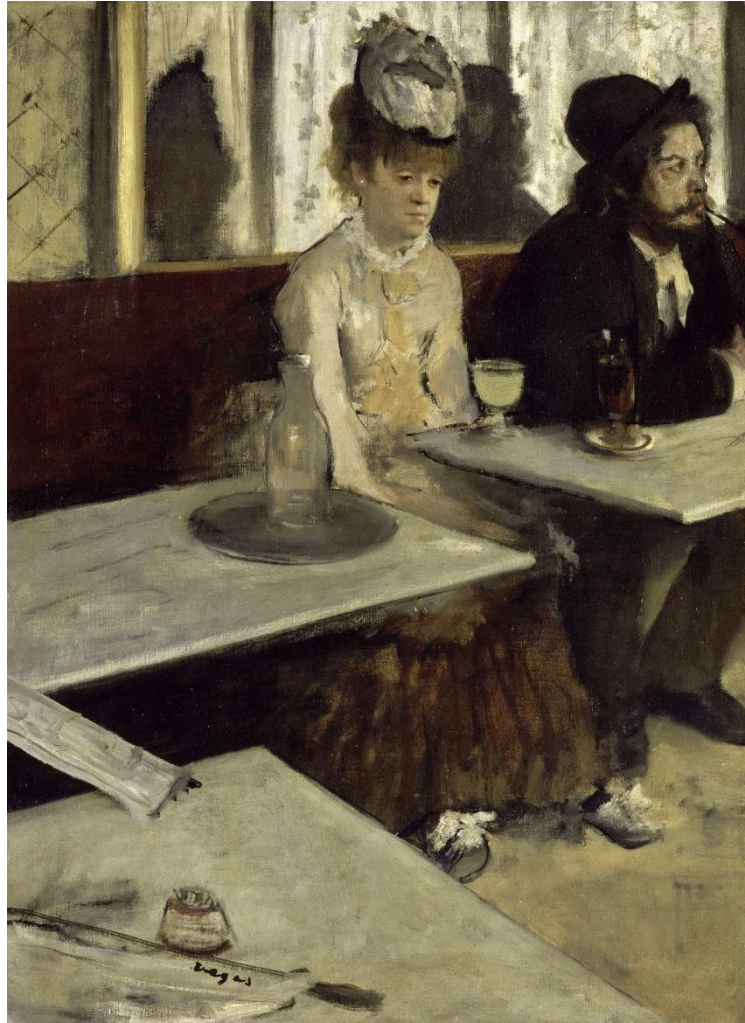
Figure 1: Edgar Degas, 'l'Absinthe' 1875-6, oil on canvas (Musée d'Orsay, 920 x 680 mm)

and the glass in front of her (which has been pushed right to the edge of the table, the glass itself

shown as overfull), the gap between the table they are seated at and the one next to it – a gap which

seems too narrow for her to fit through. The list could go on, however already it can be seen that

whilst these relationships do have relevance when viewing the picture, they would not in a glimpse

of a café in the world – it would be unreasonable to read significance into these elements there. In a

real-world situation, if we had only this glimpse, we would not know who had filled the glass or

placed it on the table, or indeed which of the two figures sat down first. (Using the analogy of signal

to noise ratio, the real-world is too noisy to read significance into such things; an artwork, however,

aspires to be all signal.) Rudolf Arnheim, similarly, writes that, "[in] visual thinking, everything

perceived tends to be taken literally…Such is visual thinking in the artist also. What is only partly

visible exists only as a part. Locations in space are not accidental: what is placed together belongs

together and must be seen in relation. What is close to the eyes is more directly related to the

viewer than what is far. When something is placed high, aboveness constitutes a part of its

character."[27] Again, these sorts of qualities do not have a literal significance outside of *virtual* forms.

However, like Arnheim, Langer does discuss how these qualities can have a figurative significance in

the real world – for what she calls artistic consciousness:

> …most great artists, and especially those who made the boldest departures from the "actual form" of things, e.g. Leonardo and Cézanne, believed they were faithfully reproducing nature… Therefore, recording what [Cézanne] saw, he earnestly believed he painted exactly what "was there"…
> [quoting Cézanne] "Nature reveals herself to me in very complex forms… One must see one's model correctly and experience it in the right way… To achieve progress nature alone counts, and the eye is trained through contact with her…"
> Cézanne was so supremely gifted with the painter's vision that to him attentive sight and spatial composition were the same thing. Virtual space was his mind's habit.[28]

Whatever the specifics of Cézanne's relationship to religion, it is significant here that he personifies

nature, making the order of the complex forms that have something of the force of revelation

organised by an agent, and permeated with significance. The St Thomas Aquinas parallel from the

introduction again recommends itself – part of the use Langer is making of Cézanne here is that form

is the access, and the only access, to 'nature'. Langer is also claiming here that, despite her words

quoted a moment ago that in "common space, there is no such thing" as space tension, for artistic

consciousness there is – that "[v]irtual space [is Cézanne's] mind's habit."

This is a development of Langer's idea of physiognomic perception, based on Cassirer's notion of

"physiognomic seeing,"[29] of which Langer writes that it is a stage of perception, "in which over-all

qualities of fearfulness, friendliness, serenity, etc., seem to characterize objects more naturally than

their physical constitution."[30] Langer brings this up in several connections – in prehistoric

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[27] Arnheim, 1962: p. 10
[28] Langer, 1953: pp. 77-8
[29] Cassirer, 1929: p. 58
[30] Langer, 1957: pp. 132-3

evolutionary terms, in terms of childhood experience, and in connection with artistic consciousness.

Of the second of these, Langer writes,

> Childhood is the great period of synaesthesia… There is a strong tendency to form associations among sensa that are not practically fixed in the world, even to confuse such random impressions. Most of all, the over-active feelings fasten upon such flotsam material. Fear lives in pure Gestalten, warning or friendliness emanates from objects that have no faces and no voices, no heads or hands; for they all have "expression" for the child, though not – as adults often suppose - anthropomorphic form. One of my earliest recollections is that chairs and *tables always kept the same look*, in a way that people did not, and that I was awed by the sameness of that appearance…
>   A mind to which the stern character of an armchair is more immediately apparent than its use or its position in the room, is over-sensitive to expressive forms. It grasps analogies that a riper experience would reject as absurd. It fuses sensa that practical thinking must keep apart.[31]

Robert Innis comments on the importance of this kind of seeing in Langer's ideas of mind.

> Physiognomical seeing, "the immediate reception of expressive value in visual forms", is absolutely central to Langer's (and not just hers) whole rational reconstruction of human mentality. It is further found operative in such phenomena as "the intuitive apprehension of symbolic import in sounds, movements, shapes and rhythmic changes like swinging, revolving, and flowing" and is a kind of "import" without a clear and defined object. This sense of import is the perception of a significance that is "felt as a power rather than a symbolic value" and that is grasped as a physical potency rather than an intellectual potency.[32]

Innis goes on to link Langer's ideas here to work in religious anthropology, not only Cassirer but also Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* from 1923. To clarify, Langer values this kind of seeing, but sees it at odds with practical seeing, which she also values. Experiencing artworks helps to make the world significant in this way:

> 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 (or sounds, motions, or events) to inward vision, and lends expressiveness and emotional import to the world. Wherever art takes a motif from actuality – a flowering branch, a bit of landscape, a historic event or a personal memory, any model or theme from life – it transforms it into a piece of imagination, and imbues its image with artistic vitality. The

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[31] Langer, 1942: p. 123
[32] Innis, 2009: p. 216, quoting Langer, 1972: p. 294

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.[33]

Moreover, whilst artworlds, the focus of proceduralist accounts, are seen to provide practical support to artistic production, they do not, for Langer, have anything to do with art's definition:

> Art does not affect the viability of life so much as its quality; that, however, it affects profoundly. In this way it is akin to religion, which also, at least in its pristine, vigorous, spontaneous phase, defines and develops human feelings. When religious imagination is the dominant force in society, art is scarcely separable from it… In an age when art is said to serve religion, religion is really feeding art. Whatever is holy to people inspires artistic conception.
>   When the arts become "liberated," as the saying is, from religion, they simply have exhausted the religious consciousness, and draw upon other sources. They were never bound to rituals or morals or sacred myth, but flourished freely in sacred realms as long as the human spirit was concentrated there. As soon as religion becomes prosaic or perfunctory, art appears somewhere else.[34]

Despite Langer's account of art being functionalist then, she neither denies the existence nor the importance of artworlds.

The distances between elements in *l'Absinthe* are involved in creating what Langer calls space tensions, but in a later work she elaborated on this, showing how elements such as these can be usefully seen as gradients, or qualitative continua, because of what she calls an 'echo' in the human perceptual system:

> …the tacit recognition of such qualitative continua, which is inherent in human perception itself, is the intuitive basis of our concepts of degree. The deployment of sensory materials by degrees is the chief device of visual and audial articulation… sense data [appears] as possessing specific degrees in various respects: brightness, loudness, pungency, etc., and implying the entire range of every such quality from one extreme to the other; it is the natural form of internal action that is reflected in the primary, receptive formulation of sensory impacts. This fundamental dynamic pattern of rise and decline, *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, build-up and dissolution, is paralleled by the frame of our perceptual experience, and governs the world presented to us through our senses. Sensations, like

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[33] Langer, 1957: pp. 71-3
[34] Ibid.: p. 402

emotions, like living bodies, like articulated forms, have gradients of growth and development.[35]

The perceptual argument here was examined in Chapter 2 – the new element is the parallel between perceptual gradients and gradients of "articulated forms" in art. Langer's answer for how artworks can appear to have or contain feelings is the existence of these gradients which lead them to be perceived as "living form". Just as weather in itself, rather than merely its effect on us, can seem cheerful, gloomy, ecstatic or threatening, the simultaneous presentation of gradients in artworks is the means by which a viewer perceives virtual tensions which are conceivable as an *image of life*: living form (this, of course, leaves the problem of separating art from non-art, the Degas from a cloudy day).[36]

Painting, sculpture and architecture are marked by use of space tension, according to Langer, but this is just a special form of qualitative gradient of the kind which makes all works of art.[37] Taken together, these gradients create a single quality – a unitary gestalt – the appearance of the work of art. Langer introduces further fundamental gradients of greater complexity:

> In art, as in life, and nowhere else in the universe as we know it, we find the conditions of necessity and freedom. Freedom is having an option; necessity is the lack of any option. But options belong only to living things, and where the concept is not relevant, as for instance in astronomy, the notion of necessity does not occur either…[38]

Langer writes that artworks project the fundamental characteristic of life when they appear to have these qualities, that growing or receding necessity is the basic condition of living things. Langer goes on:

> The semblance of necessity or "inevitability" in art… is of one piece with that of internal freedom… These two pervasive elements are counterparts, and can enter into all sorts of dialectical relationships with each other, even intersect – which they do, indeed, in every optional act: for the agent, if he may choose, also must choose. That is the real "inexorable

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[35] Langer, 1967: p. 214
[36] Ibid.: pp. 199-244
[37] Langer, 1953: pp. 102-3, 370-1
[38] Langer, 1967: pp. 221

law" of nature: the perpetual advance of life, from one situation to another, unbroken from birth to death. But the sense of inevitability which all great art conveys is most perfectly made without reference to that actuality. It is created by the fittingness of forms, the build-up of tensions and the logic of their resolutions, the exact degrees to which the elements are articulated, etc.; the idea is completely abstracted from actual life, transformed into quality, projected in sensuous terms. Yet we know it for what it is.[39]

This is another key piece in Langer's claims regarding living form, that an artwork must possess the appearance of life; not only do we have options, but our options are more or less constrained. So it is, argues Langer, with the relative appearances of inevitabilities of artistic elements and artworks. A related yet distinct gradient which Langer brings up is *individuation and involvement*. Whilst individuality does not occur by degrees, individuation does, and artistic forms and forms of life have both some degree of individuation and some direction – becoming either more individuated or less so, the latter process termed involvement by Langer. The qualities of secondary virtual forms in an artwork are interdependent, but the secondary virtual forms may also be individuated to some degree, seemingly in a process of emerging.[40] Langer's example of an ambitious surface design is from mosque architecture such as the Shah Mosque in Iran (Figure 2), where the repeated elements, such as architectural bays and arabesques, combine to create an image of involvement. In contrast, Langer gives an example of extreme individuation in painting:

> …George Simmel observed that in Michelangelo's painting the figures, though genuinely pictorial, had the loneliness which is intrinsic to sculpture, and that this essentially sculptural isolation gave them their "titanic" character, which is usually attributed to their exaggerated physique, but really is due to their isolation, the semblance of a superhuman self-sufficiency, complete individuation. In his painted human forms as in his statues all internal elements are completely interdependent so that the life of the figure seems to be consummated in its own confines.[41]

In Michelangelo's artwork (for instance, *The Last Judgement,* Figure 3), the unit of measurement is the human figure, which has the appearance of godlike power – not dependent on the

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[39] Ibid.: pp. 220-1
[40] Ibid.: pp. 222-3
[41] Ibid.: p. 238; discussing Simmel, 1911: pp. 163, 165

contingencies of environment or other agents. This remains the case despite the large number of figures in the detail shown, some even touching.

Langer's claim that the decoration of the dome of the Shah Mosque represents "an appearance of great, even enormous, proliferation, teeming life, and yet maintains the character of universal rhythms in their endless regeneration," is supported by art historian Luca Mozzati's discussion of decoration in Mosque architecture:

> Decoration, when its function is more than to protect building elements in fragile materials, can assume a virtually "anti-architectonic" role: it does not clearly or rationally emphasize the structural or organic nodes, the stresses and strains, as is the case in Western classical architecture, but rather seems to dissolve the building members into a luminous continuum, transforming the masses into surfaces overrun by calligraphy and geometrical patterns, turning the structure into a vehicle for a message rather than leaving it as an entity with its own independent significance… Their surfaces overrun with demonstrations of the their principle and meaning, to the unfathomable and indivisible unity from which springs geometric laws that govern the cosmos and life; they lead the believer, if he enquires into their form.[42]

Unfathomable and indivisible unity is quite substantially *involved* in a Langerean sense; moreover, the prescription against monumental edifices for other than religious purposes means that the extent to which decoration individuates is the extent to which they are doctrinally problematic.

In this section I have examined the way in which space tensions are a sub-category of qualitative gradient, and looked at some of the ways they function, including in some central Langerean gradients such as that between individuation and involvement. I have also discussed how practical consciousness and artistic consciousness are said to differ in Langer's account, and discussed an issue with this kind of account.

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[42] Mozatti, 2009: p. 31; for a discussion of Islamic geometric laws see pp. 24-5
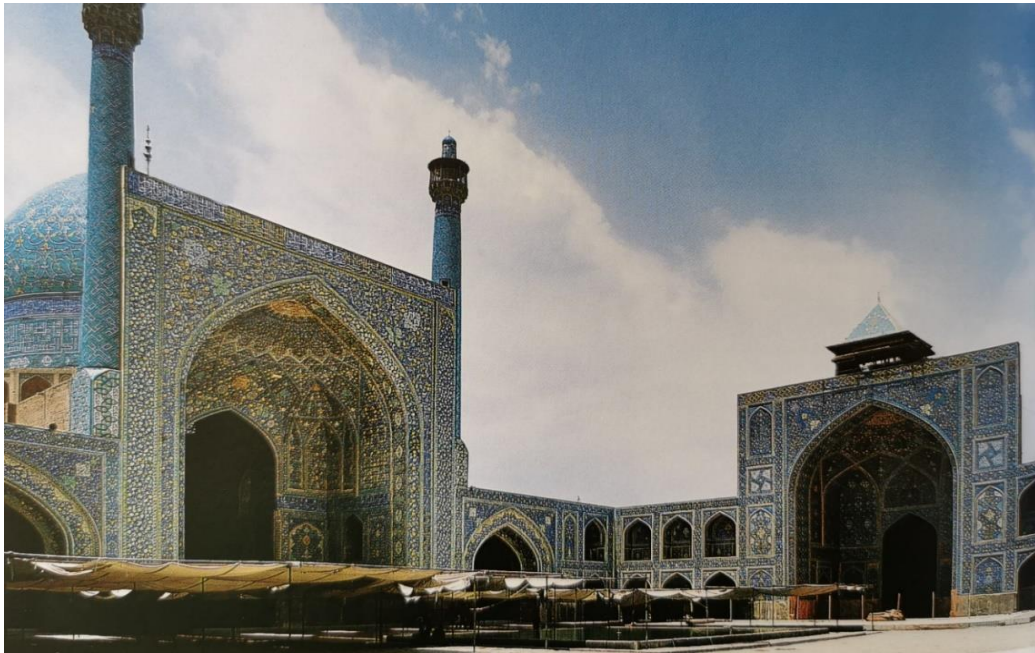
Figure 2: Shah Mosque, 17th Century, Istafan, Iran
(from Mozzati, 2010; this is an alternative view of the same building shown in Langer, 1967: p. 224)
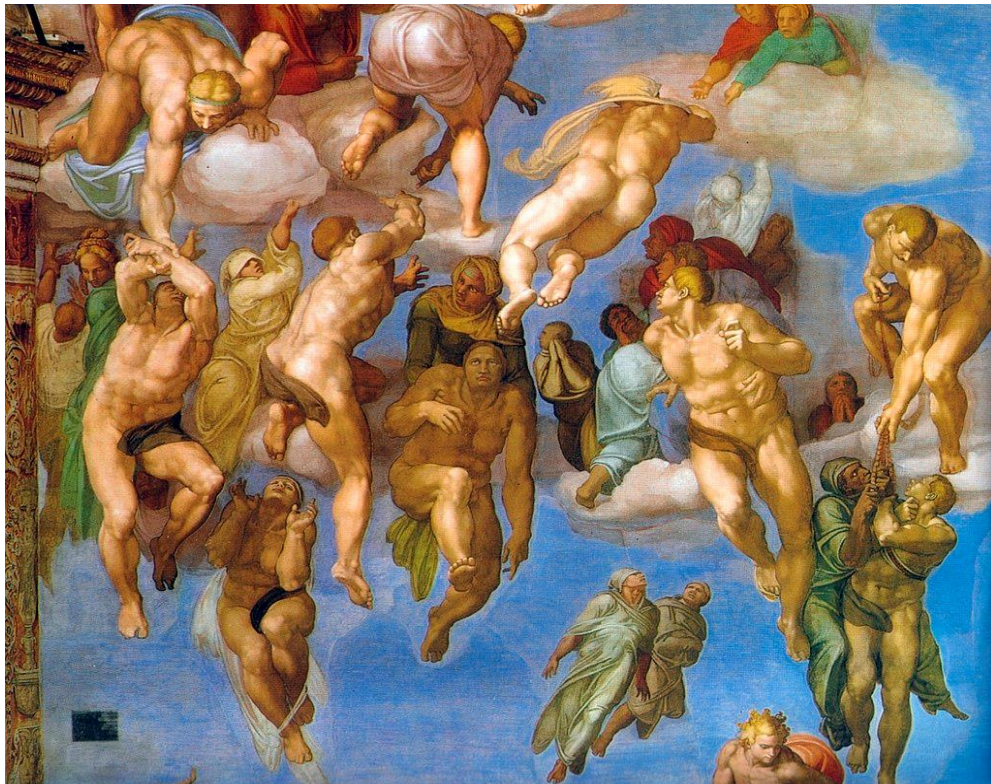
Figure 3: Michelangelo, 'The Last Judgement' (detail), 1536-41, fresco
(Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, 13,700 x 12,000 mm)

3.3 Space Tensions – Virtual Kinetic Volume

In this section I unpack Langer's account of sculptural space tensions. After introducing Langer's account, I take up the work of Robert Hopkins, one of the few contemporary aestheticians who has engaged substantially with Langer's views. After a discussion on the viability of Langer's category of the virtual as it relates to the space which a sculpture can be said to organise, I go on to discuss different notions of gallery space and personal space, as they might relate to sculpture. The section ends with a discussion of a sculpture by Alexander Calder.

In contrast to pictorial art, which she calls *virtual scene*, Langer refers to sculptural art as *virtual kinetic volume*. By this she means to refer to how sculpture exists in three dimensions, and also to its having a semblance of kinetic possibilities – having the appearance of potential for movement in particular ways:

> Just as one's field of direct vision is organized, in actuality, as a plane at the distance of natural focus, so the kinetic realm of tangible volumes, or things, and free air spaces between them, is organized in each person's actual experience as his *environment*, i.e. a space whereof he is the center; his body and the range of its free motion, its breathing space and the reach of its limbs, are his own kinetic volume, the point of orientation from which he plots the world of tangible reality – objects, distances, motions, shape and size and mass.[43]

A sculpture is at the centre of a virtual kinetic volume, which is to say that it organises the space around it – though there is room for interpretation as to how much space a sculpture organises. Robert Hopkins has taken up Langer's ideas on sculpture, calling them "coherent and plausible."[44] In particular, Hopkins takes as valuable this idea of kinetic volume, calling the space which a sculpture organises (without, he notes, assuming the nature or location of the space) gallery space.[45] Hopkins takes issue with Langer's insistence, however, on the space that a sculpture organises being virtual,

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[43] Ibid.: p. 90
[44] Hopkins, 2003a: p. 579
[45] Hopkins, 2003b: p. 278

which he takes to hint that Langer thinks the space that sculpture organises is not gallery space.

Hopkins writes of Langer that:

> She should say that, just as we see the marble that makes up a statue as organised in a particular way, organized by the thought of whatever is represented; so we see the space actually surrounding a sculpture as organized in a particular way, organized by our sense of the potential for movement and action of that represented item.[46]

This seems to be just what Langer means by virtual space in the case of sculpture. Indeed, for Langer all representation is inescapably virtual. Whilst for pictorial space this claim is more straightforward, since viewers do not have physical access to a purely virtual space 'behind' the picture plane, for sculptural representations this idea needs more defending, since viewers can generally move through and around and sometimes inside sculpturally adjacent space. Dodie Gust recounts the moment when visitors realised they were standing on a flat metal sculpture by Carl Andre:

> Some museum visitors walk into the room where Andre's work is on display and ask, "Where is the art?" When told, "You're standing on it," they jump like they're on a hot griddle and can't wait to get off.[47]

Even allowing for some embellishment in the telling, this clearly shows how actual space and gallery space differ, that there is an expectation that sculptures are afforded space in a way that other objects are not. Whilst it could be objected that the visitors did not wish to damage the sculpture, in this case the material was hard wearing, and the visitors had stepped onto it with at least some awareness of it as a surface. The significant change was from seeing the space as practical space to seeing it as "organized in a particular way," as Hopkins writes, or as "virtual," in Langer's terminology. This attempt to reconcile these accounts may seem stretched, since Andre's sculpture operates at one limit of what sculptures can do, and since it is far from clear how an account of Andre's floorworks in terms of their potential for kinetic movement would proceed.

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[46] Ibid.: p. 280
[47] Gust, 1968: p. 60

A similar point can be made, however, by considering another set of examples Hopkins brings up - marble busts; Hopkins challenges how these would function in terms of kinetic potential. Hopkins seems to be correct here, as the represented head and shoulders of a bust seem to have extremely limited kinetic potential, however a defence can be mounted for sculptural busts as organising virtual space. Hopkins acknowledges that "we ourselves interact with them in a way somewhat akin to our interaction with other people," and one feature of a bust worth highlighting in this respect is gaze, even when the iris and pupil are not clearly distinguishable from the rest of the eye.[48]

Hypothetically, if I was in an unfamiliar stately home and moving through it in the dark, then I might move past a row of looming shapes, carefully not bumping into them, but otherwise not attending to them. Perhaps the next day, in daylight, I would return and see the shapes were in fact marble busts, considering them at an appropriate admiring distance. When I returned again, after lunch, however, I might have found that the entire row had been rotated 180 degrees, apparently for cleaning, and noticed that on inspecting them again I had naturally moved closer to the busts than before lunch. The gaze of the busts, in this case, seems to command the space to a certain degree, and whilst this strains Langer's account of virtual kinetic volume, it does seem to make sense, and only make sense, within considering the sculpture as a virtual form. During the night-time episode, I was unable to experience the virtual form, and so did not allow the sculpture any gallery space at all, treating it merely as a practical object.

Hopkins doubts Langer's account too on the grounds that very small sculptures, such as Cellini's salt cellars, can organise space, but doing so leads to absurd consequences – "other condiments falling with[in] reach of the saltcellar lion's pounce, while the little creature is itself dominated by the vase of flowers close by."[49] These consequences seem worth embracing, they are harmless, and though Hopkins notes they are dubious aesthetic worth, the phenomenology seems plausible.

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[48] Hopkins, 2003b: p. 288
[49] Ibid.: p. 286

Hopkins doubts too the idea that relatively small relief panels on the doors of the Florence baptistery can organise all the space around them, "the vast space of the piazza."[50] Here I feel that Langer's notion does not require such a feat – that the space organised by a sculpture is perhaps better thought of as personal space, something supported by Langer's words, quoted at the start of this section, that a person's virtual kinetic volume is defined by their breathing space and the reach of their limbs.

In general, larger organisms require more personal space than smaller ones, though this is not the only consideration; the idiom 'bouncing off the walls' applied to young children conveys the common occurrence that highly active organisms may be relatively small but find normal amounts of personal space quite confining.

Personal space is a phrase commonly used to refer to the surrounding spatial volume that a person occupies the centre of. It is possible to violate someone's personal space, and to be intimate with someone is often to be invited to share each other's personal space. Personal space theorist Edward T. Hall identifies four distance zones, based on behavioural observation: the intimate, personal, social and public.[51] Hall claims that there are "activities, relationships, and emotions associated with each."[52] Without pursuing this too far, one thought this work prompts is that the *quantity* of space that a sculpture must organise may be variable too, and may enter into its qualitative effect.

Hopkins ponders two options, that can be explored in terms of a sculpture such as Alexander Calder's *Feathers* (Figure 4). Hopkins wonders if Langer thinks the sculpture itself is meant to be a living form or if it merely represents living form. A Langerean response is that it is meant to be a *semblance* of living form – an appearance of it:

> There is nothing actually organic about a work of sculpture. Even carved wood is dead matter. Only its form is the form of life, and the space it makes visible is vitalized as it would

[50] Ibid.: p. 287
[51] Hall, 1966: p. 116
[52] Ibid.: p. 129

be by organic activity at its center.[53]

It is a virtual living form – it is not literally alive, but seeming so. It does not resemble any form of life, but has a quality of sufficiency and individuation. The jumping, squeaking, table lamp used as the animated logo for Pixar Studios films can be seen as another example that functions similarly to this, imaging living form whilst not being a representation of any actual living form, or being alive itself.

Hopkins agrees with Langer that the experience of sculpture is partly tactile – but says Langer has not taken the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty she mentions to heart because in fact not only sculpture but also painting does this – our visual sense has been calibrated and is constantly informed by tactile experience.[54] Langer meanwhile insists that painting exists for vision alone, that if we cannot see it then touching it tells us nothing or almost nothing.

Both Langer and Hopkins are essentially correct, I think; Langer is correct that painting is for vision alone, but Hopkins is correct that our optical sense is calibrated by our lived experience of touching things and moving through space – we only recognise what we see because of our history of tactile interactions, and this carries over into our experience of seeing most paintings. The exception to this is abstract paintings – which I will return to in Chapter 6 once the elements of an explanation have been laid out.

This section has defended Langer's use of semblance of living form and the virtual, arguing that her account of sculpture on these grounds is coherent, whilst allowing that only most rather than all sculptures will have a clear kinetic volume. I have argued that the quantity of gallery space organised by a sculpture is variable, making a connection to Hall whose work could be used to add specificity to this idea.

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[53] Langer, 1953: p. 89
[54] Hopkins, 2003b: p. 281
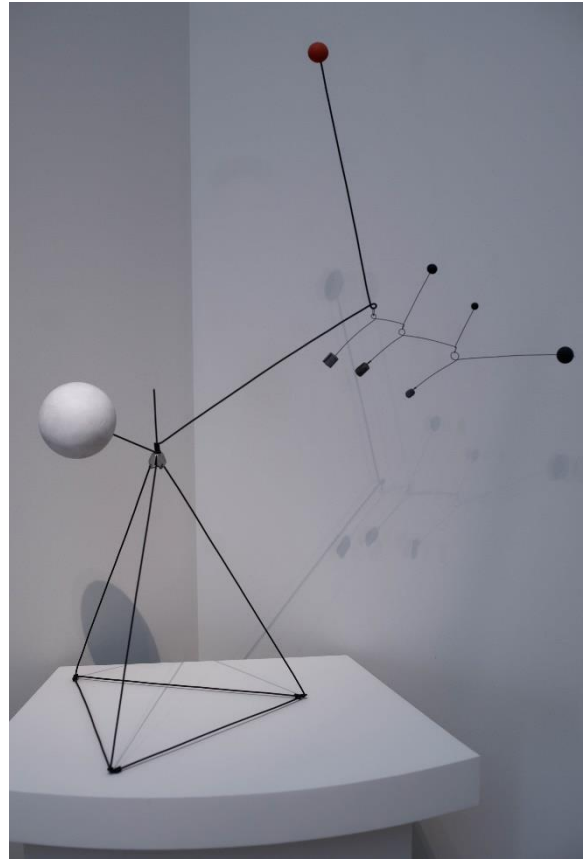
Figure 4: Alexander Calder, 'Feathers', 1931, Installation Views (National Gallery, Washington, D.C., 2019) wire, wood, lead, and paint (Calder Foundation, New York, 97.8 x 81.3 x 40.6cm)

3.4 Langer and Collingwood

This section contrasts Langer's theory with perhaps the best-known expressivist theory, that of R. G. Collingwood. Starting with some explicit limitations which Collingwood puts on his theory, rejecting magical and religious art, I consider Langer's response to this in her own theory. The section goes onto discuss the role of craft in art, both in Collingwood's ideas and then in Langer's, before looking at how Collingwood explicitly includes much that is traditionally considered non-art, including human utterances and gestures. This leads to a discussion of how Langer sees language and why she insists that art is not a language.

Langer's theory bears comparison with that of Collingwood's better-known ideas, and, helpfully, Langer discusses Collingwood's ideas directly. One unusual aspect of Collingwood's theory is that, in two respects, it is very limiting in what it accepts as art; firstly, it rejects religious or magical art, and secondly it seeks to explain only Modernist art. Concerning the former, Collingwood explicitly rejects palaeolithic cave paintings as art because they were not made with the same concept of art as "in our own modern European world."[55] He goes on:

> A similar magical or religious function is recognizable elsewhere. The portraits of ancient Egyptian sculpture were not designed for exhibition and contemplation; they were hidden away in the darkness of the tomb, unvisited, where no spectator could see them, but where they could do their magical work, whatever precisely that was, uninterrupted. Roman portraiture was derived from the images of ancestors which, keeping watch over the domestic life of their posterity, had a magical or religious purpose to which their artistic qualities were subservient. Greek drama and Greek sculpture began as accessories of religious cult. And the entire body of medieval Christian art shows the same purpose.[56]

Langer does not tackle Collingwood on this point, though her theory differs on it. Langer agrees that sometimes religious and magical qualities exist alongside artistic ones, but insists that whenever this is the case, it is the artistic qualities which dominate:

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[55] Collingwood, 1938: p. 9
[56] Ibid.: pp. 10-11. Matters are further confused at this point by Collingwood calling the medieval Christian works, to which he denies the status of art, "medieval Christian art."

> In an age when art is said to serve religion, religion is really feeding art. Whatever is holy to people inspires artistic conception. When the arts become "liberated" as the saying is, from religion, they simply have exhausted the religious consciousness, and draw upon other sources.[57]

This means that Langer's history of art includes palaeolithic cave painting, Greek and Roman sculpture, and Giotto, where Collingwood's does not. Collingwood writes that the aesthetician "is not concerned with dateless realities lodged in some metaphysical heaven, but with the facts of his own place and his own time."[58] This means that Collingwood's account seeks only to explain Modernist work, a significant limitation to his theory. This is not necessarily a problem if it can be shown that Collingwood's ideas can be applied beyond this narrow Modernist focus, but it is far from clear that this is the case, if only because of the religious prohibition discussed above. Furthermore, art is a more central expression of human experience for Langer than it is for Collingwood, finding outlets in religion and entertainment but more fundamental than either.[59]

A point which Langer does take issue with Collingwood's further limiting of the category art is in the degree to which an artwork may be pre-planned. For Collingwood, preplanning is a mark of craft, and he seems at one point to insist that preplanning disqualifies works from art status:

> No artist, therefore, so far as he is an artist proper, can set out to write a comedy, a tragedy, an elegy, or the like. So far as he is an artist proper, he is just as likely to write any one of these as any other…[60]

To this Langer strongly disagrees, pointing out that "a true artist is, indeed, not likely to set out with the resolve: 'I want to write a lyric,' but rather with the discovery: 'I have an idea for a lyric.'"[61] She points out, moreover, that an architect, "cannot let his inner need decide whether he will plan a cottage or a cathedral."[62] Langer has perhaps missed, however, Collingwood's qualification of his

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[57] Langer, 1953: p. 402
[58] Collingwood, 1938: p. 325
[59] Langer, 1953: pp. 388-9
[60] Collingwood, 1938: p. 116
[61] Langer, 1953: p. 389
[62] Ibid.: p. 390

above quoted remark, writing that for representational art, distinctions such as genre "are present from the beginning as a determining factor."[63] In another place however, he notes of the work of a poet that "what he wants to say is not present to him as an end to which means have to be devised; it becomes clear to him only as the poem takes shape in his mind, or the clay in his fingers. Some relic of this condition survives even in the most elaborate, most reflective, most highly planned works of art."[64] Overall, then, Collingwood appears to insist on some spontaneous engagement with the medium rather than a completely spontaneous engagement, a much more moderate and palatable position.

On craft more generally however, Collingwood is sufficiently opposed to the identification of art as craft that he defines the work of art as an imaginary object – it is not a collection of noises, for instance, which constitutes music, but a tune in the composer's head, and subsequently in the audience's head, "if they listen intelligently".[65] "Primarily," Collingwood writes, the work of art is "an 'internal' or 'mental' thing, something (as we commonly say) 'existing in his head' and there only: something which we commonly call an experience. Secondarily, it is a bodily or perceptible thing (a picture, statue, &c.)… The second thing… I shall show to be incidental to the first."[66] Langer's response to this is that "taking his words as he evidently means them, his statements about expression and envisagement ring true."[67] Collingwood's concept of the internal or mental object corresponds to Langer's concept of virtual form. However, Langer goes on to write that "the way one uses words is not arbitrary; it reveals one's basic conceptions; so the criticism of his terminology which follows is really a criticism of what I consider his inadequate notions."[68] Langer questions how, under Collingwood's account, we can speak of "having" a work of art when we see or think of it.[69]

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[63] Collingwood, 1938: p. 116
[64] Ibid.: p. 29
[65] Ibid.: p. 139
[66] Ibid.: p. 37
[67] Langer, 1953: p. 380
[68] Ibid.: p. 381
[69] Ibid.: p. 387

Langer, like Collingwood, does not identify the artwork with its materials, but unlike Collingwood, she believes that the material structure of an artwork facilitates its virtual or imaginary character – which she refers to as a "scaffolding for… envisagement."[70] Once an artwork is physically destroyed, its virtual character is likewise gone.

Against these limiting factors for the category art, Collingwood includes much that is generally considered non-art, writing that "every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art."[71] Langer considers this a "radical…doctrine," which is not supported in argument by Collingwood.[72] In fact, Collingwood does give some arguments in support. The first thing to bear in mind is that language, for Collingwood, is deliberate expression, of any kind. He gives the example of a small child who cries deliberately to "call attention to its needs and to scold the person to whom it seems addressed for not attending to them. [This] is still a mere cry; it is not yet speech; but it is language."[73] Collingwood is making a real distinction here, but whilst it does seem true to call this kind of cry expressive and, plausibly but less confidently so, imaginative, few would be happy to call it language – least of all Langer:

> Mr. Collingwood asserts that language is not the semantic structure it is supposed to be, but has neither vocabulary nor syntax; it is pure expression, created by "consciousness"; it is art, and has no technique, no "use" (correct or incorrect) and no symbolic function – it is expression of feeling, like dance, painting, or music. All speech is poetry. Grammar and syntax and even the recognition of words are purely arbitrary inventions for cutting it up…[74]

Langer's positive account of language is found elsewhere – in it, she notes that,

> In the first place, *every language has a vocabulary and a syntax*. Its elements are words with fixed meanings. Out of these one can construct, according to the rules of the syntax, composite symbols with resultant new meanings.
>   Secondly, in a language, some words are equivalent to whole combinations of other words, so that most meanings can be expressed in several different ways. This makes it possible to *define the meanings of the ultimate single words*, i.e., to construct a dictionary.
>   Thirdly, there may be alternative words for the same meaning. When two people

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[70] Langer, 1953: p. 387; 1967: p. 170
[71] Collingwood, 1938: p. 285
[72] Langer, 1953: p. 384
[73] Collingwood, 1938: p. 236
[74] Langer, 1953: p. 384

systematically use different words for almost everything, they are said to speak different languages. But the two languages are roughly equivalent; with a little artifice, an occasional substitution of a phrase for a single word, etc., the propositions enunciated by one person in his system, may be *translated* into the conventional system of the other.[75]

Collingwood attempts to pre-empt an account of language such as this by claiming that the definition of words is "precarious and arbitrary," and that homolingual translations never have precisely the same meaning. Whilst definitions are sometimes precarious, they are seldom if ever arbitrary; however, Collingwood's rejection of homolingual translations is partly acknowledged in Langer's writing that only 'most' meanings can be expressed in different ways.[76]

Taken as a whole, both Langer and Collingwood identify art as the expression of either feeling or emotion and mean broadly compatible things by both the expression and the feeling and emotion parts of this.[77] Both agree on artistic creation, and that the emotion expressed in music, for instance, cannot be expressed in words.[78] As shown, however, the details of their theories differ, and not only in terminology. Collingwood's history of art includes only experiences rather than objects, and on

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[75] Langer, 1942: pp. 94. This, incidentally, bears a strong resemblance to Hans Hoffman's account of language in his later *Search for the Real* (1948) "A plastic idea must be expressed with plastic means just as a musical idea is expressed with musical means, or a literary idea with verbal means. Neither music or literature are wholly translatable into other art forms; and so a plastic art cannot be created through a superimposed literary meaning." Also, to Richard Wollheim's rejection of the suggestion that Cubism is a kind of language. Wollheim writes, "If regarding Cubism as a language has some value as a metaphor, it certainly lacks literal truth. Cubism is without syntax, without meaning rules, without a vocabulary, without a logic – though it might sometimes, *sometimes*, be useful, or illuminating, or refreshing, to apply some of these terms to it in a loose or impressionistic fashion. The simplest way of grasping the non-linguistic character of Cubism is to recognise that (1) there are no rules that specify how its elements may, and may not, be combined, but (2) its ability to refer to the outside world is totally independent of this fact. The minimal requirement of a language is that there should be a well-articulated syntax, and that semantics should be dependent on this syntax." See Wollheim, 1990: pp. 27. Langer appears to be the earliest source of this argument; she elsewhere writes on how the meaning of words changes – she would perhaps be better placed to write in the above that the "elements are words with *relatively* fixed meanings." See Langer, 1967: pp. 190-7
[76] Collingwood, 1938: pp. 258, 260
[77] Collingwood and Langer both view emotion as a cognitively complex form of feeling. He writes that feeling has to be expressed in bodily action – a point where Langer would disagree: feelings, for her, can terminate as mental images. By having a psychic level of sensum separate to consciousness, Collingwood suggests that there are unconscious feelings, a point that Langer would reject. Collingwood, moreover, reifies feeling and does not have mental expectations of any kind as part of his account of sensation, imagination and feeling. Finally, Collingwood believes that the only emotions an artist can express are his own, and that, correspondingly, if the artist lives apart from the community of the audience the art will not interest them – the artist expresses the community's emotions by sharing the emotional experiences to begin with. See Collingwood, 1938: pp. 164, 191-4, 238-9, 314
[78] Langer, 1942: pp. 228-9; 1953: pp. 46-8, 380-1; Collingwood, 1938: pp. 128, 245, 282

the one hand excludes pre-modern art and on the other seems to include all deliberate human gesture and utterance. Langer's account, by contrast, results in a history of art which hews close to the commonplace view of what ought to be included – embodied works from all periods and places of human settlement, and from a wide and inclusive range of media, including painting, sculpture, and architecture; music, dance and theatre; prose and poetry; cinema and still other emerging artforms.

In this section I have compared and contrasted the accounts of Langer and Collingwood, showing that they are really quite different from one another and arguing that Langer's version of expressivism results in a history of art which hews much closer to the common-sense understanding of what art is, something I take to be a virtue of Langer's account. I have shown how the artifact and indeed the expression is incidental in Collingwood's theory, whereas they are central and intrinsic in Langer's account. Lastly, I have examined the views of each on language, showing why Collingwood believes utterances and gestures are forms of art and why Langer disagrees and believes art is not a language.

3.5 Langer and Wölfflin

In this section Langer's account is considered alongside that of Heinrich Wölfflin. The section begins by introducing Wölfflin's five precepts and considering both their value and limitations. The section goes on to consider how Langer's gradients can be seen as a more open-ended version of Wölfflin's precepts, with the advantage that they do not privilege a particular style. The section ends by considering a number of gradients in first the opening chapter of *Middlemarch* by George Eliot and then a photograph by Gregory Heisler.

Langer's gradients are reminiscent of Wölfflin's five precepts from his *Principles of Art History* (1915). Each of these is a gradient, a distinction with two poles, and Wölfflin uses them to point out

formal differences between Renaissance and Baroque art – though the gradients have since been applied much more broadly.[79]

Wölfflin puts forward the five pairs of concepts as follows: 1) the development from linear to painterly, the former which Wölfflin puts in terms of outlining and surfaces, with the latter described as "surrendering itself to the mere visual appearance" 2) from planar to recessional, with the former organising the elements into a sequence of planes while the latter "relates objects essentially in the direction of forwards and backwards" 3) from closed to open, the former appearing self-contained, and the latter a "relaxation of rules, the yielding of tectonic strength" 4) from multiplicity to unity, where the Classical approach is for elements to "maintain a certain independence" whilst, by the 17th Century, there is "the subordination, to one unconditioned dominant, of all other elements" and 5) absolute and relative clarity of the subject, this relates to things as Wölfflin claims they are as opposed to how they seem, taken as a whole.[80]

Wölfflin's fourth gradient, from multiplicity to unity, closely corresponds to Langer's distinction between individuation and involvement. Langer was aware of Wölfflin and cites his 'On the Concept of the Picturesque' (1913) in the same paragraph as her example of Michelangelo's self-sufficient sculptural isolation in his painted figures mentioned above – closely making the link between her gradients, in this case the extreme pole of individuation, and Wölfflin's precepts.[81] Having brought out these parallels, it is worth bringing out both how Langer's ideas differ from Wölfflin's, and the extent to which her ideas are vulnerable to the criticisms which have been made of his better-known ones.

From the standpoint of aesthetics, Michael Newall gives an account of Wölfflin's distinctions of linear-painterly and planar-recessional that he says is "universally applicable," noting that a longer

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[79] Whitney Davis notes some of the applications of Wölfflin's precepts, including, already by the time the 6th edition of *The Principles of Art History* was published in 1922, Japanese art and old-Nordic art. See Davis, 2015: p. 160
[80] Wölfflin, 1915: pp. 5-8
[81] Langer, 1967: p. 238

discussion would include closed-open as well. Jason Gaiger and Lambert Wiesing have analysed the

five precepts and found that the final two are implied by the first three but that, nonetheless, as

Gaiger puts it, the concepts "allow the possibility of talking about style in general terms," or to use

Wiesing's phrase (which Gaiger quotes), they remain "universally valid."[82] Wölfflin's distinctions have

enduring value.

However, Gaiger writes to the effect that, if they are to be robust, Wölfflin's aesthetics need

separating from his historical ideas:

> …if Wölfflin's theory of style is to form the basis of a philosophically defensible account of 'the logic of depiction' it needs to be extricated from the cyclical conception of history within [which] it was originally articulated.[83]

In particular, Wölfflin's theory of style privileges the Classical ideal and is normative rather than

descriptive. Langer's theory, however, provides a ready-made framework to which Wölfflin's better

established oppositions might be rehomed. Langer's gradients have some additional desirable

features in this respect. They do not necessitate the unity of visual forms, where, for instance,

Wölfflin insists that linear works ought also to be planar.[84] Newall discusses thematization and

deletion as they turn up in Wölfflin's book, the former being where one of the gradients is

consciously adopted in the making of the work and the latter where it is consciously suppressed.[85]

Within a Langerean framework, such ideas could either be taken over or dealt with under the more

general framework of salience. For Langer, some gradients are more salient than others, depending

on the artwork. Whereas a Wölfflinian formal analysis guides the viewer to think first about the

linear or painterly distinction, the Langerean criteria of gradients encourages the viewer to think first

about which gradients are salient within a work.

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[82] Newall, 2015: p. 176
[83] Gaiger, 2008: p. 101
[84] See Newall, 2015: pp. 175, 178 n.26 for a discussion of this and rebuttal, for instance briefly discussing a planar, painterly set of works in Mark Rothko's Seagram Murals
[85] Ibid.: p. 176

Another advantage of Langer's gradients is that they are open-ended – the list is not limited to five. Considering the first chapter of *Middlemarch* by George Eliot, the reader is introduced to a number of these gradients in quick succession and in various ways. The narration sets up the gradient between natural beauty and ornamental beauty, and another between intelligence and common sense (these need not be polar opposites in actuality, but in the novel they are presented as such), yet another between an aristocratic background and one whose ancestors were involved in "yard-measuring or parcel-tying."[86] The narration also sets up the gradient of the theoretic and the practical, with most of these gradients involving the protagonist, Dorothea, in one way or another. We are told that Dorothea "could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in gimp and artificial protrusions of drapery."[87] This shows us that, for Dorothea, at least, the spiritual life and a keen interest in drapery are mutually exclusive – and so another gradient. The setting up of this gradient pays dividends later in the chapter when Dorothea, against her initial judgement, decides to keep some of her mother's jewelry, humanising the character by showing how she is not always able to live up to her own ideals. By this point, the reader of *Middlemarch* has already become used to the relative omniscience of the third person narration which, whilst able to access the thoughts and feelings of the characters of the story, is far from disinterested, dropping phrases such as "our elder poets," and "today's newspaper."[88] Eugene Goodhart in fact argues that the omniscient narration of the story may be necessary because the world of the story "is riven by opposing perspectives."[89] These perspectives can be seen as gradients too, with characters being more or less idealistic, charitable, and perceptive, and the narrative voice giving the reader privileged access into these perspectives.

One gradient which Wölfflin's list seems not to account for is clarity or ambiguity of intrinsic scale – the extent to which the size relationships between visual elements are clear. In a portrait of

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[86] Eliot, 1871: p. 5
[87] Ibid.: p. 6
[88] Ibid.: p. 5
[89] Goodhart, 1999: p. 556

basketball player Shaquille O'Neal, for instance, shown in Figure 5, these size relationships are partly ambiguous. The photographer, Gregory Heisler, explains his intentions in making the photograph in terms of ambiguity of scale, noting that he aimed for a strange and disquieting effect by combining the forced perspective of an extremely large chair and a tall man with ambiguous lighting. [90] Heisler offers a perceptual explanation that the intensity and directionality of light gives cues regarding the nature of the source, especially with artificial light. Heisler deliberately provides conflicting cues in this photograph in order to create the desired effect – for instance, having O'Neal's face and torso in sharp focus whilst his feet and the lower chair legs are blurred. Crucially, the spotlight which illuminates O'Neal appears to be placed below him, making him seem large, since spotlights are generally placed high up. The contradictory cues – the chair suggesting he is small whilst the spotlighting suggests he is large – create the disorienting effect Heisler was after.[91] Heisler explicitly lists gradients: "Big and small, high and low, soft and sharp." [92] Heisler has identified a gradient, scale, and then photographic elements that he can manipulate, also gradients, in order to achieve the feeling he wishes to create in the work. It is worth noting too that strangeness and disquietude are well described as feelings but not emotions.

Wölfflin did not create his precepts with images like this in mind – he did not claim applicability for them outside of Renaissance and Baroque artworks. However, given that his precepts are commonly applied to all kinds of works, it seems desirable to have a version of them which can account for work such as this. As chapters 5 and 6 will argue, clarity of scale is sometimes an especially salient gradient.

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[90] Heisler, 2013: pp. 41-3
[91] Ibid.: pp. 43
[92] Ibid.

Figure 5: Portrait of Shaquille O'Neal by Gregory Heisler (from Heisler, 2013: p. 41)

Langer's gradients not only allow for considering scale but make brief mention of it, writing that

"mutual adjustments of visual scale," do not generally occur with mental images but that this is

different in art when elements are unified.[93]

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[93] Langer, 1967: p. 101

In this section I have argued for the facility of Langer's gradients, on the grounds that in many ways they are a profitably disinterested and more flexible version of Wölfflin's precepts. I have shown how the idea of gradients can be applied to works in different media.

3.6 A Scaffolding for Envisagement

In this section I consider Langer's account as a definition of art. Starting with Stephen Davies's list of challenges for different sorts of definition, I look at whether Langer's account can be defended against these. Finding that they can, I then move on to consider additional challenges, most notably its failure to distinguish art from non-art and how it can be seen as overinclusive.

Davies has written a book, *Definitions of Art*, and penned an entry of the same name in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*.[94] In both works, Davies groups definitions of art into functionalist and proceduralist theories. Functionalist theories claim that all art performs a particular or primary function, the theories differing principally in the function art is to perform, such as giving pleasure or expressing emotion; whereas proceduralist theories claim that art status is conferred on works by an artworld of some kind. Langer's theory would be classed as a functionalist account.[95]

Davies lists four challenges for these:

> Functionalism faces these objections: it is difficult to find any single or pervasive function that is potentially served by all artworks. And if all artworks must be functionally successful, it is difficult to account for very bad art. Also, the theory tends to be conservative in dismissing from the realm of art some philosophically stimulating recent works, many of which are widely accepted as art even if they challenge what was thought to be foundational or valuable about their predecessors. Moreover, functionalism does not readily encompass works with social, ritual or didactic functions, as against aesthetic ones, as is so for much non-Western and popular art.[96]

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[94] Davies, 1991; 2013: pp. 213-23
[95] Davies very briefly mentions Langer's theory, though incorrectly summarizes her view as claiming that art is "an iconic symbol of forms of feeling." This associates her view with C.S. Peirce's, incorrectly, since an iconic relationship involves a physical resemblance, whereas for Langer the resemblance need only be a logical resemblance – a resemblance of structures. See Davies, 1991: pp. 4, 163
[96] Davies, 2013: p. 216

As to the first, the single function Langer claims is served by every artwork is to be an image of feeling. We are not yet in a position to evaluate this, however, as just mentioned, feeling in Langer is qualitative. The artwork is meant to be taken as a whole (the quality of the primary virtual form) whilst parts of the artwork are distinguishable (qualities of secondary virtual forms); the incorporation of feeling will narrow this down but for now, over-inclusively, an artwork presents a quality for contemplation.[97] Whilst the over-inclusiveness of this definition is unsatisfactory, it is not obviously wrong; in a way it is a kind of umbrella concept for hedonic, expressivist, and cognitive theories of art. It will be returned to at the end of this section.

Davies' second objection can be countered more directly. For Langer, bad art is corrupt, poor art is inexpressive.[98] Whereas Davies questions how to account for works which on the one hand must be functionally successful but on the other are very bad, Langer agrees with Collingwood:

> Art which is… distorted at its very source by lack of candor is bad art, and it is bad because it is not true *to what a candid envisagement would have been*. Candor is the standard: "seeing straight," the vernacular calls it. As Mr. Collingwood says, where envisagement is false one cannot really speak of either error or lie, because error arises only on the higher level of "intellect" (discursive thinking) and lying presupposes "knowing better"; but lack of candid vision takes effect on the deep level of imagination. This kind of falseness he calls, therefore, "corruption of consciousness." *Bad art is corrupt art*. It is false in the most vicious way, because this falseness cannot be subsequently helped, as a lie may be exposed and retracted, and error may be found and corrected. Corrupt art can only be repudiated and destroyed.[99]

This is not obviously wrong, again, but it is quite unclear. Corruption, in this sense, does not seem to refer to propaganda art, for instance, which seems better understood in terms of errors and lies. Instead, Langer is possibly better read here as referring to a kind of emotional intelligence, how an artist who works with sensitivity to their life of feeling will not produce bad art. This might be the case, but it is not very helpful in identifying such work.

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[97] This is over-inclusive because it fails to distinguish between artworks and mere things
[98] Langer, 1953: pp. 381, 387
[99] Ibid.: p. 381

Unlike Collingwood, however, Langer also has a criterion of poor art – that it is inexpressive. Care must be taken here, since Langer makes expressiveness the criterion of art: threatening to collapse the distinction between poor art and non-art. Whilst Langer does refer separately to the criteria for both non-art and poor art being inexpressiveness, it is clear that she means that non-art is absolutely inexpressive, with no expressive intent on behalf of the maker, whereas she means poor-art is relatively inexpressive, with the expression ineffective rather than absent:

> …in good art the expression is true, in bad art false, and in poor art unsuccessful. Where no intent or impulse to express anything enters in at all, the product – even if it be a human figure, like a tailor's dummy or a doll – is not art. A tailor's dummy could be art, and dolls can be and sometimes are.[100]

Langer has, moreover, a positive example of expressiveness, Giotto's *The Visitation* (Figure 6), in which she emphasises how expressiveness permeates the work:

> Expressiveness has endless degrees. Complete artistic success would be complete articulation of an idea, and the effect would be perfect livingness of the work. "Dead spots" are simply inexpressive parts. From beginning to end, every stroke is composition; where that is attained, there is truly "significant form."[101]

Collingwood does not include the distinction between poor art and non-art, due to his insistence, as Langer states, that "art has no technique."[102] Langer disagrees, arguing that "Beyond the rudiments which everyone learns – how to use a pencil at all, how to use language at all, how to whittle a stick, chip a stone, sing a tune – [an artist] learns his craft as he needs it for his purpose, which is to create a virtual object that shall be an expressive form."[103] In order to maintain this, Langer would need to claim that either learning as an artist's apprentice, or in the traditional academic method of drawing from plaster and life models, is either rudimentary or not directly involved in the creation of art. This seems to be a slightly strained position, Langer goes on to say that "every artist invents his

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[100] Ibid.: p. 380
[101] Ibid.: p. 79
[102] Ibid.: p. 381
[103] Ibid.: pp. 387

technique," which seems to be, at best, only partially accurate. This position does, however, give

Langer a criteria for distinguishing between poor and bad artworks. The former are produced when

the artist is not in control of their technique or lose their feeling of what they meant to express –

they are relatively inexpressive through a failure either of envisagement or dexterity. Bad artworks,

Figure 6: Giotto, 'The Visitation' ('The Salutation' in Langer, 1953), 1306, fresco
(Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, 150 x 140 cm)

on the other hand, are, as noted, not candid envisagements of feeling – dishonest. If bad art, for

Langer, is made by lack of sensitivity to the life of feeling, and specifically the lack of an honest

envisagement of the feeling content of the prospective and emerging work; poor art, for Langer,

seems to be a matter of a lack of sensitivity to the medium, in particular, in the above examples,

because of distractions, but also due to technical limitations. Poor art is honest but inept, bad art may be technically proficient but is dishonest.

The third challenge is easily met as Langer's theory is not conservatively dismissive – if anything it may be over-inclusive. Langer explicitly includes some crafts (to the extent they are expressive of human feeling), readymades, and indeed more or less anything that has ever been called art, with the exception of animal art due to its lack of symbolic expression:

> If animals are to be admitted as artists then either they must be thought to share, to some degree, our mental powers of symbolic expression... or art must be conceived as an activity not requiring symbolic expression – as emotional demonstration, or as pure pleasurable sensory stimulation.
> Both hypotheses seem to me untenable...[104]

The exclusion of animal art is another way of noting how Langer's position is not a version of formalism – whilst it is not inconceivable that animals could produce artifacts indiscernible from those of human production, it is currently inconceivable that these artifacts could be symbolically expressive. In terms of conservatively excluding works of substantial merit, there is an additional challenge worth considering. Arthur Danto famously claimed that an artwork would not be so wherever or whenever it was made – that Picasso, for instance, was able to produce an artwork by painting on a tie, but that this had not been possible in earlier times.[105] A Langerean response to this could be to insist on the separation of the definition of art from artworlds, so that earlier artists could have made art by painting on ties, but that taking it seriously as art, even the artist taking such an endeavour as art, is a separate issue. Langer did not write any sort of response to proceduralist accounts, but her position is clear – it is the activity of the creator rather than the recognition of an artworld which bestows the status of art:

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[104] Langer, 1967: p. 142. Langer's conclusions are drawn concerning the intellectual capabilities of non-human primates in her own time and examination of 'dances' and 'rituals' in various animals which turn out to be impulsive, if stereotyped, behaviour. Langer leaves open the possibility of symbolic thought arising in animals in future
[105] Danto, 1981: p. 40

> Whether art is practiced in the service of religion or of entertainment, or in the household by women potters and weavers, or passionately in forlorn attics with leaky skylights, makes no difference to its own aims, its purity, or its dignity and importance.[106]

The Raphael cartoons at the V&A Museum in London are today considered art, but were not produced to be final products; as objects they have only belatedly gained artworld status. Many other artists, such as Hilma af Klint, discussed in Chapter 1, or Vincent Van Gogh, received only marginal artworld status in their lifetimes – it might reasonably be felt to be an unacceptable consequence of proceduralist theories that these artists were not creating art until their work received belated recognition after their deaths.

Davies' fourth challenge – that functionalist accounts generally fail to account for ritualistic or didactic artworks, especially in non-Western traditions – is also not a problem for Langer's account:

> [A]rt, whether serving for self-expression, self-stimulation (like war dances), literal communication (bugle calls, pictorial records, some African drumming), magical practices or worship, is art in so far as its producer uses the opportunity offered by his practical activity to project an idea of subjective realities – in simple, everyday things, such as the shapes of utensils and geometric decorative designs, the sense of rhythm, the dialectic of need and gratification, vitality, growth; on a nobler scale, in conjunction with religion and other high cultural interests which are naturally charged with emotions, the feeling patterns of the acts, objects and beliefs belonging to such contexts.[107]

Far from excluding these works, then, Langer's account might conceivably be thought overinclusive in this regard. Art historian Alice Procter has recently written about the inappropriateness of institutions such as the British Museum holding, exhibiting, and refusing to return certain ritual objects to their communities of objects.[108] A prominent example in Procter's text is of Māori mokomokai, tattooed and mummified human heads which:

> were created as part of a Māori funerary tradition, to be kept privately and honoured by the family of the deceased, or else they were made from the heads of enemies as military trophies to be displayed as symbols of strength. In every circumstance, their display was tightly controlled by ritual and protocol: there are accounts of the mokomokai of enemies being exchanged at the end of a war to mark the conciliation. It was a practice done with

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[106] Langer, 1953: pp. 388-9
[107] Langer, 1967: pp. 144-5
[108] Procter, 2020: pp. 154-61

respect, and protected as *tapu* – sacred, spiritual or restricted.[109]

Procter notes that in 2006 the British Museum rejected a request for the repatriation of seven mokomokai.[110] An account such as Langer's, which includes objects such as mokomokai as art, could potentially be used in a problematic attempt to lend legitimacy to institutions such as the British Museum retaining and displaying these remains.

This does not, however, invalidate her account. It should perhaps first be said that, despite these being human remains, the mokomokai would be considered as artworks by Langer – the remains have been formed, both in the tattooing and the embalming, and their former use in larger rituals as images gives them the function of formalising the felt life of the community, making tangible the connection to the deceased. Even if Langer is right about this, it does nothing to reduce the moral burden on curators and the institution at large. There are materials and practices that could conceivably be made into art, by Langer's definition of art, but be thoroughly immoral. The appropriateness of display does not rest solely (or even mainly) on the definition of art. In the case of the mokomokai, a living community has requested their return, and whilst there is a lack of documentation regarding the circumstances behind the production and acquisition of the seven mokomokai held by the British Museum, there is a consensus on why these objects were made and the destructiveness to Māori culture and communities of colonialism.

Langer's account appears to be a compelling version of an expressivist theory, compared to Collingwood's and also judged by Davies' criteria. It is not, however, without its difficulties. The rest of this section considers additional challenges not raised by Davies. Intuition, for instance, is not sufficiently clear in Langer. It is John Locke's use that she wishes to follow, and Locke's examples include the intuitions that "black is not white," and "three is more than two."[111] Even today,

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[109] Ibid.: p. 155
[110] Ibid.: p. 160
[111] A slightly fuller discussion of Locke, Langer and intuition will follow in the latter part of Chapter 4

however, it is unclear how this is done. Intuition essentially only labels what appears to be a complex and compound process – but leaves much unexplained.

It might be objected that even if artworks do present us with qualitative continua we can use as scaffolding for the envisagement of feeling, that this does not differentiate art from non-art. A bunch of bananas sitting on a table provides all sorts of qualitative continua – shape, colour, relative freshness and unexpectedness to name a few. Adding in the intention to provoke an experience in the beholder does not seem to help much, as the intention may have been to encourage someone who does not eat enough fruit to do so, as a reminder and encouragement – a presentation of an object with qualitative gradients with the intention of occasioning an experience (perhaps a particularly fresh bunch of bananas has been chosen with the hope that it will be more enticing). This experience, moreover, can be used as a scaffolding for the envisagement of feeling, perhaps guilty feelings on the part of the beholder for not having been eating enough fruit.

Langer's account seems to suggest that the bananas in this example may be art, but because of the quality of intention and the limited knowledge of human feeling projected in them, poor art, because relatively inexpressive. Crucially, the gradients provided do not reward contemplation any more than aesthetic contemplation of another bunch of bananas would.

This counterexample therefore brings out some features of value in art according to Langer's theory. Firstly, despite being a theory of art, the emphasis is not really on defining art – which for her has a low bar of entry. Langer does not give necessary and sufficient conditions, instead providing a normative account of art that is interested in good and great art, splitting it from poor and bad art. This seems to better accord with actual practice in the world – galleries generally giving space to good art, for instance.[112]

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[112] This is clearly an over-simplification – much gallery space is given over to poor or bad art by famous artists, for instance, and artistic quality is only one criterion amongst which curators make hanging decisions

Secondly, art objects have a claim to uniqueness. Langer writes on this:

> A beautiful object may impress one instantly as unique without being startlingly different from others; it may even exemplify a standard form, as many highly artistic products of traditional design do. Its uniqueness is popularly explained on the ground that every handmade thing shows deviations… [but] Many things (e.g. pipe cleaners, dishmops, cartons), though made on one pattern, are far from precisely identical, yet they do not seem unique. A statue, however, may be reproduced – in some media, such as metal casting, there is no "original," but a perfect democracy of "copies" as long as the mold is intact – yet every "copy" seems entirely original… The upshot of these paradoxical findings is that the individuality of a work of art is not a factual condition but a quality, as virtual as all other artistic qualities. It is the semblance of organism that creates the apparent uniqueness of a piece. The work seems unique when it is "alive," i.e., expressive.[113]

Uniqueness is a virtual quality which artworks and living forms possess, helping somewhat to distinguish between art and non-art, since not possessing this quality will tend to disqualify objects from art status. However, the bunch of bananas has this semblance due to its literal living form.

Thirdly, the rendering of the artwork is all-important. In the bananas-counterexample, the bananas were chosen rather than created, but not chosen with any particular care, not chosen with a view to the specificities of the experience occasioned in the beholder. The gradients intersected not at random, but in fact in a highly determinate manner owing to the production and history of the bunch in question, but the *selector*'s attention to them was largely indifferent, save for an interest in freshness, which any bunch of bananas could provide if picked at the appropriate time. This indifference is problematic in art where gradients are the 'lifeblood', to paraphrase Langer's metaphor, of living form. Undifferentiated gradients lead to poor, relatively inexpressive, art.

Another criticism Langer's theory might be open to is the inclusivity of the condition to be expressive of human feeling. As noted in Chapter 2, feeling includes exteroceptive feeling, interoceptive feeling, proprioceptive feeling, imagination, cognition – and the condition merely states that the work be identifiable as one or more states among these sub-types. Langer acknowledges this when she writes that "almost anything can be a work of art…"[114] This does not mean, however, that

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[113] Langer, 1967: p. 209
[114] Ibid.: p. 64

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everything, or even almost everything, is a work of art. Leaving the signature to one side, Duchamp's *Fountain* was perceptually identical before and after becoming an artwork, but in being selected and exhibited became a work of art. Langer's statement allows for this, but does not offer much guidance for how to determine whether or not something is a work of art. In particular, in Langer's theory, there does not seem to be a way to prove someone wrong who claims that something is a work of art. This does not necessarily make Langer's theory vacuous or incorrect, but it is a worry.

In this section I have argued that, by Davies' criteria, Langer's account is quite successful, as I have given examples to show how she meets these criteria. Nonetheless, despite being logical and plausible, Langer's account is not a true definition in the sense of offering a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, which would enable the reliable separation of art from non-art.

3.7 The Existence of Inexpressive Artworks

In this final section of the chapter, I examine the claim that there are inexpressive artworks. After looking at the claims of some contemporary aestheticians who make this claim, and considering their purported examples, the section proceeds by examining the art and statements of Frank Stella and, in particular, Carl Andre, on the grounds that these artists explicitly made art that was not meant to be expressive. The section offers Langerean readings of Stella and Andre's work, arguing that Stella's stripe paintings and Andre's floor works are not examples of inexpressive artworks.

If there are completely inexpressive artworks, then expressivism fails as an account of art. Whether this is so, however, is less clear than sometimes thought. Dominic Lopes, for instance, claims that there are traditions which make inexpressive works the ideal but does not give examples.[115] However, Gordon Graham writes that "the music of Bach and Handel, the paintings of Picasso and Klee, or the poetry of Milton and Pope," are not easily characterised as being expressive of emotion,

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[115] Lopes, 2005: p. 2

granting that these are not counterexamples, more a call for philosophical defence and critical examination.[116] It must be added that these seem not to be particularly strong examples – Bach's *Air (2nd Movement) from Orchestral Suite No. 3* can be straightforwardly heard as being expressive of serenity or joy; Picasso's *Guernica* as expressive of strong grief and disgust; and Milton's *Paradise Lost* opens with the narrator entreating the muse to aid their telling of the fall of man and the making of the world, expressive of regret, awe, grief, compassion, and ambition - all within 26 lines.

A stronger example of art said to be inexpressive may be found in the stripe paintings of Frank Stella and the sculpture of Carl Andre. The two artists were friends, having gone to the same school, and Andre shared Stella's studio for a crucial time in the late 1950s.[117] Stella asked Andre to write a catalogue introduction for his show at the Museum of Modern Art, this is the statement in its entirety:

> "Preface to Stripe Painting" (1959)
>
> Art excludes the unnecessary. Frank Stella has found it necessary to paint stripes. There is nothing else in his painting.
>
> Frank Stella is not interested in expression or sensitivity. He is interested in the necessities of painting.
>
> Symbols are counters passed among people. Frank Stella's painting is not symbolic. His stripes are paths of brush on canvas. These paths lead only into painting.[118]

Here we seem to have an example of what Lopes refers to – a tradition which makes inexpressive work the ideal. Andre's own work might be thought to be even more inexpressive since he does not work the materials. Art historian Alastair Rider writes of Andre that his use of "machine-fabricated modules also meant that their constructions did not register the handling or touch of the artist, which, in turn, led commentators to emphasize the glaring absence of expressiveness in this art."[119] Rider also links this lack of evident handling and expressiveness to the definition of art, noting that

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116 Graham, 2013: p. 106
117 Rider, 2011: pp. 47-8
118 Andre, 2005: p. 267
119 Rider, 2011: p. 10

lacking "from these works is any evidence of artistic technique, personal style or expressiveness – in fact, all the criteria that still identify art to most people."[120]

Against this, however, are a range of statements which seem to affirm the expressiveness of the works. Occasionally this is to be meant as expressive of emotion, as is the case for art historian Sebastian Egenhofer, who writes of a 1996-7 Andre show that it "expresses grief and a mute resistance."[121] Statements such as this, however, are rare. More common are statements about the qualities that Andre's works are said, in some way, to have or project. Rider writes that "Andre's sculptures often possess… an air of 'aloof understatement'," and that there is a "psychologically powerful sense of absence and presence that emanates from [an Andre] sculpture."[122] Rider notes that Andre provided the title for Stella's *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor* (1959), citing art historian Caroline Jones' assertion that the title captures the odd and conflicting experiences that viewers have reported of the work, Jones also mentioning that looking at the painting "can feel like gazing into a pond of unknown psychological depths."[123] This suggests that the painting occasions virtual space, in Langer's terms, and that the artwork is the virtual rather than literal form.

Much of the interest in Stella's work in particular, however, is in how his painting operates more in terms of sculptural form. Kirk Varnedoe, for instance, writes that "the literalists ([Donald] Judd-Andre)" argued that "Stella was producing objects that generated space outside of themselves and that activated the space around them."[124] This activation of gallery space is also clearly comprehensible in Langerean terms, as discussed in Section 3.3. Of Andre, Philip Leider writes, "the order which Andre imposes on materials is not designed so much to create an object as to create a set of conditions which we experience as art; if those conditions fail to come into being we are not

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[120] Ibid.: p. 42
[121] Egenhofer, 1997: p. 312
[122] Rider, 2011: pp. 36, 38
[123] Ibid.: p. 48
[124] Varnedoe, 2006: p. 100

left with a bad work so much as we are with a kind of vacuum, the situation as before."[125] This could easily be reformulated as complete inexpressiveness – leading to non-art, virtual tension having not been created.

In a review of a 1997 Andre exhibit, discussing *25 Cedar Scatter* (1992), David Sylvester wrote of two simultaneous effects, on the one hand a "scattering [that] was the release of pent-up tension, an imperative, joyous, triumphant release," and on the other "a sort of need for those dispersed timbers to come together again and rediscover their unity," phrasing which very much suggests the simultaneous virtual release and virtual tension that Langer claims is a feature of virtual space, as discussed in Chapter 1.

The rhetoric of Andre's art has generally been argued for in terms of literality and isolation instead of association. In an interview, Andre said that "The art of association is when the image is associated with things other than what the art work itself is. Art of isolation has its own focus with a minimum of association with things not itself. The idea is the exact opposite of multi-media communication. My work is the exact opposite of the art of association. I try to reduce the image-making function of my work to the least degree."[126] However, multiple public statements by Andre complicate this apparently simple idea. Barry Schwabsky has seized on the associations brought up by one of these statements: "'My ideal of sculpture is a road,' Andre once said – we recall that what for others were the motionless symmetrical stripes of Frank Stella's black paintings possessed, for Andre, the vectorial dynamism of 'paths' – and certainly these arcs, as they move away from us… are also roads of a sort… This means that although they render the room they inhabit more visible by articulating it, they also act as baffles to our passage within it, turning it into an embryonic labyrinth, virtual walls politely yet firmly controlling our passage."[127] Schwabsky is not alone in finding associations in Andre's art. Adrian Searle seizes on precisely the isolation of Andre's materials as

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[125] Leider, 1968, p. 52
[126] Gust, 1968: p. 61
[127] Schwabsky, 1995: p. 266

emphasising their associative content – rather than their literality: "Andre's work is largely

formulated around the associative connotations of materials. Bricks carry just as many associations

as oil paint, though they belong to the everyday. That Andre chose to use them as modules, and

stacked them rather than chiselling or carving them, doesn't mean that he wasn't making the same

kinds of judgements as any other artist."[128] Carl Meyer, in the introduction to Andre's collected

writings, brings out how Andre himself has come to admit the inevitability of associations in

artworks: "From the start, the minimalist enterprise encoded a tension between a negation of

subject matter and the recognition that this was, by definition, unachievable. 'When I set out on the

great adventure of my art I dedicated myself to the creation of work utterly free of human

associations,' Andre recalled. 'It is exactly the absurd impossibility of that quest which made my

work possible. If I had known that it is impossible to make art devoid of human associations because

the essence of art is human association, I never would have been able to do what I have done.'"[129]

Most dramatic is a poem from 1978 in which Andre presents the symbolic implications of wood as a

material:

> Wood is the mother of all matter. Like all women hacked and ravaged by men, she renews
> herself by giving, gives herself by renewing… She is the spark and heat, ember and dream of
> the hearth. In death her ashes sweeten our bodies and purify our earth… She greets us in
> the morning of our birth whether dark in the chambered earth or bright in the consuming
> fire. O mother of matter, may we share your peace?[130]

Julia Bernard comments on this, "What is involved here, and doubtless present at other points

within this oeuvre, is clearly the elevation of materials through their allegorization. For apparently

wood has for Andre a whole network of anthropomorphic-vitalist metaphorical meanings, which he

might no longer express but which was seemingly valid for him at the time he constructed such

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[128] Searle, 1996: pp. 295-6
[129] Meyer, 2005: p. 16
[130] Quoted in Bernard, 1996: p. 285; Rider notes that the poem is from 1978 – See Rider, 2011: p. 240

sculptures."[131] Literality seems to have been a helpful concept for Andre, but, as even he admits, associations are impossible to purge completely.

Another quality that Andre's work might be said to be expressive of is *emptiness*, in the Taoist sense. An exploration of this quality in Chinese art forms a substantial part of Chapter 5, for now an appropriate introduction to the concept is Chapter 11 of the Dao De Jing, a "book which Andre feels reflects his own temperament"[132]:

> Thirty spokes share one hub. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand and you have the use of the cart. Knead clay in order to make a vessel. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you have the use of the vessel. Cut out doors and windows in order to make a room. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the room. Thus what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use.[133]

Nicholas Serota has linked this chapter and concept to Andre's work *8 Cuts* (1967, Figure 7), writing that "Andre removed eight rectangular forms from a floor covered with cement blocks, raising questions as to whether the sculpture was the negative (the removals) or the positive (remaining blocks) form."[134] In Langerean terms, Serota is discussing virtual tension that seems to exist between artistic elements, the emptiness having a charged quality. Andre has spoken, oxymoronically, of both "fierce equilibrium" and "fierce calm", phrases which make sense when considering virtual form but less so if the brick works are considered literally.[135]

Emptiness, at least in the Daoist sense, is not an emotional state (though a case could perhaps be made for a meditative state being an 'empty' state). As shown in Chapter 2, however, concepts, both for Langer and for a growing number of contemporary neuroscientists, are felt. In intention and execution, *8 cuts* is expressive of emptiness – expressive of a form of feeling.

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[131] Barnard, 1996: p. 285
[132] Serota, 1978: p. 206
[133] Translation by Lau, 1963: p. 67 quoted in Bourdon, 1978: pp. 176-7. Langer also quotes this chapter in her unpublished notes – the Witter Bynner translation (1944). See Carton 3, Susanne Langer Papers, 1895-1985 (MS Am 3110). Houghton Library, Harvard University
[134] Serota, 1978: p. 206
[135] Quoted in Serota, 1978: p. 200

Andre's stated emphasis on the literality of what is there is not so much undermined as complemented by the additional element of the literality of what is not there, absence functioning in the work even more visibly than presence. This current runs through much of Andre's work – he published his collected writings in 2004 under the title *Cuts*. Rider writes on this in a way that seems to suggest something like Langer's virtual kinetic volume: "to see Andre's sculptures as 'cuts in space' almost invariably suggests that his work 'does' something very particular to its surrounding environment. Here space is not simply the entity we usually take for granted, the way we simply assume that the enveloping air is breathable. Instead, Andre seems to understand space as something that the sculpture itself supplies, like a stream of oxygen. Suddenly the emptiness around a work appears more intense, itself an almost palpable presence."[136] Again, these remarks can be easily incorporated into a Langerean aesthetics with very minor rephrasing – the sculptures appear as living forms, organising the space to the extent that they seem to create it. *8 Cuts*, however, suggest an interesting, albeit minor, amendment to Langer's ideas on sculpture existing at the centre of a virtual kinetic volume. Whilst this is ordinarily the case, with *8 Cuts* it is possible for the viewer to occupy the centre, and be surrounded by the work, or, if the emptiness is felt to be the work, then to actually penetrate the space of the work. Rider writes that, when walking over the surfaces of Andre sculptures, "it is hard not to imagine yourself passing – ghostlike – through the place where sculptural substance usually resides. In that sense, his works achieve a peculiarly pronounced sense of emptiness, in spite of their substantial physicality."[137]

Reconciling the rhetoric of literality with the experience of many viewers and critics, some of which have been quoted above, that Andre's works have associative content – not least Andre's own comments about this content – is possible by recognising that a *rhetoric* of literality is quite different from literality itself. Art historian Dominic Rahtz has argued that the often-valorised literality of

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[136] Rider, 2011: p. 53
[137] Ibid.: p. 39
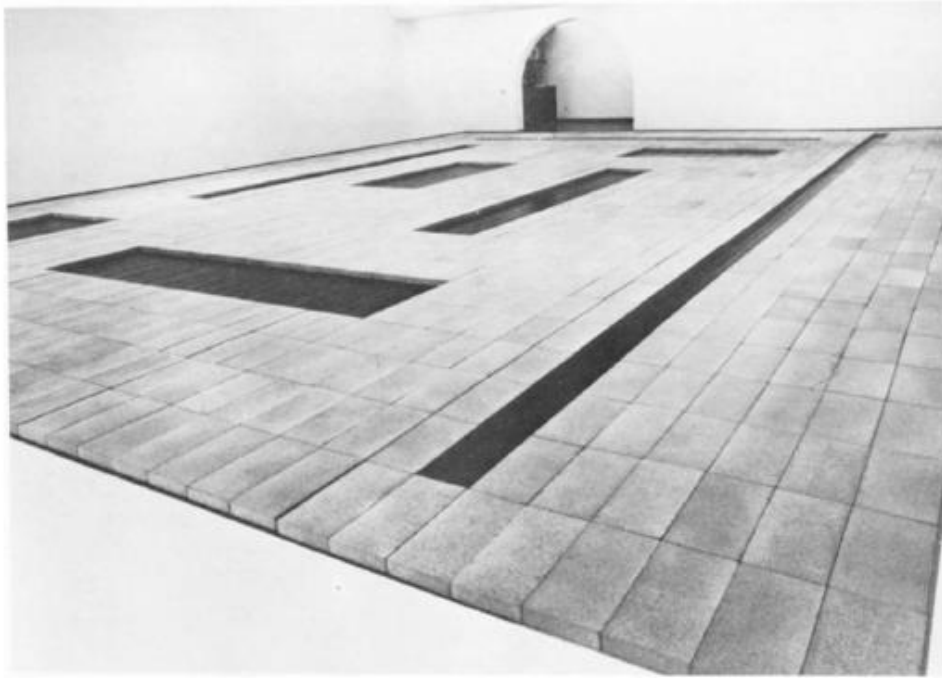
*Figure 7: Carl Andre, '8 Cuts' (installation view), 1967, brick
(Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, dimensions unknown)*

Andre's work is in fact better seen as a produced literality, an effect or quality.[138] Instead of being

the material literality of the materials just there, this view sees the work *as if* it is just there,

expressive of literality rather than literality itself. Rahtz argues that the figural is always more or

other than literal, either as metaphor, symbol, or expression.[139]

Supporting this argument is the catalogue for Andre's 1967 show at the Dwan gallery, which listed

Andre's steel works as made from iron – and the initial title of his steel structure was *144 Pieces of*

Iron.[140] Rider notes that pure iron was barely available to buy, and that steel was much easier to

work with. Rider writes that it was only in 2008 that Andre first made works with pure iron: "Up to

that point the artist had always used steel as a surrogate for iron. In other words – within the logic of

Andre's own presentation of his work – steel is obliged to stand in for an entity that is simply not

identical to what it is itself."[141] Ordinarily this would not be particularly significant – but when

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[138] Rahtz, 2004: p. 339
[139] Ibid.: p. 341
[140] Rider, 2011: p. 89
[141] Ibid.

bearing in mind the rhetoric of literality, this is significant, and suggests much more virtuality than

literality – a performance of steel more than its literal presentation. It seems important too that this

working practice started early and continued through most of Andre's career – unlike Andre's

comments on association, published only in 2004, Andre was happy to present steel as iron as early

as 1967.

In this section I have argued that work which purports to be inexpressive is sometimes well

understood as being expressive and that a Langerean framework for understanding this

expressiveness is valuable. Even if the argument of this section, that it is possible to correctly see

both Stella and Andre's works as expressive virtual forms, is accepted, it does not demonstrate the

non-existence of inexpressive artworks. There does, however, seem to be a burden of proof on

those who assert the existence of inexpressive artworks to provide examples and to explain the

sense in which they are inexpressive.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Langer's expressivism is a sophisticated account which, whilst it fails to

distinguish between art and non-art, has the resources to coherently discuss a wide range of

artworks. As mentioned in the introduction, this does not include works, such as monochrome

paintings, which lack qualitative gradients, though, as will be seen in Chapter 6, Langer's account is

able to deal with near monochromes, such as the panels on the off-axis walls of the Rothko Chapel in

Houston. I have explained Langer's use of gradients and space tension, and set Langer's ideas against

those of Hopkins on sculpture, Collingwood as a rival expressivist theory, and Wölfflin, as another

account of art based on qualitative gradients.

Langer repeatedly insists on the centrality of the qualitative, which is why this chapter has discussed

her ideas with this in mind:

> The achievement of artistic quality is the first, last and only aim of the artist's work. That achievement is the expression of "the Idea" – an idea of human emotion and sentience, of which the work is a projection. There is no compromising with standards of beauty such as regularity, balance, decorative color, etc. – many eminent aestheticians to the contrary notwithstanding. If regularity does not serve to create the emotive quality, it is tiresome. If balance does not spring from the rhythm of feeling, such balance looks frozen. Color does not seem decorative if it does not enhance the appearance of livingness; and if it does it is expressive.[142]

Projection and expression are close synonyms in Langer's works – the next chapter will attempt to clarify some aspects of projection in Langer's project and its reception. Feeling is the key term in Langer's account of art, however – the content of art and the benefits of exposure to artworks are both measured in feeling. Because of Langer's conception of feeling, this means that Langer's is a psychological view of art:

> Feeling, in the broad sense of whatever is felt in any way, as sensory stimulus or inward tension, pain, emotion or intent, is the mark of mentality. In its most primitive forms it is the forerunner of the phenomena that constitute the subject matter of psychology. Organic activity is not "psychological" unless it terminates, however remotely or indirectly, in something felt. Physiology is different from psychology, not because it deals with different events – the overlapping of the two fields is patent – but because it is not oriented toward the aspects of sensibility, awareness, excitement, gratification or suffering which belong to those events.[143]

Art, for Langer, is meant to give us knowledge of feeling – not by communication of ideas but by showing us what feeling is like, something we are too caught up in the practicalities of life to notice in any detail ordinarily. The aspects Langer lists at the end of the above quote – sensibility, awareness, excitement, gratification and suffering – are the subjects of art, objectified presentations of what feeling is like, possible because both feeling and artistic elements are constructed from gradients. That works are formed into perceptual (or imaginal, in the case of literature) objects is necessary so that they can be experienced, but this perceptual aspect of the work is only a scaffolding which supports and facilitates the experience of the virtual form – feeling.

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[142] Langer, 1967: p. 121
[143] Ibid.: p. 4

Whether or not this is plausible remains to be seen – it would require a lengthier exploration, criticism and defence than is possible here. Certain elements, such as the way in which Langer's principles apply to literature, have been only briefly sketched due to the focus of the present study on, in particular, painting. The present chapter, however, has meant to show that Langer's theory of art has been unfairly overlooked; it is not, for instance, mentioned in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy under 'The Definition of Art, nor mentioned in the Routledge Companion to Aesthetics under 'Definitions of Art'.[144] It is briefly but incorrectly referred to in Stephen Davies' book, *Definitions of Art*, and has a brief mention in *Theories of Art Today*, edited by Noël Carroll, but where her theory is not engaged with, explored or criticised.[145] Langer has put forward a version of expressivism that is fine grained and plausible, and the strength of her ideas, when examined alongside Collingwood's, and by Davies' criteria, demonstrates that a lengthier examination of her theory of art is needed.

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[144] Adajian, 2022; Davies, 2013: pp. 213-23
[145] Davies, 1991: p. 4; Carroll, 2000: p. 5

Chapter 4

Defending Projection

This chapter exists because of the reception of Langer's ideas. Had they been read on their own

terms at the time then this chapter would not need to exist, since the value of her ideas – discussed

in the preceding chapters – would have been clear. This is not to say that Langer's ideas are without

flaws; some of these have been noted already, and others doubtless exist. The issue with the way in

which Langer's ideas have been engaged, however, is that, by and large, the critics were not

engaging with Langer's ideas, but focussing almost exclusively on how her work might relate to

Ludwig Wittgenstein or others associated with logical positivism.

Nowhere is this more egregious than when looking at the issue of how Langer's ideas relate to both

the early and late work of Wittgenstein. Langerean aesthetics, in the second half of the 20th Century,

were, as noted in the Paul Guyer quote from the introduction, a casualty of the enormous influence

of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Today, with the waning of that influence, interest in Langer is

growing.[1] Interest in the *Tractatus*, by contrast, is rising again, in subjects such as computational

linguistics and cognitive science; this is worth bearing in mind when reading the criticism in this

chapter, which generally proceeds from the assumption that the *Tractatus* is discredited.[2]

The chapter also exists, however, as a survey of pitfalls when considering Langerean aesthetics –

frequently posed but largely baseless criticisms against which to be wary when testing her ideas.

More than the other chapters, then, this one engages with Langer's critics.

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[1] In addition to the already mentioned monographs on Langer by Innis (2009) and Dengerink Chaplin (2019), a research group 'The Susanne K. Langer Circle', a group of sixty or so academics with an interest in Langer, was set up in late 2020, and has an in-person conference scheduled for this summer in Frankfurt on Langerean thought across disciplines

[2] Recent research articles in computational linguistics making use of the *Tractatus* in this way include Tozzi, 2018; Johnson, 2017. Research in cognitive science making use of early Wittgenstein over the latter Wittgenstein includes Soames, 2019; Harré & Tissaw, 2005; Swann, 1992

This first half of the chapter explores concerns that Langer's account of meaning is problematically indebted to Wittgenstein's Tractarian account. The first section considers the influential criticism of Stephen Davies before moving on to two more sections first dealing with the concerns of Roger Scruton, Monroe Beardsley, Richard Wollheim, Paul Welsh, Bernhard Sholz, and then a section on the criticism of Malcolm Budd.

The chapter then goes on to consider a challenge from Gary Hagberg concerning Langer's ideas on projection, specifically the significance of the tripartite structure of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. Two sections on *Guernica* consider first a Langerean response to this criticism, and then put forward the gist of a Langerean reading of the painting in defence.

4.1 Davies's Objections

This section deals with objections from Davies to Langer's account, based on Davies's contention that Langer's use of Wittgenstein is problematic. After introducing the central problem of Wittgenstein's 'picture' theory, and the apparent tension between this and the latter Wittgenstein, I look at the latter Wittgenstein's rejection of his earlier idea that there is a general form of proposition, defending Langer on the grounds that Wittgenstein does not distinguish in the *Investigations* between the meaning of language and the uses to which it is put. Returning to the 'picture' theory, I consider recent work by Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, who argues that Langer would have read Wittgenstein in German and that 'model' theory is a more accurate rendering of what Wittgenstein would have had in mind. The section ends by considering some of Langer's statements on contexts of use and considering how Langer puts forward an idea from Philip Wegener which is in fact a unified account of form, expression, and context of use.

A recent book by Saam Trivedi, *Imagination, Music, and the Emotions*, summarises Langer's ideas in a single sentence before concluding: "[her] view has been discussed and criticized extensively for

over seventy years now, and I refer the interested reader to Stephen Davies's criticisms…"[3] The

implication is that Langer's views have been thoroughly refuted to the point where they no longer

need either including or countering in a discussion of this kind. The aim of this and the following

section is to trace the line of criticism back from Davies to the early critics of the 40s and 50s,

evaluating these criticisms and seeing whether they can be countered.

Much of the criticism of Langer hinges on the claim that she bases her account of meaning in

articulate products on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, in particular his claim that "we picture facts to

ourselves."[4] Davies complains that:

> The "picture theory of meaning" has been rejected, most notably by Wittgenstein himself. In
> brief, the problem is that the meanings of sentences depend more on the context of their
> use than on their form; many sentences sharing a superficially similar form operate in
> different ways within the various social practices in which they find their homes.[5]

The *Tractatus* indeed seems not to do justice to the context-dependence of everyday language. This

does not mean however that logical form is completely unimportant. The distinction between the

two rests on the fact that, in the *Tractatus*, meaning derives from logical form, which is the relational

structure internal to the proposition. In the 'language games' discussed in Wittgenstein's

Philosophical Investigations, the meaningful structure is the relation between language and its

embedded social contexts of use. The question glossed over by Davies is the extent to which the

latter Wittgenstein is a rejection of early Wittgenstein. Philosopher of language Roger White notes

the wide variety of interpretations on this issue, from those who, like Davies, see the *Investigations*

as a simple rejection, to those who emphasise the continuity between the early and latter

Wittgenstein.[6]

I will return to the issue of pictures in a moment, firstly considering Wittgenstein's rejection of there

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[3] Trivedi, 2017: p. 78
[4] Wittgenstein, 1921: p. 9
[5] Davies, 1994: p. 129
[6] White, 2006: pp. 141-2

being a 'general form of proposition.' As White notes, this is the point at which he explicitly rejects

his earlier work (Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, section 65, goes on to say that "someone might

object against him, '…you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you

yourself the most headache, the part about the *general form of propositions*, and of language.'"[7])

Wittgenstein claims that language has all sorts of relationships, that there is no general form, and

the meaning depends on social contexts of use. However, as White goes on to say, he frequently

caricatures his earlier position and then only attacks the caricature:

> The actual positions of the *Tractatus* seem to be caricatured, and the actual arguments he
> had presented for those positions either simply not considered, or again presented in the
> form of crude caricature. The arguments he then presents against those positions typically
> only work against the caricature… Such passages give the strong impression that, over
> twenty years after the event, during which time he had been thinking along such different
> lines, Wittgenstein could no longer fully recover what he had said earlier, or why he had said
> it.[8]

Crucially, the idea of rules of projection, mentioned in the *Tractatus* and given special emphasis by

Langer in *PINK*, can be seen as a precursor to Wittgenstein's ideas in the *Investigations*:

> 4.0141 In the fact that there is a general rule by which the musician is able to read the
> symphony out of the score, and that there is a rule by which one could reconstruct
> the symphony from the line on a phonograph record and from this again – by means
> of the first rule – construct the score, herein lies the internal similarity between the
> things which at first sight seem to be entirely different. And the rule is the law of
> projection which projects the symphony into the language of the musical score. It is
> the rule of translation of this language into the language of the gramophone record.[9]

Whether or not this should be called a truly general rule is debatable. The general rule is certainly

not the same rule of projection which allows a musician to read sheet music and play a melody as it

is when somebody notes down dictation. There are a plethora of relationships – and importantly,

Wittgenstein does not claim that there is only one rule of projection, he writes that the musician can

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[7] Wittgenstein, 1953: p. 31
[8] White, 2006: p. 142
[9] Wittgenstein, 1921: p. 24 (quoted in Langer, 1942: p. 79)

read the symphony out of the score, and then could re-construct the score out of the symphony.[10]

These rules of projection *are embedded in social contexts of use*; shorthand notation and the ability

to read and perform sheet music are not skills that infants are born with – there is already then the

implication of this emphasis on social practices in the early Wittgenstein. If this is the case, however,

it remains troubling why Wittgenstein would distance himself from his earlier views. White notes

that Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, does not distinguish between what a sentence means and

the use to which it is put, and that Wittgenstein does not consider the argument he had put forward

for there being a general form of proposition in the *Tractatus*, instead showing a diversity of uses

and asking if it is credible they share an underlying form.[11] White suggests that far from this being an

effective refutation, the diversity of uses suggests a flexibility to the language that suggests a simple

underlying system.[12]

In *Tractatus* 4.5, Wittgenstein claims that "the general form of a proposition is: This is how things

stand."[13] Following White, it seems that the diversity of sentences given in the early sections of the

Investigations can be reformulated into this earlier propositional form. Wittgenstein claims that this

general propositional form is proved "by the fact that there cannot be a proposition whose form

could not be foreseen."[14] Langer certainly subscribes to Wittgenstein's idea that language is based

on a general propositional form of assertion, though she claims that *use* has brought out auxiliary

modes, including, for instance, the interrogative use of language. [15] This in itself goes some way

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[10] Symphony here seems quite ambitious – our notional listener transcribing the notes must not only have perfect pitch, but be able to discern dozens of separate instrumental parts – but in melodic terms Wittgenstein's idea seems fairly safe. Note too that the general rules are a little fuzzy – there is, for instance, a lack of standard ornament notation in Baroque and Classical music, which is a minor barrier too; whether the transcriber ought to note tempi in beats-per-minute or a descriptive word or phrase is unclear. None of these minor points trouble the main thrust of argument – but do throw the phrase 'general rule' somewhat into doubt.

[11] White, 2006: pp. 142-3

[12] Ibid.: p. 143

[13] Wittgenstein, 1921: p. 43

[14] Ibid.

[15] Langer, 1967: p. 102

towards negotiating between the *Tractatus* and *Investigations* and will be returned to later in this chapter.

The takeaway from this is that whilst Langer's reading of Wittgenstein has often been criticized as superficial, her reading is credible and coherent; Langer reads Wittgenstein as suggesting that different rules of projection apply between the world and our articulate products, that each rule of projection presents an aspect of the world. Dengerink Chaplin notes an area where Langer is in fact more consistent than Wittgenstein.[16]

Returning to the issue of propositions as pictures, Dengerink Chaplin points out that Langer would most likely have read the *Tractatus* in German:

> In thesis 2.1 Wittgenstein states that we 'make to ourselves pictures (Bilder) of facts' (TLP 2.12). This is followed by the sub-thesis that the 'picture (Bild) is a "model" (Modell) of reality.' (TLP 2.12). In order to understand Wittgenstein's meaning and Langer's reading of the word 'Bild' – Langer most likely will have read the Tractatus in German – it is important to know some of its German connotations. While often translated as 'picture', 'Bild' is equally used to refer to three-dimensional representations and statues – the German word for 'sculptor' is 'Bildhauer' – and is also used for 'model'.[17]

Dengerink Chaplin draws attention to Wittgenstein's 1914 notebooks, which show that the inspiration for the 'picture theory' had come to him when he read about a local trial in which an automobile accident was shown to the court through the use of toy cars and dolls – modelling the situation.[18] Dengerink Chaplin notes too the likely source of Wittgenstein's use of pictures understood as models, from the physicist Heinrich Hertz:

> But Wittgenstein's interest in pictures understood as models goes back much further, that is, to his years of studying engineering in Manchester. One of the text books that influenced him deeply was Principles of Mechanics by the German physicist Heinrich Hertz and he twice refers to him in the Tractatus (TLP 4.04; 6.361). Hertz, who had been a student of Hermann

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[16] She writes, "Langer might be seen to be even more consistent on this point than Wittgenstein. In thesis 2.17 Wittgenstein claims, 'What a picture must have in common with reality in order to represent it after its manner – rightly or falsely – is its form of representation. (*TLP* 2.17) But in *The Practice of Philosophy*, Langer criticizes Wittgenstein for suggesting that a picture can ever be a *false* representation. As she writes, 'We cannot really speak of a false picture. If the analogy does not hold there is *no* logical picture. But Mr. Wittgenstein repeatedly uses the term." See Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: pp. 148

[17] Ibid.: p. 139

[18] Ibid.

von Helmholtz, used the word Bild to refer to models as a way of understanding physical processes.[19]

She concludes that:

> Reading these statements in the light of Hertz will preclude interpretations of Wittgenstein's 'picture theory' in terms of a simplistic correspondence or 'copy theory' of representation... Langer holds, following Wittgenstein, that 'there is no such thing as the form of a real thing, or of an event.' For Langer a symbol is therefore 'not a reproduction of its object, but an expression – an exhibition of certain relevant moments, whose relevance is determined by the purpose in hand.'[20]

Without having access to this argument regarding translation, Robert Innis reaches much the same conclusion:

> Langer took over from the early Wittgenstein *a* (not the) picture theory of propositions, but clearly went in a very different direction with it. Indeed, as I have noted, I think that it is for her really a metaphor or a model and does not constitute any claim to a strict identity or isomorphism.[21]

Elsewhere, Innis puts the issue differently, emphasising the importance of structure in both Langer and Wittgenstein:

> Langer is equating, in effect, the "logical" with the "structural." Thus she is able to assert "the importance of configuration for any sort of meaning relation, from the simple denotation of names or suggestiveness of natural signs, to the most intricate symbolic expression, in literal notation or poetic metaphor" … *This*, I think, is the real lesson Langer learned from Wittgenstein. It is not a lesson directly dependent, either in its formulation or in its consequences, on the contention of the picture theory of language…[22]

Scholarship tends to refer to Wittgenstein's 'picture' theory – in inverted commas – to signal that Wittgenstein is using a rather special meaning of picture. It may be simply a bad translation – it is hard to see what is lost by replacing the term with model: we make to ourselves models of facts.

White notes that:

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[19] Ibid.: p. 139
[20] Ibid.: p. 140; quoting Langer, 1942: pp. 91
[21] Innis, 2009: p. 40
[22] Innis, 2009: p. 19; Innis is quoting from Langer, 1930

> Although Wittgenstein was fluent in English, he was not a native speaker, and had been resident in England for a relatively short time, so that his appreciation of the nuances of English will not have been perfect, so that even if Wittgenstein's approval of a certain translation is to be taken seriously, he is not to be regarded as necessarily infallible.[23]

Going back to Davies then, much of his criticism hinges on linguistic issues which disappear if we treat picture - Bild - as model. Wittgenstein could better have called his theory the 'model theory'. At the time the *Tractatus* was published, pictures were generally taken to be uncontroversially iconic, which may be why the image/picture/model distinction did not seem important (I unpacked Langer's distinctions between these in Chapter 1). Davies' criticism of Langer relating to language and Wittgenstein are that the meaning in sentences depends more on context of use than form, that logical form cannot be easily distinguished from superficial or surface form, and an assumption that Langer's use of Wittgenstein requires that sentences be regarded as concatenations of simple names.[24]

I will go through these objections in order, using Beck's initial sketch of the London Underground as an example (as shown in Chapter 1.2, Figure 2). This is not because it is a picture, though it certainly is in several senses, but because it is a model. Currently, its dominant function is as an artefact, often on display at the V&A, its context of use now much less to do with providing a logical structure which individuals can mentally grasp in order to orientate their position and movements relative to the network of underground train lines (though this residual function still operates), and much more to do with embodying a particular moment in the history of map-making and of thinking about London. The residual function was a practical one, and since London and its travel networks have developed whilst the artefact's virtual form remains unchanged, this function is obsolete – which is much of why its auxiliary functions are now more visible, such as its historical and aesthetic functions. Langer notes a similar progression of stages of meaning in *PINK*, discussing language:

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[23] White, 2006: pp. 144-5
[24] Davies, 1994: p. 129

> Every word has a history, and has probably passed through stages where its most important significance lay in associations it no longer has, uses now obsolete, *double entendres* we would not understand. Even the English of Shakespeare has changed its color since it was written, and is lucid only to the historian who knows its setting… And through all the metamorphoses of its meaning, such a word carries a certain trace of every meaning it has ever had, like an overtone, and every association it has acquired, like an aura, so that in living language practically no word is a purely conventional counter, but always a symbol with a "metaphysical pathos," as Professor Lovejoy has called it. Its meaning depends partly on social convention, and partly on its history, its past company, even on the "natural symbolism" or suggestiveness of its sound.[25]

Langer writes figuratively here, but it is clear that her idea of models is not, as Davies suggests, independent of context of use. In fact, Langer can be seen to appreciate both context of use and form:

> All discourse involves two elements, which may be called, respectively, the context (verbal or practical) and the novelty. The novelty is what the speaker is trying to point out or to express.[26]

Langer suggests that all language likely emerges from the empractic use, extended by the development of emendation and metaphor.[27] The context, originally, exists only tacitly or practically, and bringing it explicitly into the utterance – what in the above is quoted as verbal context – is only done once language has developed to a significant degree:

> When the speaker is fully aware of the context and the need of stating it, his speech is full-fledged. As Wegener puts it, "Only the development of speech as an art and a science finally impresses on us the duty of rendering the exposition before the novel predication."[28]

Because of this Davies' objections do not hold – Langer does not treat sentences as concatenations of simple names, and whilst she distinguishes between surface and logical form, the latter is arrived at by considering the rules of projection in use.

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[25] Langer, 1942: p. 282
[26] Ibid.: p. 139
[27] Ibid.: p. 136
[28] Ibid.: p. 137

In this section I have argued that, to the fairly loose extent to which Langer's ideas are based on the early Wittgenstein, she presents a nuanced and helpful view. I have considered the challenges to Langerean aesthetics that Davies' makes directly.

In addition to criticism on the basis of Wittgenstein's picture theory, however, Davies claims that there is reason to doubt Langer correctly understands Wittgenstein more generally, referring the reader back to Welsh, Sholz, and Budd. Before examining the criticisms of these thinkers, however, a brief detour will be made to consider first the criticisms of Scruton, Wollheim, and Beardsley.

4.2 Scruton's, Beardsley's, Wollheim's, Welsh's and Sholz's Objections

This short section deals with different objections from five aestheticians, mainly on Wittgensteinian grounds. Despite the quantity of objections dealt with in the section, the section is able to proceed quickly because the elements of the defences have been mainly set up in the preceding section. I first discuss Scruton's criticism of Langer's terminology, use of the Tractarian Wittgenstein, and Scruton's claim that what Langer puts forward is a type of formalism, before moving on to consider briefly Beardsley's criticism of Langer's use of Wittgenstein. I then look at Wollheim's criticism, also based on Tractarian issues, in particular criticising Langer for the use of the term isomorphism, which she in fact does not use. The section then goes on to look at the objections of Welsh, who questions, again, Langer's use of Wittgenstein's 'picture' theory, before going on to question Welsh's claim that what Langer's account amounts to is something he calls an image theory. Finally, the section looks at the objections of Sholz, and how Sholz very much places Langer within the logical positivist tradition based on her terminology, therefore taking her out of context. The section ends with a discussion of Langer's terminological shift from meaning to import, and how philosophers such as L. A. Reid have defended Langer's terminology of embodied meaning.

Scruton attacks Langer in two books, his brief remarks focussing entirely on *PINK*.[29] Scruton claims

that Langer's use of the term 'logical form' is redundant, though, as shown earlier in Chapter 1, for

Langer this refers to structural form, "a whole resulting from the relation of mutually dependent

factors, or more precisely, the way the whole is put together."[30] Of the form of a musical sonata, for

instance, or classical ballet, Langer writes "This is not what I mean; or rather, it is only a very small

part of what I mean."[31] The parts of the term 'logical form' are, therefore, not redundant, as Langer

refers to other types of form.

Scruton most often brings Langer up to criticize her imitation theory or copy theory, "the same old

idea of resemblance," borrowed "in an eccentric way from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*."[32] As shown,

Langer does not hold such a theory – her account of symbols is that they are formative, creating

meaning by abstracting, clarifying and embellishing, rather than copying .[33]

Scruton also accuses Langer of having a Cartesian view of mind and body – something shown to be

not the case in Chapter 2 of this thesis: Langer's concept of feeling is structured explicitly to avoid

such a view.[34] He then puts forwards Wittgenstein's argument from the *Investigations* that there is

no inner life due to the impossibility of 'private language', coupling this with the Hegelian argument

"our 'inner' life is realized in, and constituted by, its *Entäußerung* in social life."[35] This essentially

behaviourist approach to mental activity is much less attractive today than in the wake of the

Investigations; Langer criticises this kind of approach by criticising it as essentially Cartesian, the last

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[29] Scruton, 1974: pp. 46, 190, 220; 1997: pp. 166-7. *FF* is listed in a footnote to the 1974 text and bibliographies of both, but nothing is written about its arguments beyond noting that presentational symbols are found in it as well as *PINK*
[30] Scruton, 1997: p. 166n7; Langer, 1957: pp. 15-6
[31] Langer, 1957: p. 15
[32] Scruton, 1997: pp. 166n7, 166n26; Cf. Scruton, 1974: p. 46
[33] Langer, 1962: p. 58
[34] Scruton, 1997: p. 166; Langer, 1967: p. 16-22
[35] Ibid.: p. 166

resort of those "who find themselves faced with the choice between 'the physical' and 'the psychical' and elect the former as their universe of discourse."[36]

Finally, Scruton accuses Langer of formalism – "crescendos and diminuendos, surges and releases, tensions and plateaux; and these peculiar 'formal' features are then isolated as the *things that matter* in our emotional life. As though loving someone mattered because of those inner rushes of blood to the heart (if that is how it feels) and not because the person himself matters a million times more!"[37] Scruton mistakes Langer here, the distinction here coming down to the analogy made in the introduction between Langer and St Thomas Aquinas. Langer does not claim that these formal features are what matters, she claims instead that they are the only access we have to the world:

> No matter what heights the human mind may attain, it can work only with the organs it has and the functions peculiar to them. Eyes that did not see forms could never furnish it with images; ears that did not hear articulated sounds could never open it to words… A mind that works primarily with meanings must have organs that supply it primarily with forms.[38]

What matters, for Langer, is meanings, which we access through forms.

Beardsley, too, questions how Langer's account hinges on Wittgenstein:

> To what extent does the plausibility of Mrs. Langer's view of music depend on her upon her acceptance of the very misleading suggestion made – and later abandoned – by Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*… esp. pars. 4.01, 4.012, 4.021, that a statement is a "picture" of a fact, so that even in "discursive symbolism" there is an element of presentational symbolism, or syntactical iconicity?[39]

The preceding discussion will have made clear that a statement is a model of a fact, and that neither presentational symbols nor Peircean icons need be involved.

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[36] Langer, 1967: p.17
[37] Scruton, 1997: p. 166
[38] Langer, 1942: p. 90
[39] Beardsley, 1958: p. 361

Wollheim's review of *FF* is very critical – he even goes as far as to criticize the captions to the

illustrations.[40] In the short paragraph that deals with the Wittgensteinian influence, Wollheim writes

that:

> the view that a symbol symbolises its reference in virtue of an isomorphism between the
> two comes from an unquestioning acceptance, and then uncompromising generalisation, of
> a very odd and obscure view of language held by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, and
> brilliantly criticised by him in the *Philosophical Investigations*.[41]

To take these issues in reverse order, the continuity between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*

has been discussed above; as to the issue of unquestioning acceptance, again the discussion above

shows that Langer follows Wittgenstein, in general spirit if not quite in terminology, up to the point

where she makes a radical break to show an expanded area of meaning.

To the third point, Wollheim is not the only philosopher to criticize Langer for using the term

isomorphism, a strange criticism, as Dengerink Chaplin points out, since she does not use the term in

her writings.[42] Dengerink Chaplin is essentially correct in this, though in fact there *are* two brief

mentions of isomorphy in her book from 1967, the first in a discussion of the relationship of a

thermometer to temperature, but there are no mentions of the terms isomorphic or isomorphism in

her entire oeuvre.[43] This first 1967 usage is telling – there is a very stable relationship between the

amount of heat in an environment and the expansion of mercury in a thermometer, there is a

sameness of logical form, but the relationship could be described as 'resemblance' only in a single,

highly circumscribed respect (in that height corresponds in a precise way to temperature). Langer

avoids using the concept of isomorphism for any less strict relation – the second mention is Langer

discussing another philosopher failing to meet the test of isomorphy.[44] The oddest example of a

critic accusing Langer of using the term comes from Peter Kivy in *A Corded Shell*. Acknowledging that

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[40] He writes, "The correct title of the Matisse (Plate VI) is not *Studio at Nice but Grand Interieur, Nice*, or, in English, *Interior at Nice.*" See Wollheim, 1955: p. 401
[41] Ibid.: p. 400
[42] Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p. 171
[43] Langer, 1967: p. 76
[44] Ibid.: p. 183

his own view "bears some superficial resemblance," to Langer's, Kivy spends the best part of two

pages attacking Langer's use of a term she never used.[45] "As is well known," he writes, "Langer made

extensive use of the concept of isomorphism in her aesthetical writings in general, and in her

musical ones - notably *Philosophy in a New Key* – in particular. I have avoided this word… the

concept of isomorphism is at once too technically specific and (as a result) too abstractly general for

my purposes." Langer would agree that the term does not belong in aesthetics, and resists taking it

over from Wittgenstein. Kivy's attack surely cannot be seen as deceitful, he must believe Langer

writes about isomorphism; it seems to be a symptom of the too common occurrence of critics

writing off Langer before adequately reading her.[46]

Welsh questions "on what grounds can we call a sentence a picture? And are all sentences

pictures?"[47] This seems possible to dismiss by again considering pictures as models – a sentence

models an understanding, and indeed all sentences model in this way. Surprisingly, Welsh does not

dig into Wittgenstein's meaning at all, writing that "I have no wish to question whether Mrs.

Langer's position is also that held by Wittgenstein."[48] For Davies to use Welsh as backup in this

situation is unreasonable – it is not clear from the article whether Welsh has even read the

Tractatus. In addition to the picture problems, Welsh criticizes Langer's theory of language as an

image theory (despite neither Langer nor Wittgenstein holding such a theory), inadequate because it

supposes that words must give a clear mental image of the concept they represent:

> As an account of understanding words it is inadequate since many people report few or no
> images when they read, talk, or think. The theory is limited again in that there are some

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[45] Kivy, 1980: pp. 62-3; further quotations from these pages
[46] This is not the place to discuss the relationship of Langer's musical aesthetics to Kivy's, but Dengerink Chaplin claims they are 'almost identical'. Discussing Kivy's physiognomic resemblance argument put forward about a sad-faced Saint Bernard dog, Dengerink Chaplin writes brings in the views of philosopher of music Albert van der Schoot, who observed, 'in spite of [Kivy's] recognition of [Langer's] pioneering role in the question of music's relation to the emotions, he finds it hard to accept that Langer preceded his Saint Bernard by almost half a century'." Van der Schoot, 2015 p. 169 in Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: p. 191
[47] Welsh, 1955: pp. 185-6
[48] Ibid.: p. 186

words whose meanings could not be given in images: "but", "or", "not", "because", and so on.

Moreover, if a given word, say "father" calls up an image in us, the image need not be the same for any two persons, nor need those images have a common pattern.[49]

Welsh here gives three arguments. The first – that people do not experience images when they use language – depends on whether the images are to be understood as conceptions or as sense-impressions. Langer certainly argues that people generally use language with a sense as to its meaning, but does not argue that listening or reading language provokes sense impressions equivalent to the subject matter under discussion.

Welsh's second argument further suggests however that this is how he takes her, by suggesting that words suggesting logical operations cannot be imaged – they can certainly be conceived of. Langer writes about them at length in the context of symbolic logic,[50] in terms of language she writes that they are unlike pictures:

> Now, in an ordinary picture, the terms of the represented complex are symbolized by so many visual items, i.e. areas of color, and the relations are indicated by relations of these items…
> But most of our interests center upon events, rather than upon things in static spatial relations. Causal connections, activities, time, and change are what we want most of all to conceive and communicate. And to this end pictures are poorly suited. We resort, therefore, to the more powerful, supple, and adaptable symbolism of language.
> How are relations expressed in language? For the most part, they are not symbolized by other relations, as in pictures, but are *named*, just like substantives.[51]

Welsh's third argument, that two people need not have the same "image" in mind when hearing the word 'father', is one that Langer would agree with, once clarified that it is conceptions that are being discussed, rather than sense impressions, though she would not accept that those images need have no common pattern:

> It is by virtue of such a fundamental *pattern*, which all correct conceptions of [a thing, such as a] house have in common, that we can talk together about the "same" house despite our private differences of sense-experience, feeling, and purely personal associations. *That*

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[49] Ibid.: p. 182
[50] Langer, 1937: pp. 45-81
[51] Langer, 1942: p. 73

> *which all adequate conceptions of an object must have in common, is the concept of the object*. The same concept is embodied in a multitude of conceptions. It is a *form* that appears in all versions of thought or imagery that can connote the object in question, a form clothed in different integuments of sensation for every different mind. Probably no two people see anything just alike. Their sense organs differ, their attention and imagery and feelings differ so that they cannot be suppose to have identical impressions. But if their respective conceptions of a thing (or event, or person, etc.) embody the same *concept*, they will understand each other.[52]

Welsh's objections do not stand scrutiny.

Sholz deals with Langer only according to how her theory accords with literature, however his characterisation of Langer's general approach and relationship to Wittgenstein are worth considering. He reads her as being a part of the logical positivist tradition – writing that, "[h]er affinity with truth-functional logic is apparent in the use of words like "pseudo-symbolic structures," "real significance." The criterion for "real significance," is for her, as for the positivists, the empirical one…"[53] Sholz takes Langer very much out of context; the entire force of her position in the chapter on discursive and presentational symbols in *PINK* is to point out the limits in treating meaning, or "real significance," this narrowly. "I will go with the logicians and linguistics as far as they like," writes Langer, "but do not promise to go no further. For there is an unexplored possibility of genuine semantic beyond the limits of discursive language."[54] It might be said, however, that Langer leaves herself open to this misunderstanding by bifurcating the terminology of this "genuine semantic," – discursive symbolism has *meaning*, whereas presentational symbols have *import* instead:

> Works of art, which I am sure have *import*, but not genuine meaning, are symbols of a sort, but not of the sort Nagel defined; for neither do they point themselves to something thereafter known apart from the symbol, nor are they established conventions … they are, I think, quasisymbols.[55]

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[52] Langer, 1942: p. 71
[53] Sholz, 1972: p. 216
[54] Langer, 1942: p. 86
[55] Langer, 1962: p. 60

Dengerink Chaplin calls this "tortured language," quoting this section from Langer and another from

Reid, who writes in Langer's support:

> [I do not] see why she should defer to the self-limited view of meaning held by Nagel and
> other semanticists, deciding to use the word 'import' instead. … [K]ow-towing to the
> logicians doesn't do them, or aesthetics, any good. 'Meaning' is a rich word with a rich
> variety of content, and should not be used in one logical context only. … [T]here is a unique
> thing, embodied meaning. Reid explains the term 'embodied meaning' in terms very similar
> to Langer: 'I prefer to say that we apprehend patterns of paint and sound, not as "meaning
> something" or express something, but as meaningful: [it is] embodied meaning.'[56]

On this last point, the distinction is that embodied meaning is formative, meaning created, rather

than pointed out. Returning to the idea that Langer follows the logical positivists, where she does

not follow Wittgenstein Sholz complains that her position cannot be reconciled with his.[57] Similarly,

Sholz also claims that Langer takes Wittgenstein's idea of picturing literally rather than

metaphorically – something which rests on the Bild as picture rather than Bild as model translation.[58]

In this section I have argued that a range of prominent aestheticians have mistaken Langer's position

by taking it out of context and confusing elements of it with positions of thinkers in the logical

positivist tradition. I have argued that none of these objections stand up to scrutiny and that they

seem to be mainly the result of assuming Langer's position to be associated with points of view

which the critics already disagree with and then quibbling with her.

4.3 Budd's Objections

Budd's objections to Langer's ideas cannot be dealt with quite so straightforwardly and focus in on

the meaning of the symbol. The section first looks at Budd's characterisation of the symbol before

looking at Ernst Cassirer's definition of a formative symbol and the use Langer makes of it. Looking

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[56] Reid, 1969: pp. 68, 70 in Dengerink Chaplin, 2019: pp. 174
[57] This is on the matter of poetry, which, as shown in Chapter 1, for Langer is a non-discursive or presentational
form. Sholz, 1972: p. 216
[58] Ibid.: p. 221, see also p. 215

then at the substantial agreement between Langer and Budd as to the intrinsic value of art, the section argues that this is a place where Budd mistakes Langer. The section moves on to Budd's criticisms regarding language and the use Langer makes of Wittgenstein and her failure to explain the structure of both propositions and states of affairs. Acknowledging the opacity of Langer's ideas at this point, I offer a partial explanation of these ideas gleaned from Langer's writings, connecting this to contemporary hylomorphic accounts. After considering Budd's axiom that 'there is no thought which cannot be represented in language,' the section concludes by arguing that the main conceptual use Langer makes of Wittgenstein is by taking and developing his notion of projection.

Two linked points should be made first to show how treating Langer's theory of art as fundamentally symbolic has led to confusion. In Budd's *Music and the Emotions*, he devotes a chapter to Langer's work, titled 'Music as Unconsummated Symbol'. Before he turns to Langer in the chapter however, he spends two pages attempting to clarify the range of meanings assigned to the concept of the symbol, though all of these follow from a broad definition of a symbol he gives as "anything which stands for or represents something else."[59] Whilst this definition would encompass most uses of the term, it is nonetheless a severe mischaracterization of Langer's concept.

Langer's view of symbols is that our experience with language has misled us into thinking that reference and communication are prime functions of symbols, whereas these are merely uses to which the symbolic has been put. In this she followed Cassirer – considering the primary function of symbols to be the formulation of experience. Cassirer put it thus:

> Every authentic function of the human spirit has this decisive characteristic in common with cognition: it does not merely copy but rather embodies an original, formative power. … This is as true of art as it is of cognition; it is as true of myth as of religion. … Each of these functions creates its own symbolic forms.[60]

Formative symbols are a creation rather than a recreation. Moreover, Langer and Budd are substantially in agreement as to the intrinsic value of art. Budd insists when discussing Langer that

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[59] Budd, 1985: p. 104
[60] Cassirer, 1955: p. 75

the value of music is intrinsic rather than instrumental,[61] and ten years later he generalised the point to include all works of art:

> Our attachment to the works we value as art is an attachment to the very experiences they offer, not to something detachable from them. To appreciate the value of a work of art it is necessary to undergo the experience it offers.[62]

Langer's agreement on this point can be seen by recourse to her notion of the symbol, but it is also given more directly in *FF*. As shown in Chapter 3, discussing Collingwood's theory of art, Langer takes issue with Collingwood's idea that a work of art exists in the artist's imagination – a position he takes due to his denying any role an artist's technical skill with the manipulation of materials, his denial of craft within art. Langer's response is to agree that the work of art is not identical with the materials, but to suggest that the experience of the work of art is instead afforded by these materials:

> …even good artists, and such as think about art theory, say of Leonardo's *Last Supper* that it is a work of art, and not of themselves that they are "having" one when they see or think of the picture. The picture is, indeed, not the paint on the wall, but the illusion which Leonardo created by means of paint on damp plaster. The paint, unhappily, has largely disappeared; but there is enough left to sustain the illusion, so the picture is still there. If time obliterates the last faint pigmentation, the work of art will have disappeared, no matter how well anyone may know and remember its vital import – the harmonies of feeling it revealed.[63]

Budd's specific criticisms regarding language and Wittgenstein concern how Langer fails to explain both the structure of a proposition and the structure of a state of affairs. Because Langer takes the requirement that there is a similarity between the two in the case of a discursive symbol from Wittgenstein, it might be expected that she could use his explanation of these structures, but because Langer uses terminology differently – 'object', in particular – she cannot do this. "Langer does not give a clear, alternate explanation of these ideas," Budd concludes.[64]

The force of this objection can be mitigated – it has already been mentioned how Langer does not argue anything new regarding discursive symbolism, her discussion of it really being to introduce an

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[61] Budd, 1985: p. 116
[62] Budd, 1995: p. 16
[63] Langer, 1953: pp. 385-6. Langer's remarks suggest she thinks the painting is a fresco – it is actually oil on a double layer of gesso, pitch, and mastic. See Wallace, 1972: p. 83
[64] Budd, 1985: p. 111

adjacent area of meaning: presentational symbols – but Budd seems to be correct here, at least

when only considering Langer's works in aesthetics (*PINK*, *FF*, *POA*) as he does, and depending on

exactly what Wittgenstein means by terms such as 'object'.[65] Whether Langer's 1937 *An Introduction*

to Symbolic Logic fulfils the obligation is difficult to say – in a way it is a 300-page explanation of the

ideas, and certainly describes in detail the structure of propositions, but being confined to symbolic

logic barely mentions objects at all, and does not engage Wittgenstein even once. The following

passage from this text, however, gives an example from which Langer's ideas of language and its

relation to objects and states of affairs can be gleaned:

> Not only in the artificial devices like the letters that spell a word, but in physical things as
> well, the importance of relations may be seen in the very constitution of objects themselves.
> Consider, for instance, the character of a coral rock. Its factors are the shells of millions of
> lilliputian individuals, all in definite relations to each other. Each tiny shell coheres with
> some other, and that with another, and so forth. Ultimately they all cohere together in an
> immense lump. So long as their *relations to each other* – i.e. the fact that one is *to the right*
> of another, or *on* another, or *near* it, *far from* it, etc., - can undergo no change, they form a
> solid island. But let some monstrous grinding force change their relations, so that shells
> which were *to the right* of others are now *to the left*, shells which were near each other are
> now distant, and so forth – and what has happened? The rock is no more! Perhaps not a
> single one of its factors has been destroyed, but if they no longer cohere, and thus keep
> their spatial relations to each other rigidly unaltered, the rock is destroyed. A mere shifting
> pile of corals is obviously not a rock. The very nature of the object depended on the *cohesion*
> of its parts. And cohesion is not itself a factor of the rock, but is a *relation among the*
> *factors*.[66]

Firstly, from this it can be agreed with Budd that Langer's 'objects' seem indeed quite unlikely to

correspond to Wittgenstein's – they are far from simple. The passage indeed suggests that objects

are strongly defined by internal relations, an argument that could also be made, for example, by

pointing out how qualitative differences between chemical elements follow from differing internal

structures – the number of atoms on the outer shell etc. The impression the passage gives of

Langer's ideas about states of affairs in the world is incomplete, however it seems safe to say that

states of affairs in the world are marked by relationships, and objects, with internal relations, may

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[65] Roger White discusses possible interpretations of the term and the ambiguities involved in it. See White,
2006: p. 38-46

[66] Langer, 1937: pp. 45-6

enter into external relations with other objects. Langer begins the passage by noting that such

characteristics are shared by the letters which make up a word – though whilst changing the

relationships of parts of the object changes the state of affairs, changing the letters around in a word

changes the symbol. Immediately preceding this passage she notes how rearranging the internal

relationships of the word, by shuffling the order of the letters, can turn the name 'Ronald' into

'Roland', or 'Arnold', or 'Landor'.[67] A proposition such as 'Roland is arriving," is, on this

understanding, similar to the state of affairs of a person with the name Roland's imminent entrance.

It is not the case that Roland is made up of six components each given a letter, and the way in which

Roland is structured is modelled by the ordering of these letters, whereas a Ronald in the world has

identical components but a different structure – Langer criticizes Russell for desiring a symbolism of

this type in the following remark, in *PINK*:

> It is a mistake, I think, to symbolize things by entities too much like themselves; to let words
> in temporal order represent things in temporal order. If relations such as temporal order are
> symbolized at all, le the symbols not be those same relations themselves. A structure cannot
> include as part of a symbol something that should properly be part of the meaning. But it is
> unfortunate that names and syntactical indicators look so much alike in language; that we
> cannot represent objects by words, and relations by pitch, loudness, or other
> characteristics.[68]

The internal difference between 'Ronald' and 'Roland' differentiates the symbol, and that is enough

to suggest a differentiation of objects in the world. Langer says, if I read her correctly, that 'Roland',

a relatively stable phenomenon in the world – an object – has been named, and the proposition

'Roland is arriving,' models the relationship of Roland to an unspecified destination which he will

quite soon reach. The parts of the proposition, 'Roland' and 'is arriving', whilst looking alike, actually

function quite differently, with the latter describing a relationship that the former is part of, whilst

the former is a name label. It should also be noted that Langer would have us take 'Roland is

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[67] Ibid.: p. 45
[68] Langer, 1942: p. 81

arriving,' as *logically* identical to 'Roland arrives,' but not *rhetorically* (Langer calls this

psychologically) identical:

> In a scientific discussion of temperatures, the loneliness and silence of the realms where absolute zero obtains are irrelevant; these factors are associated with "absolute zero" only through a picturesque personal conception of that temperature, and are meaningless to the man who imagines a long thermometer with the mercury out of sight. Likewise, the astounding length of the imaginary thermometer is irrelevant. "Loneliness," "silence," and "length" are not *logically* connected with the meaning of "absolute zero."[69]

Discursive language depends for its meaning on logical form – psychological, or grammatical, or

poetic form occurs when the language is being used non-discursively.

Whilst this account of objects and logical form is incomplete, Langer's account could be

supplemented by recourse to hylomorphic accounts, in which structure or form is the central

explanatory principle. Contemporary advocate of such accounts, philosopher William Jaworski, puts

the essential principle vividly, and in a way reminiscent of Langer's coral example:

> Suppose we put Howard in a very strong bag – strong enough to ensure that nothing leaks out when we squash him with several tons of force. Before squashing, the contents of the bag include one human being; after squashing, they include none. In addition, before squashing, the contents of the bag can think, feel, and act, but after squashing, they can't. What explains these differences in the contents of the bag pre-squashing and post-squashing? It cannot be the physical materials, for those remain the same – none of them leaked out. What changed was rather the way those materials were organized or structured… Paradigmatically, [structure] unifies diverse physical materials into a single composite whole.[70]

Jaworski points out that Aristotle's account of emotions in *De Anima* is a hylomorphic account, and

that until the 17th Century hylomorphism was the dominant philosophy of nature.[71] Hylomorphic

accounts, moreover, are receiving much attention from metaphysicians in the 21st Century.[72]

Without getting into the detail of where Langer's account corresponds and differs to Jaworski's and

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[69] Langer, 1937: p. 67
[70] Jaworski, 2018: p. 27
[71] Ibid.: pp. 25-6; Jaworski, 2011: p. 271
[72] Jaworski lists accounts from Fine, 1999, 2008; Johnston, 2006; Oderberg, 2007; Koslicki, 2008; Jaworski, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016; Rea, 2011; Marmodoro, 2013; and Koons, 2014. In response to Herbert Read's review of the first volume of *Mind*, Langer strongly denied she was setting forth a metaphysical system – see Wehr, 2004: p. 121. Nonetheless, Langer's philosophy of mind (and coral) is certainly hylomorphic

other hylomorphic accounts, it is significant that, from a contemporary philosophy of mind perspective, Langer's account appears to be increasingly plausible.

Budd mentions that Langer may be subject to an objection which Ernst Nagel brings up in a review of *PINK*, an objection Wittgenstein would not be subject to.[73] Nagel does not mention Wittgenstein, but does say of Langer that "she in effect maintains a sort of copy theory of musical significance."[74] She does not. More significantly, Nagel does not grasp that Langer has the formative power of the symbol most strongly in mind rather than the referential power of the symbol; because of this he does not consider the implications of there not being a form of the real world by which to test propositions, which can only be tested against other symbols, including the abstractions made by the eye and ear.[75] Generously, Nagel's misunderstanding on this point is made clear only by considering Langer's later work in *Mind*, but the core is present in *PINK*.[76]

Budd's only remaining criticism of Langer regarding language is axiomatic, that "there is no thought which cannot be represented in language."[77] He may be correct in this, but it is certainly something that, at least so far as the discursive (non-poetic) use of language goes, Langer disagrees strongly with, and something Budd does not provide evidence for. Budd, indeed, does not distinguish between discursive and non-discursive forms of language – if Budd is including poetic use of language then his position on the issue becomes very similar to Langer's. It is fundamental to her view that there are thoughts which cannot be adequately represented in discursive language. Anyone who accepts that artworks have cognitive content which cannot be adequately paraphrased in language, for instance, would agree.

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[73] Budd, 1985: p. 184n8. Budd may be alluding to the debate surrounding non-conceptual mental content, which he would presumably reject, but which a Langerean position would need to endorse. See Bermúdez & Cahen, 2020.

[74] Nagel, 1943: p. 328

[75] Ibid.: p. 326

[76] Langer, 1942: pp. 89-91; cf. Langer, 1967: pp. 153-98

[77] Budd, 1985: p. 112

In terms of Wittgenstein, Langer describes the *Tractatus* as a set of "metaphysical aphorisms," a

description which has generally been overlooked, despite occurring in *PINK*, and is not only an

accurate characterisation of Langer's use of the text – in spirit rather than to the letter – but also

arguably a plausible reconciliation between Wittgenstein's bold assertions and his simultaneous

claim that what he has written is nonsense:

> 6.54   My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who
> understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them
> – as steps – to climb up and beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the
> ladder after he has climbed up it.)
>   He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.
>
> What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.[78]

As to Langer's reaction to the *Investigations*, her only published reference to the latter Wittgenstein

is that he ended up with theories which were "a despairing resort to behaviourism."[79]

More importantly, for all the fuss over how Langer takes Wittgenstein's 'picture' either

metaphorically or as model, the conceptual and terminological takeaway from the *Tractatus* was

really the idea of projection. By the time of *Mind*, she was to explain the difference between non-

poetic language and art in terms of the former having a stable form of projection whilst the latter

does not:

> The most salient characteristic of discourse is that its symbolization of concepts is held to
> one dominant projection, which enables users of words to "run through" elaborate
> combinations of them, building up meanings by accretion. Other expressive devices may find
> their way into the pattern of discourse, but they are contingent to the basic pattern, and
> their sense is very aptly said to be "between the lines." The "lines" of discourse are
> propositional constructions; other accepted forms, which are not strictly propositional –
> interrogative, imperative, vocative – are auxiliary forms developed in use. The essence of
> language is statement.
>   The single pre-eminent projection of language [proposition] is both its power and its
> limitation… It is clumsy and all but useless for rendering the forms of awareness that are not
> essentially recognition of facts, though facts may have some connection with them. They are
> perceptions of our own sensitive reactions to things inside and outside of ourselves, and of
> the fabric of tensions which constitutes the so-called "inner life" of a conscious being. The
> constellations of such events are largely non-linear, for where sequences occur they

[78] Wittgenstein, 1921: p. 89
[79] Langer, 1982: p. 206

normally occur simultaneously with others, and every tension between two poles affects (evokes, modifies, cancels or precludes *ab initio*) many concomitant ones having other poles…[80]

Models have a stable rule of projection, whereas images do not, the projection in the latter determined by salience rather than convention.

In this section I have argued that Budd's criticism of Langer is based on a misguided assumption as to what she meant by the symbol, acknowledging that, nonetheless, some of Budd's criticism regarding the clarity of Langer's position on the structure of states of affairs and propositions is warranted. I have also argued that Langer takes up Wittgenstein's Tractarian idea of projection and develops it as a central concept in her philosophy.

4.4 Guernica 1: Motif, Convention and Form

This section looks at a criticism of Langerean aesthetics by Hagberg, who argues that Langer's account cannot form the basis of an adequate reading of the structure of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. The section begins with Hagberg's challenge, before moving on to defend Langer's account, first on the subject of form, then motif, and then looking at the interplay between motif and convention in differing conceptions of iconography. I argue that Langerean aesthetics has the elements necessary to provide an adequate reading of *Guernica*, and that Hagberg mistakes Langer in important ways.

Hagberg has criticized Langer for not having a clear account of stylistic patterns:

> The form is the aspect or dimension of the work that we are to abstract; it is this which allegedly carries aesthetic meaning. Langer, on this point, acknowledges a debt to Fry and Bell and thinks it clear why aesthetically relevant form lies beyond description. Indeed, on her view, all matters of content must be excluded, because that which is amenable to discursive projection, which content clearly is, is thereby aesthetically irrelevant. But it appears that in order to see what is of central importance to the theory we must rely on the very thing the theory prohibits. To take another case, a disinterested and formally abstracted perception of Picasso's Guernica would not yield an uncluttered, undistorted, and immediate recognition of the aesthetic meaning the work possesses. It would yield rather a

[80] Langer, 1967: pp. 102-3. Cf. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.5; *Investigations*, §§18, 23

confusing array of disconnected images and an utter failure to comprehend and to feel the force of the work. Now there is a clear formal organization in that painting, a three-panel scheme derived from mediaeval altar-pieces. But it is not clear what role this compositional form would play in Langer's account of artistic meaning. And with this we arrive at the question parallel to that in the theory of language which inquires into the relation between the proposition and its meaning. Specifically, what is the significance of the form of the work, e.g., sonata-allegro, rondo, tripartite altarpiece, theme and variations, Sophoclean tragedy, etc., in Langer's account?[81]

Hagberg here mischaracterises Langer's position. To begin with, Langer explicitly states that she is

not concerned with genre form:

> The word "form" has several current uses; most of them have some relation to the sense in which I am using it here, though a few, such as: "a form to be filled in for tax purposes" or "a mere matter of form" are fairly remote, being quite specialized. Since we are speaking of art, it might be good to point out that the meaning of stylistic pattern- "the sonata form," "the sonnet form" - is not the one I am assuming here. [82]

Langer goes on to describe what she does mean by form, an apparently self-contained relational

structure:

> I am using the word in a simpler sense, which it has when you say, on a foggy night, that you see dimly moving forms in the mist; one of them emerges clearly, and is the form of a man. The trees are gigantic forms; the rills of rain trace sinuous forms on the window pane. The rills are not fixed things; they are forms of motion. When you watch gnats weaving in the air, or flocks of birds wheeling over-head, you see dynamic forms - forms made by motion.
>   It is in this sense of an apparition given to our perception, that a work of art is a form. It may be a permanent form like a building or a vase or a picture, or a transient, dynamic form like a melody or a dance, or even a form given to imagination, like the passage of purely imaginary, apparent events that constitutes a literary work. But it is always a perceptible, self-identical whole; like a natural being, it has a character of organic unity, self-sufficiency, individual reality. And it is thus, as an appearance, that a work of art is good or bad or perhaps only rather poor; as an appearance, not as a comment on things beyond it in the world, nor as a reminder of them.[83]

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[81] Hagberg, 1984: p. 335; Hagberg is far from alone in asserting a relationship between medieval altarpieces and *Guernica*. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona writes that "The visual and philosophic relationships between Grünewald's *Crucifixion* and Picasso's *Guernica* have been noted by such students of Picasso as Sir Anthony Blunt, Heschel Chipp, Jane Dillenberger, Albert Elsen, Luboš Hlavaček, Ruth Kaufmann, Sir Roland Penrose, Herbert Read, and Frank D. Russell. Extending these interpretations, the visual and iconographic affinities presented in *Guernica* define it as a modern presentation of that same "essence of agony" of that hapticity of the female body, central to the art, but without the Christian reality, of Matthias Grunewald." See Apostolos-Cappadona, 1992: p. 41
[82] Langer, 1966: p.7
[83] Ibid.: p.7

Langer uses the word apparition here in place of virtual form; form, in art, is about how things seem. This is clear enough, but it does leave Hagberg's challenge unanswered – the force of which, accounting for the presence and function of stylistic patterns across different artworks, does indeed want answering. Hagberg is essentially right that Langer's account of the significance of genre is unclear; however, careful attention to her relevant remarks gives both an idea as to her position and justification for her not foregrounding such issues:

> …if academic training has caused us to think of pictures primarily as examples of schools, periods, or the classes that Croce decries ("landscapes," "portraits," "interiors," etc.), we are prone to think *about* the picture, gathering quickly all available data for intellectual judgements, and so close and clutter the paths of intuitive response.[84]

A full account of Langer's ideas on intuition is outside the remit of this study – briefly, her concept of intuition is the same as Locke's: *a direct logical or semantic perception*.[85] This quote should also not be taken as meaning that Langer dismisses the cognitive value of art – as discussed in Chapter 3. She does not want viewers to be distracted by metadata and categorisation, though this does not mean, contra Hagberg, that discursive reasoning has no place:

> Works of art are not usually comparable… This does not mean, however, that works of art cannot be criticized. Appreciation – being impressed or left cold – comes first; but the

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[84] Langer, 1953: p. 397

[85] Langer's use of the term intuition is not the same as either Croce or Bergson, but is explicitly Lockean: "Intuition is the basic intellectual function. The word has been popularly used to denote some alleged possession of information without any demonstrable source – foreknowledge of rationally unpredictable events, factual knowledge without any access to facts, etc.; it is also used as a synonym for instinct, which it certainly is not. I am using it here in the strict sense which it was given by Locke in his *Essay*. In that sense, "intuition" is direct logical or semantic perception; the perception of (1) relations, (2) forms, (3) instances, or exemplifications of forms, and (4) meaning." Langer rejects Locke's fifth sense of intuition – "intuition of ourselves" – given in every thought. See Langer, 1967: pp. 128-9. Langer sees intuition as fundamental to what she calls the great shift between animal mentation to human mentality: "The development of intuition, if not its very beginning, appears in the evolutionary theater as a hominid speciality; wherever else its roots may reach and show some budding life, it is in the human stock that it has had a steady growth, and made a radical difference in the entire design of that species, shifting its operational basis from directly stimulated instinctive action to more or less planned activity." (Ibid.: p. 129) Lockean too is Langer's take on logical reasoning, which both depends on and results in intuitions: "'Reasoning' is the process of building up insight into relations which are too complex to be grasped by direct inspection of the highly elaborate exhibit or statement, in which many terms are implicitly connected with others in several directions at once, and perhaps are even determined in their nature by such relations – that is, are functions of other terms. Reasoning is the use of logic to make implicitly given conditions explicit; and logic is a fundamentally simple yet powerful machinery for getting from one intuition to another, systematically, successively, without losing any member of the series." (Ibid.: p. 146)

recognition of how the illusion was made and organized and how the sense of import is immediately given by a strong piece, even though the critic himself may be nonplussed by its strange feeling – that recognition is a product of analysis, reached by discursive reasoning about the work and its effects. Such findings, however, are no criteria of excellence; they are explanations of it, or contrariwise of failure. As soon as they are generalized and used as measures of achievement they become baneful.[86]

Langer would have us suspend judgement when possible, to experience works before analysing them, and holds that an overly analytical frame of mind will preclude an adequate experience of a work of art qua art.

Figure 1: Pablo Picasso, 'Guernica',1937, (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Reina Sofía, Madrid, 3,490 x 7,770 mm)

The choice of *Guernica* (see Figure 1) is significant: by Hagberg's reading of Langer she seems dangerously close to aestheticizing the depiction of war crimes. He notes Langer's acknowledging a debt to Roger Fry and Clive Bell, though does not pay attention to the way her account deviates from theirs – to the extent that, in fact, Hagberg's criticisms here are really of Bell's position rather than Langer's.[87] Answering the criticism requires both clarifying the question "what is the significance of the form," and providing a reading of *Guernica* in Langerean terms – including the tripartite division and triangular motif but also other referential matters, including Christian and

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[86] Langer, 1953: p. 406
[87] William G. Bywater, Jr. has defended Bell partially on the grounds that what he is producing is criticism rather than aesthetics. "Bell's approach to criticism is audience-oriented. The critic does not render judgements on the basis of norms and reasons, rather he turns his attention to the audience, guiding and animating it." See Bywater, Jr., 1975: p. 33

Spanish iconography. To clarify the question, there is not a 'significance of the tripartite form' in Langer's account – meaning for her is a function, and the tripartite form functions differently in different works. Moreover, the tripartite form is one of many interdependent forms that may be found in the work. Tripartite form for Langer is a motif – as are, for instance, circular, triangular, and spiral structures:

> The fundamental forms which occur in the decorative arts of all ages and races – for instance the circle, the triangle, the spiral, the parallel – are known as *motifs* of design. They are not art "works," not even ornaments, themselves, but they lend themselves to composition, and are therefore incentives to artistic creation. The word *motif* bespeaks this function: motifs are organizing devices that give the artist's imagination a start, and so "motivate" the work in a perfectly naive sense. They drive it forward, and guide its progress.[88]

She has this to say about how motifs combine to create genres, which then may retain or discard these motifs as they develop, here in terms of the genre of "dance music," provoked by popular dance of the past:

> Popular dancing… carried on in the spirit of romance, escape, relief from the burden of actuality, without any spiritually strenuous achievement – that is to say, the erotic and entertaining pleasure dance – has begotten a corresponding genre of musical composition, originally intended merely as part of the dance: the whole literature of "dance music." This in turn has produced musical forms which are independent, today, of that original connection: the suite, sonata, and symphony. Even the waltz, the tango, the rumba, have suggested works of music that are not really intended to be danced. But such developments are musical events, not balletic. The dance, in relation to the concert suite that begins with an *intra* and ends with a *gigue*, serves as a musical motif, which is fairly well dropped by the time Haydn takes the sonata in hand.[89]

A motif is a kind of secondary virtual form. Langer argues here that the dance motif originally functioned within a sonata but, by the 18th Century, was no longer a standard part of it. Secondary virtual forms come and go, both within artworks and within traditions; the primary virtual form alone is necessary and stably present. Secondary virtual forms are the key *conventional* elements within genres; they may be present or absent in works, and, more importantly, present or absent to

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[88] Langer, 1953: p. 69
[89] Ibid.: p. 203

varying degrees. Fidelity to genre is a matter of the extent to which the secondary virtual elements

of an existing tradition are engaged with. The specifics of how this is done is an art historical matter

– we will return to *Guernica* shortly – but this way of folding in convention into her aesthetics, as

part of secondary virtual form, deserves a little more discussion. Primary virtual form cannot really

be said to be conventional – the use of space in painting is necessary and sufficient, for Langer; to

not use it is to not make paintings rather than to break with convention. But depiction of objects, for

instance, is a convention, which might be done to varying degrees. The presence or absence of one

of these secondary virtual forms is less significant than its modulation – how the form is used, the

tradition engaged with, and the device functions. Indeed, Langer is keen to stress how little

conventions really matter in art – unlike in models. Discussing clocks, she notes how often we ignore

their physical character because this is irrelevant to the meaning, noting too that in this case

"elementary meanings are assigned by convention and could be changed by agreement." Art,

however, functions differently:

> The art symbol, however, does not rest on convention. There are conventions in art, and
> they do change, but they govern only the ways of creating the symbol, and not its semantic
> function. When they change, it is not by any agreement but by individual departure from
> them.[90]

Clock-time is standardized centrally, and deviation from it is error. Secondary virtual forms, by

contrast, are chosen voluntarily, and conventions are established because certain of these devices

function in particular and effective ways. Artists experience other people's art and borrow devices,

though the ways these devices function is always subject to the overall functioning of the work, and

so there is not a standard meaning involved in using them. (It should be remembered here that

whilst, by semantic, Langer is referring to meaning, there is not the necessity for a syntactical

element. This is another area of terminology where Langer's usage is rather misleading.) Langer links

convention and reference too, in a potentially misleading way:

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[90] Langer, 1967: p. 105

> The artistic symbol, *qua* artistic, negotiates insight, not reference; it does not rest upon convention, but motivates and dictates conventions. It is deeper than any semantic of accepted signs and their referents, more essential than any schema that may be heuristically read.[91]

It is quotes like this, taken out of context, which have mislead Hagberg. Langer is saying not to get too hung up on iconography and referential meaning. For instance, in terms of iconography, Langer worries about artistic readings which try to compile meaning by combining unitary meaning discursively. In the case of *Guernica*, looking up some major iconographic elements in *Hall's Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, an art historical reference book, gives a superficial 'reading' of the painting. Here are excerpts from the entries for horse, sword, and bull (there are no entries for lightbulb, bomb, or the colour grey):

> **Horse.** The mount of warriors, kings, nobles and others, on their travels or in battle. Horses draw the triumphal car of numerous mythological figures, see CHARIOT. The horse is an attribute of Europe personified, one of the FOUR PARTS OF THE WORLD. Bucephalus, the horse of ALEXANDER THE GREAT, is generally depicted as white…[92]
>
> **Sword.** The weapon of the solider in many narrative themes (see WARRIOR); also a symbol of authority and of the administration of justice and, like the palm frond, the attribute of the Christian martyr… [nothing about broken swords][93]
>
> **Bull.** An object of worship in primitive religions, for its strength and fertilizing power… A bull-headed monster, the Minotaur, slain by THESEUS….[94]

This rather literal exercise in iconography says little about Guernica (though admittedly the horse acting as Europe personified works well), and the labelling of this long list of iconographic attributes as a *dictionary* suggests a level of precision that is misleading; Langer cautions against such readings:

> The interpretation of forms as objects gives the forms a meaning in the primary, discursive sense. Even if those objects have further symbolic values, those values are meaning; and both levels of meaning are elements in the construction of the art symbol, not separate parts of its import. The deeper level – the symbolic significance of objects such as Durer's skulls and hourglasses, Picasso's Minotaur – is almost always confused with the artistic

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[91] Langer, 1953: p. 22
[92] Hall, 1996: p. 157
[93] Ibid.: pp. 294-5
[94] Ibid.: p. 54

expression of feeling…[95]

And so the tripartite structure of *Guernica*, for Langer, was adopted in making the work, and the sort of use made of it by Picasso may well influence other artists in adopting the device and variations on it in their own works.[96] It is not possible however to build up a reading based on components including the tripartite structure, as even such associations as this altarpiece-like structure seeming religious in character might function in drastically different ways depending on the artwork. Malcolm Budd, for instance, writes about how the way in which subject matter is engaged by an artist can fundamentally alter its character:

> Manner of depiction can present its subject in a manner that *counteracts* the response that would typically be wrung from a spectator of the actual depicted scene (as in the case of a serene picture of the Crucifixion, Raphael's exquisite *The Mond Crucifixion*, for example).[97]

In fact, Langer's discussion of the dangers of iconographical concatenation were echoed by T. J. Clark in his 1974 essay 'The Conditions of Artistic Creation':

> …in a generation [iconography] has declined from a polemic about tradition and its forms, an argument over the conditions in which an artist encountered an ideology, into desultory theme-chasing—100 pictures of the Noble Savage, with fifty early blast furnaces thrown in.[98]

Clark here criticises the state of art historical discourse; Langer makes the same point from the philosophical perspective. An oversimple iconographic reading of Guernica is likely to get hung up on recognition of first objects and then their potential symbolic values – at the expense of a more substantial engagement with the work.[99] For Clark, this more substantial engagement is social and political:

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[95] Langer, 1967: p. 97n56
[96] Regarding the extent and sort of influence Picasso's art, especially *Guernica*, had in the United States, see *Picasso and American Art* (Fitzgerald, 2006)
[97] Budd, 1995: p. 76
[98] Clark, 1974: pp. 561-2
[99] Kandinsky, in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, makes the same point of the shallow and blinding effect of the recognition of subject matter: "Imagine a building divided into many rooms. The building may be large or

To talk of *Guernica* at all is inevitably to broach the issue of Picasso's contact as a citizen with the events of the twentieth century. My assumption, like everyone else's, is that the century shaped and informed his worldview. But it did so, I have been arguing, on a structural level: the epoch only really appeared, to Picasso as a painter, in the guise of a form of life – a specific shape and depth to experience – coming to an end. This remains *Guernica*'s subject. But now the end is treated epically – as the agony of a polis, played out by monsters and heroes.[100]

Without pursuing this too far, it is clear that Clark's interests, specifically in the *treatment* of the end of the guise of a form of life located specifically within the twentieth century, cannot be adequately dealt with by recognition of objects and their symbolic values. Langer shares this kind of interest in art, which is to say it is one of the values of art she recognises. Though her emphasis is more psychological than social, she shares with Clark commitment to the idea of artworks being specific to and articulate of their historical moment:

…the consideration of art as a cultural heritage brings us back to a concept that was set aside in an earlier connection – the concept of art as a kind of "communication." It has its dangers because, on the analogy of language, one naturally expects "communication" to be between the artist and his audience, which I think is a misleading notion. But there is something that may, without danger of too much literalness, be called "communication through art," namely the report which the arts make of one age or nation to the people of another. No historical record could tell us in a thousand pages as much about the Egyptian mind as one visit to a representative exhibit of Egyptian art. What would the European know of Chinese culture, with its vast reach into the past, if Chinese feeling had not been articulated in sculpture and painting? What would we know of Israel without its great literary work – quite apart from its factual record? Or of our own past, without medieval art? In this sense, art is a communication, but it is not personal, nor anxious to be understood.[101]

small. Every wall of every room is covered with pictures of various sizes; perhaps they number many thousands. They represent in colour bits of nature – animals in sunlight or shadow, drinking, standing in water, lying on the grass; near to, a Crucifixion by a painter who does not believe in Christ; flowers; human figures sitting, standing, walking; often they are naked; many naked women, seen foreshortened from behind; apples and silver dishes; portrait of Councillor So and So; sunset; lady in red; flying duck; portrait of Lady X; flying geese; lady in white; calves in shadow flecked with brilliant yellow sunlight; portrait of Prince Y; lady in green. All this is carefully printed in a book – name of artist – name of picture. People with these books in their hands go from wall to wall, turning over pages, reading the names. Then they go away, neither richer nor poorer than when they came, and are absorbed at once in their business, which has nothing to do with art. Why did they come?" Kandinsky, 1911: p. 3

[100] Clark, 2013: pp. 239-40
[101] Langer, 1953: p. 410

As discussed at length in Chapter 2, feeling, for Langer, is of special significance: it is the primary way in which people relate to the world and themselves, motivating thought and action. Whilst Langer does acknowledge this historical "communication through art," the primary value for her of art, which causes her to minimise the role of reference and convention in a way misleading to Hagberg and others, is emotional insight:

> What any true artist – painter or poet, it does not matter – tries to "re-create" is not a yellow chair, a hay wain or a morally perplexed prince, as "a symbol of his emotion," but that quality which he has once known, the emotional "value" that events, situations, sounds or sights in their passing have had for him. He need not represent those same items of his experience, though psychologically it is a natural thing to do if they were outstanding forms; the rhythm they let him see and feel may be projected in other sensible forms, perhaps even more purely. When he finds a theme that excites him it is because he thinks that in his rendering of it he can endow it with some such quality, which is really a way of feeling.[102]

In this section I have addressed the concerns by Hagberg in relation to what Langerean aesthetics would make of Picasso's *Guernica*. Countering Hagberg's objections directly, I have also shown why Langer does not foreground this issue, due to her insistence that focusing on the category an artwork may belong to can get in the way of aesthetic experience. Having argued that Langerean aesthetics has the resources to provide an adequate reading of *Guernica*, in the next section I shall provide such a reading.

4.5 Guernica 2: 'The Iron Eats'

This section offers a reading of *Guernica* in Langerean terms. Considering the subject matter of the painting, the section considers a specific use that has been made of the tapestry version of *Guernica*, and how this relates to Langer's ideas on artistic vitality. The section considers, once again, motifs, this time from the point of view of the artistic transformation of life into art. The remainder of the section looks at the primary virtual form and, especially, secondary virtual forms and the projections

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[102] Langer, 1967: pp. 118-9

in which they appear in *Guernica*, offering a reading in terms of the qualitative continua found in the painting. Finally, the issue of tripartite structure is addressed directly.

Guernica portrays a historical event, and does so by depicting, amongst other things, nine figures: four women, a baby, a man-shaped statue, a bull, a horse and a bird. These function as a kind of Greek Chorus, responding in various ways to the attacks from an unseen enemy; the responses of the figures are the main subject of the painting. Guernica the town was, at the time of the attack, well behind the lines, with most of the men away fighting; it is reasonable to think that this countryside town was mainly filled with women and children and farm animals -that Picasso's choice of figures is broadly taken from accounts of the attack. Rudolf Arnheim points out that this is not the case:

> As far as the characters are concerned, we find human figures and animals endowed with at least equal importance and entrusted with similar roles. Why animals? One can point, pedantically, to the agricultural setting, although as a matter of fact the reports on the bombing of Guernica mention neither horses nor cattle but describe flocks of sheep machine-gunned by the German planes. In any event, it is surely not a concern with faithful documentation that placed Picasso's animals in the picture. Presumably he introduced them because, first of all, we attribute to animals simple, elementary, but strong reactions. Second, when animals are given the status of human actors, as they are here, they tend to stand for one particular mental attitude, as they do, for example, in fables. Whereas in the image of a human figure the properties attributed to it are subservient to it and belong to it by contingency rather than by necessity ("a man who happens to be strong"), the animal appears as subservient to the property which it represents and which it possesses by the necessity of its very nature ("strength, embodied by the bull"). Therefore the animals in *Guernica* depersonalize, purify, and intensify the human properties for which they stand.[103]

Arnheim's reading here agrees with Langer's more general ideas – that the figures are characters, chosen and painted with a view to their expressive qualities and potential. For Langer the motif or theme can come from anywhere, its suitability will depend on its ability to support the salient aspects of whatever the artist wishes to express:

> Wherever art takes a motif from actuality – a flowering branch, a bit of landscape, a historic event or a personal memory, any model or theme from life – it transforms it into a piece of imagination, and imbues its image with artistic vitality. The result is an impregnation of

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[103] Arnheim, 1962: p. 28

ordinary reality with the significance of created form. This is the subjectification of nature, that makes reality itself a symbol of life and feeling.[104]

An artist may be inspired by seeing cherry blossom, paint a scroll depicting them, and exhibit it. Viewers, in turn, having been presented with a qualitative treatment of the theme – perhaps apocalyptic blossom, more likely serene – take this treatment with them so that, when they encounter cherry blossom in day-to-day life, *the experience itself* is accompanied by something of this quality. The language of this quote suggests that whenever a motif is taken from life this *must* happen, at least in genuine, which is to say functional, artworks. Whether or not this is the case, it seems clear that it can happen. Guernica as a historical event has been transformed into *Guernica* the reified imagination nugget which in turn has affected perception of the event – "reality itself" has become "a symbol of life and feeling." A *Guernica* tapestry, the production of which was supervised by Picasso, was on long-term loan to the United Nations between 1985 and February 2021.[105] In 2003, a week before Colin Powell attempted to win UN approval for the bombardment of Baghdad, the tapestry was covered with a blue shroud. An Australian UN delegate, Laurie Brereton, gave a speech to the Australian federal parliament linking the two events:

> Throughout the debate on Iraq there has been a remarkable degree of obfuscation, evasion and denial, and never more so than when it comes to the grim realities of military action. We may well live in the age of the so-called 'smart bomb', but the horror on the ground will be just the same as that visited upon the villagers of Gernika [the Basque spelling of the town]… And it won't be possible to pull a curtain over that.[106]

This seems to be the sort of artistic vitality Langer has in mind – and returning to Hagberg's criticisms, is precisely contrary to denying the content of the painting. Langer has more to say about content from life – she is discussing poetry, but explicitly says that her remarks here apply to all art:

> Every good work of art has, I think, something that may be said to come from the world, and that bespeaks the artist's own feeling about life…The motif, often springing from deeper sources of the imagination than art itself, and the feeling the artist has toward it, give the

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[104] Langer, 1966: p. 12
[105] Gladstone, 2021.
[106] Van-Hensbergen, 2004: pp. 2-3; full-text of the speech reported in the Brereton, 2003.

first elements of form to the work; its dimensions and intensity, its scope and mood…It is usually with the advance of conceptual competence that an artist becomes able to find material outside his own situation, because he becomes more and more apt to see all things, possibilities as well as actualities, half-wrought already into expressive forms in terms of his own art…Where a theme comes from makes no difference; what matters is the excitement it begets, the importance it has for the poet. The imagination must be fed from the world – by new sights and sounds, actions and events – and the artist's interest in human feeling must be kept up by actual living and feeling; that is, the artist must love his material and believe in his mission and his talent, otherwise art becomes frivolous, and degenerates into luxury and fashion.

As surely as some experience of real life must inspire art, it must be entirely transformed in the work itself.[107]

The way in which real life is transformed in art, according to Langer, is in motifs – which have the quality of acts rather than things:

In painting quite elementary decorative figures may serve to organize gripping representations, as the simple shape of the Cross the fusion of God and man, the crucified Christ…And once an element is created, it influences the entire work. A transcendent moment effects a rarification of the whole piece and lifts it as a whole above the level of sensuous tensities. Every abstraction, intensification, coloration, acts on it in this way; consequently even the most direct influence of one element on another seems to go via the implicit core of the art symbol.

Elements in art have not the character of things, but of acts. They are "active," act-like, even where they are not "acts" in the dramatic sense nor in the special sense which is sometimes given to the word by people who let it mean only moral acts. In a broad sense, which I find far more useful for philosophical purposes, any unit of activity is an act. Taken in this way, the term has an instrumental value for building up a coherent and adequate concept of mind, and on that pragmatic basis I use the broad sense here.[108]

It should be noted that whilst, for instance, it makes sense to ask what the window depicted on the right side of *Guernica* is doing, it makes little sense to ask that of a window in the real world. Depicted elements seem active – this very much leads into Langer's idea of art needing to seem like *living* form.

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[107] Langer, 1953: pp. 253-4
[108] Langer, 1967: pp. 201-2

In terms of *projection*, the primary virtual form is virtual space – the rule of projection is depiction. Langer's ideas on this have been outlined in Chapter 1; briefly, for *Guernica*, there is a recognisable configuration of a space, a space recognisable as having a tiled floor and which is edged by walls. This space is filled – and in Langer's terms, *created* – with characters and objects, which are secondary virtual forms which enter into qualitative relations with each other and with the total space.

In terms of secondary virtual forms and their projections, it is worth noting again, contrary to models, being able to describe the projection in a finished work is not the same as being able to provide rules of translation where equivalent meanings can be derived by applying a stable rule when transforming between media.[109] In terms of secondary virtual forms, what we are looking for in a finished artwork are qualitative continua, not in literal terms but in virtual terms. In other words, what matters is not paint and canvas but virtual elements – what the painting seems like, in qualitative degrees.

There are many such qualitative continua in *Guernica*, such as light-dark, hard-soft, Classical-Surrealist, vertical-horizontal, life-death, inside-outside, medieval-modern, and individuation-involvement. However, since commentaries on Guernica are already so extensive, here I will focus on a single gradient and a single additional motif. Between these two, which also seem to have been written about less in relation to Guernica, it will be apparent how a fuller Langerean reading of the painting might proceed.

The gradient is freedom-necessity. In the previous chapter, Langer was quoted writing that whenever art produces a semblance that lies upon this continuum then it has a semblance of life since having an option is a characteristic of life and art and nothing else as we know it. In Guernica, the secondary virtual form of the woman on the right side who falls from a window has a semblance

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[109] Langer, 1967: pp. 81-2

of almost total necessity, to use Langer's term, which is to say that she has almost no choices left.

She is falling, unsupported, and, whilst she may be able to reach her arms and flail, she seems

unable to escape. She is falling to the ground, a ground made solid by many elements, for instance

the splayed feet of the woman who looks up at the lamp. The woman at the other side of the

canvas, the grieving-mother, holds what seems to be her son. He has no choices left, and hers are

awful – she has no way of saving him. Her grief is bird-like and primal; her left palm resembles the

bird's wing and tail perched behind her on the table, her up-turned face echoed too in the bird's

posture, her other hand also feathery. Teardrop eyes and nostrils, of both these peripheral female

characters, link to the teardrop nostrils of the bull and especially the horse; the grieving mother has

the choices to be able to wail, she is able to follow instincts. In terms of this grieving mother, the

final stanza of Evan Shipman's 1931 poem *The Captive* seems relevant:

> Freedom to turn the pain (how frail
> The scales of bondage)
> Pain is stale in the core
> Though the weight shall remain
> Attending the slow fire of fate.[110]

She is alive, she has options, but they are awful; the 'freedom to turn the pain' is a mockery of

freedom, a freedom which only drives home the awful necessity, nigh-on inevitability of the

situation. The analysis could continue, but in terms of necessity and freedom I will only point out one

additional detail, which is the anguish contained in the palms of the hands of the characters, the

tension shown in them clasping, uselessly.

The motif I would like to discuss is the eye-bomb-lightbulb. Its most literal meaning is a lightbulb

with a lampshade, but it is in its presentation that Picasso associates it both with an eye and a bomb.

The eye watches cruelly, cruel because of its harshness, jaggedness of the spike-like eyelashes (these

read also as light and fire-explosion with the bulb and bomb respectively), hardness striking out of

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[110] Shipman, 1931: p. 285

the spikes. The hardness, spikiness, and whiteness of the form all relative to softer, more rounded, greyer forms elsewhere. In terms of the lightbulb and the bomb, both are products of industry. The painting as a whole references the aerial bombardment of Guernica the town, the bomb motif stands in for the aggressors as a whole, but the lightbulb too is implicated. None of the particular kinds of horror depicted in the painting would occur were it not for the products of the industrial revolution. The motif of the lightbulb, remember, is presented just next to the lamp – which has a softness, an up-rightness, a *living-ness*, in contrast to the horizontal falling-ness and dead-ness, *death-ness*, of the implicated industrial contingency descending upon an innocent rural town. Shipman's second stanza of 'The Captive' opens with the terrifying line, "the iron eats," this is a sentiment which applies to the motif of the lightbulb.

How does this all relate to the tripartite structure which Hagberg mentions? There seem to be many answers to this, overlapping ones, certainly including the evocation of the pieta, and the sufferings of Christ, readings which the stigmata-like wound on the horse seem to corroborate. Part of the work done by the tripartite scheme also seems to be making conspicuous the absence of a Christ-like figure, who we might expect in the centre, in place of the horse writhing away from the pain. The attack on Guernica was not divine wrath, the altar-like structure emphasises the worldliness and groundedness of the human suffering.

In this section I have provided a Langerean reading of *Guernica*. If the previous section was a defence based on an art-historically informed aesthetics, then this section has been a defence of Langer's ideas based on an aesthetically informed art historical approach. The value of taking such an approach is that Langer's ideas have seldom been used, and discussing her ideas without application has obscured the usefulness and prompted misunderstandings.

Conclusion

This chapter has meant to clear the decks somewhat in terms of criticism of Langerean aesthetics, as most of the criticisms examined have been shown to be either taken out of context or otherwise completely misrepresenting her view. The criticisms with more force are both from Budd – with it remaining unclear precisely where her break with the Tractarian Wittgenstein takes place, what, for instance, constitutes an object or a state of affairs. Most helpfully, Budd situates Langer as a philosopher who fundamentally believes that there are thoughts which cannot be represented in language. Whilst Budd disagrees, it is this kind of criticism on a substantive point which ought to provide the model for engagement with thinkers such as Langer. It is disappointing that the majority of aestheticians mentioned in this chapter did not really attempt to understand what Langer meant. Her account needs attacks, to draw out connections and identify inconsistencies – to strengthen it. Unfortunately, most of the criticism discussed in this chapter is lazy and unworthy caricature.

The *Guernica* sections have brought out some additional concepts in the Langerean toolset, such as motif and explaining the way in which convention figures. They argue too that Langerean aesthetics has the flexibility to attend to both detailed and global nuances of artworks, contra Langer's critics.

Chapter 5

The Experience of Scale in Traditional Chinese Religious Art

This chapter introduces the aesthetic concept of scale. More specifically, it introduces the gradient of clarity of both extrinsic and intrinsic scale. *Extrinsic scale* is the experience of relationship of the physical size of the artwork itself to the body of the viewer. *Intrinsic scale* is the viewer's experience of the size relationships of visual elements within an artwork.

Within the broader thesis, and especially within the following chapter, these gradients are meant to be seen as functioning in a Langerean aesthetic framework; however, in the current chapter Langer is put to one side. In a thesis so heavily predicated on Langerean aesthetics, this requires some explanation. Partly it is a matter of not needing to shoehorn Langer into every discussion of art – her aesthetics provide a set of tools which are available and useful but not always required. Whilst the discussion in this chapter could be written with Langerean terminology, it is not necessary to do so.

To some extent, Langerean aesthetics pervade this chapter too, as not only clarity of intrinsic and extrinsic scale are understood as gradients, but the chapter assumes that the works under discussion are expressive of human feeling. Beyond this, however, an attempt has been made to understand the artworks in question by contextualising them in their traditions. It is this core of scale, especially relative clarity of intrinsic scale, which relates to the Langerean ideas discussed in the first four chapters and which will be returned to in Chapter 6; other than this, this chapter makes an attempt to deal with Chinese artworks in Chinese terms.

The selection of Chinese religious art is due to the subject matter of the chapter – introducing scale. The three religious traditions of China, in the periods under discussion certainly the dominant traditions in the country, are marked by each being centred on a particular conception of part to whole. Confucianism considers the relationship between an individual and society. Buddhism, the

relationship of the individual to a metaphysical Ultimate Reality, beyond time and space and rebirth. Daoism considers the relationship of the individual to nature and the universe. As scale concerns the relationship between discrete physical or virtual elements, the device has very often been used to represent the relationship between and within religious elements.

Within the present thesis, the selection of Chinese art also has the advantage of the entire pictorial tradition being semi-figurative or semi-abstract, which is to say that strict linear perspective only began to be used in Chinese paintings in the 18th Century – before this, in Chinese painting, there is always some ambiguity of intrinsic scale.[1] For the purposes of the thesis, complete clarity of intrinsic scale has already been adequately covered in the discussion of John Martin's *Belshazzar's Feast* in the introduction. This chapter, once it gets on to intrinsic scale, will be treating examples of partly ambiguous intrinsic scale, and the following chapter is focused on examples of entirely ambiguous intrinsic scale. The experience of scale in traditional Chinese religious art in pictorial examples is shown to be always partially ambiguous, and this device is exploited for a variety of different effects. In Confucian architecture, however, scale is used quite differently, with an aim of complete clarity.

Each section draws out references to intrinsic scale in Chinese textual sources and makes connections to how these textual suggestions were taken up by artists working in various Chinese traditions. The first section looks at Confucian architecture, and how extrinsic scale is used to perform social relations. The second section examines Buddhist didactic painting and sculpture and how the device of intrinsic scale is used to dramatize the hold that suffering has from a Buddhist perspective and to motivate seekers on the Buddhist path.

Four further sections examine Daoist landscape painting, looking at a distinctive variation of the device of intrinsic scale – emptiness. The first of these Daoist landscape painting sections introduces the Daoist concepts of emptiness and yin and yang and discusses how they relate to intrinsic scale.

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[1] Chongzheng, 1997: pp. 284-5

The second section examines some unusual effects which this device has been used to create, including bistable images and the appearance of motion in painting. Building on these, the third section examines a particularly complex example of Song Dynasty landscape painting, before the final section compares Daoist landscape painting to the European Romantic tradition, arguing that, despite some superficial similarities, the deeper differences between the traditions are due to differing conceptions of God and the Dao.

5.1 Extrinsic Scale and Confucian Architecture

This section argues that extrinsic scale is central to the effect of Confucian architecture. I begin by looking at the words of Confucius on extrinsic scale in ritual performance, before looking at how the Confucian tradition expressed these ideas in architecture. Making some comparisons to European and American architectural traditions, the section ends with a discussion of how the device of extrinsic scale functions in the Forbidden City in Beijing.

In *The Analects*, Confucius is reported to have been shocked at a breach of ritual etiquette when the de facto ruler of the state in which Confucius lived, the head of the Ji family, had twice the quantity of dancers that a minister of his position ought to have had (in order to continue the precedent, set since at least the Zhou dynasty, a series of precedents that could be said to be all important to Confucius):

> 3.1 Confucius said of the Ji Family, "They have eight rows of dancers performing in their courtyard. If they can condone this, what are they *not* capable of?" [2]

Commentaries have interpreted this according to later ritual texts:

> …different ranks in society were allowed different numbers of dancers to perform outside the ancestral hall during ceremonial observations: the son of Heaven [was] allowed eight rows of eight dancers, feudal lords six rows, ministers four rows and official [sic.] two rows.

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[2] Slingerland, 2003: p. 17

Although he was *de facto* ruler of Lu, the head of the Ji Family officially held only the position of minister, and his use of eight dancers thus represented an outrageous usurpation of the ritual prerogatives of the Zhou king.[3]

The significance of Confucius' remark here is that we have, in the sayings ascribed to the founder of Confucianism, a statement clearly stressing the importance of propriety in public performance, and this propriety being, implicitly in the Confucius and explicitly in the later commentary, tied to status.

The link I wish to make to scale is that social hierarchy was performed (to use Confucius' verb) by different allowances being made in the quantity of rows of dancers. Quantity here is size, and the relationship between quantity of dancers and the audience is one of extrinsic scale, as I am defining extrinsic scale to be the relationship of the physical size of the artwork itself and the body of the beholder.[4]

Apart from remarks on the orientation of palaces, and some passages in the *Book of Rites* which can only questioningly be attributed to Confucius,[5] Confucius does not discuss architecture. Indeed, Confucius does not really treat the arts at all, in as much as his relevant concern is ritual – and the performance of ritual, in appropriate but, to his mind, relatively unadorned performances. Nonetheless, Confucius established a tradition that became the dominant tradition in Chinese *public* life for two thousand years. Within the arts, the influence can be most clearly seen in architecture, but it was not until the eighth century that the principles of Confucian architecture were written down clearly, in the Tang Dynasty text *Yingshangling* [營繕令] (Rules of Construction and Repair):

> For all residences of princes and dukes and those whose ranks are lower, double-layered bracket arms and coffers are not allowed to be used. Residences of those whose official ranks are above the third rank are not allowed to surpass a five-bay, nine-rafter hip-gabled structure, and their gatehouses are not allowed to surpass a three-bay, five-rafter structure. Residences of those whose official ranks are of the fifth and above are not allowed to surpass a five-bay, seven-rafter hip-gabled structure, and their gatehouses are not allowed

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[3] Ibid.

[4] It is not important for my argument that defining the physical size of a dance, which in this case is the artwork in question, is difficult. Despite the difficulty, I believe it could be done, and that it is correlated to the number of dancers

[5] The *Book of Rites* passages concern axial radial symmetry in palace floorplans, see Feng, 2012: p. 21, 31

to surpass a three-bay, two-rafter structure. *Wu* gates [烏門] generally are still built [for residences of those whose ranks are of the fifth and above]. Residences of those whose ranks are below the sixth and the seventh are not allowed to surpass a three-bay, five-rafter structure, and their gatehouses are not allowed to surpass a one-bay, two-rafter structure. Those who are not consultants-in-ordinary are not allowed to build "axle-center" residences [*chouxinshe* 抽心舍], and [their residences are not allowed to] have installed decorations of overhanging fish, tile beasts, and refined beams. For those [having] residential homes of their grandfather, even though all the descendants are granted a hereditary rank [as a recognition of the services of the grandfather], let them live in the old residences. Neither residences of those whose ranks are under princes and dukes nor those of commoners are allowed to have a pavilion tower overlooking other inhabitants' homes. Houses built by commoners are not allowed to exceed three bays and four rafters, and decorations are never allowed.[6]

This text strikingly parallels the earlier rituals related in *The Analects* – instead of rows of dancers, the *Yingshangling* explains the relationship between architectural bays and social rank. Jiren Feng has written the following commentary on the text, emphasising the range of elements linked explicitly to social hierarchy:

This document shows, for the first time in Chinese architectural literature, that almost every aspect of the Chinese architectural system was associated with the status of the building's owner… it is clear that a hierarchical architectural system also applied to architectural types, structures, and even particular elements. For the first time, bracket arms are clearly related to social status… It is also the first time that we are told specifically how many bays a building has and how many rafters are used in a section of a wood frame, thus indicating that the number of purlins in a frame is significant for the status of the building. In other words, the size of a building and the space formed by its frame are also associated with social status.[7]

The relationship between the physical size of an artwork and that of the beholder is what I have called extrinsic scale, here Feng notes that "the size of a building [is] associated with social status," because, so I argue, of its relationship to those who come into contact with it.

[6] Ibid.: p. 55
[7] Ibid.: p. 56

In general, something of the same argument could be made for many if not most architectural

traditions. The Medieval church, for example, and the rise of monumental art museums in the

modern period, both follow the principle of dignifying the contents by virtue of their large size,

leading to, the architects surely hope, an impressive effect on the beholder. This effect is achieved

through the device of extrinsic scale, as I have been arguing.
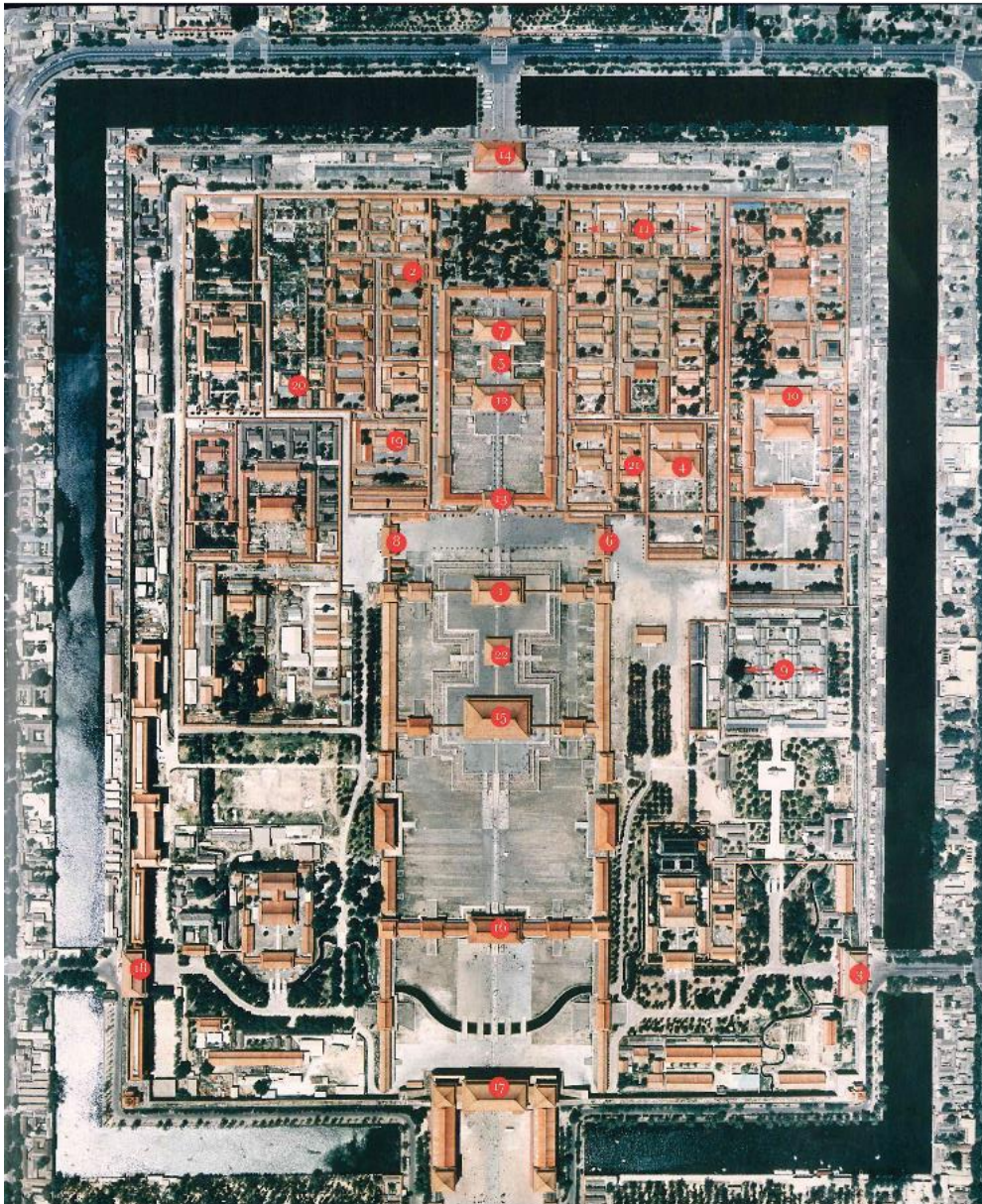
Figure1: Annotated Aerial View of the Forbidden City, Beijing
(From Rawski and Rawson (eds.), 2005: p. 19)

The distinctiveness of Confucian architecture however, lies in the rigidity of the categories. York Minster may be larger than Canterbury Cathedral, but this is never perceived as a threat to the clerical authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In the US, both the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Art Institute in Chicago are larger than the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., but this is not seen as architectural brashness or an affront to weak rulers in the capital city.[8] The Confucian system, whilst broadly similar, is at once much more fine-grained and inflexible.

The Forbidden City in Beijing (Figure 1) has been built to exemplify the Confucian worldview, where harmonious human society occurs when individuals perform their social roles and meet their social obligations. Knowing one's place is of upmost importance in a Confucian society; social mobility is, at least in theory, non-existent. The name of the Forbidden City relates to the principle of excluding those who are not felt to be worthy of inhabiting a shared social space with the emperor. Admission to the city through the Meridian gate (number 17 in the figure – the southern gate) is an admission to a social world of insiders. The Meridian Gate is reached after crossing a moat fifty metres wide, and the gate itself stands thirty-five metres tall, and, until 1912, was the tallest building, by law, in sight.[9]

With details such as these, the design performs seriousness and magnificence; the experience of passing through the Meridian Gate is a privilege and confers privilege. Admission through the gates however only gives access to the outer court, and most visitors would never proceed beyond this to the inner court. A discussion of the architecture of the Forbidden City notes that "the Three Palaces of the Inner Court mirrored on a smaller and more intimate scale the grandeur and hierarchical ordering of the Three Halls of the Outer Court."[10] In this way nested spaces enforced social hierarchy on all of the individuals permitted within the Forbidden City – up to and including the emperor. It is noteworthy that all three Manchu emperors preferred the Summer Palace – finding the Forbidden

[8] Pariona, 2017.
[9] Barmé, 2008: p.28
[10] Ibid: p.40

City "too labyrinthian and circumscribing for their taste; its ingrained habits of management were too oppressive."[11]

This section has shown how the Confucian use of extrinsic scale has its basis in the *Analects* of Confucius, and how this was subsequently expressed in Confucian architecture, providing a highly public performance of socially expected roles.

5.2 Intrinsic Scale and Buddhist Painting and Sculpture

This section looks at the functioning of the device of scale in Buddhist teachings and artworks. Beginning with a story attributed to the Buddha, the section then looks at how the elements of this story were later recompiled into an expanded cosmology – the origin of wheel of rebirth representations. Considering the role of intrinsic scale in these representations, the section moves into considering how these elements are expressed in the work of an eleventh century Tibetan poet, Jetsun Milarepa. Finally, I consider two visual examples of the wheel of rebirth – a Tibetan painting, and a Chinese relief carving.

In *The Dhammapada*, the Historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, is reported outlining the path to enlightenment, stressing as he does the main motivation for doing so – escape from Mara: the demon of impermanence, death and temptation:

> 273 Of paths the Eightfold is the best; of truths the Noble Four are best; of mental states, detachment is the best; of human beings the illumined one is best. 274 This is the path; there is no other that leads to the purification of the mind. Follow this path and conquer Mara. This is the path; there is no other that leads to the purification of the mind. 275 This path will lead to the end of suffering. This is the path I made known after the arrows of sorrow fell away. 276 All the effort must be made by you; Buddhas only show the way.

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[11] Ibid: p.48. The Forbidden City is best seen as existing within the tradition of Confucian architectural practices prescribed most extensively in the 12th Century *Treatise on Architectural Methods or State Building Standards* (*Yingzao fashi*), a manual detailing appropriate architectural practices for use by those of different ranks in the hierarchy. See Shiqiao, 2003: p. 471

Follow this path and practice meditation; go beyond the power of Mara.[12]

Elsewhere in the text the Buddha explicitly personifies Mara:

> 7 As a strong wind blows down a weak tree, Mara the Tempter overwhelms weak people who, eating too much and working too little, are caught in the frantic pursuit of pleasure. 8 As the strongest wind cannot shake a mountain, Mara cannot shake those who are self-disciplined and full of faith.[13]

Though the Buddha refers more commonly to the Buddhist project in terms of escape from suffering, escape from Mara is referenced almost as much, and as such is the most sustained figurative device used to show the motivation for joining the path. It is these references to Mara, attributed to the founder of Buddhism, which would later be developed into an expanded cosmology: the metaphysical concepts of the Buddhist universe. However, already in the Buddha's words the power dynamic between living beings and Mara is clear: Mara is in control until those on the path have achieved enlightenment.

There is relevance here too already to intrinsic scale. I am defining intrinsic scale as a viewer's experience of the size relationships of visual elements within an artwork. In the second extract quoted above, weak people and the self-disciplined are compared to a weak tree and a mountain respectively. A wind cannot be clearly understood in size, however what is important is the relationship between a strong wind and a weak tree – which can be clearly understood – and the relationship between the strongest wind and a mountain, which can also be clearly understood. The Buddha here illustrates his meaning through a literary image, using the device of intrinsic scale.

It is worth noting that the same point could have been made, but was not, without resorting to the device of intrinsic scale: Mara could be represented as a crushing iron foot, with the weak represented as being made of a brittle substance such as chalk, and the strong made of a substance

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[12] Easwaran, 1985: p. 205
[13] Ibid.: p. 106

such as diamond. Logically, there seems to be as much to recommend this simile as the one the Buddha actually used, were it not for the potency of the device of intrinsic scale which, as I have been arguing, is particularly suited to presenting the power dynamics of relationships visually.[14] The simile based upon intrinsic scale could be argued to be more immediate than that based on substance, because the size of objects is usually more immediately apparent than their substance.

Between seven and nine hundred years after the life of the Buddha, a vinaya – a set of monastic regulations – was written in Sanskrit called the Mūlasarvāstivāda, which represents the earliest surviving evidence concerning the wheel of rebirth, the visual motif which will form the basis of the rest of this section.[15] The vinaya includes an apocryphal story of the Buddha instructing followers to paint the wheel of rebirth on the outside of monastery walls:

> According to the vinaya, Śakyamuni [the Historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama] specifies exactly how to paint the wheel… In the center of the wheel, monks should paint the three poisons, using a pigeon to represent greed, a snake for hatred, and a pig for delusion. Around that the wheel should be divided into five (or, in later accounts, six) segments... The Buddha also mentions the Demon of Impermanence [Mara] who clutches the wheel, symbols of transcendence outside the wheel (like a white circle to represent nirvāna), and a set of verses touting the virtues of renunciation. The Buddha ends his instruction with the decree to station a preacher beside the painting to explain the laws of karmic retribution to anyone who visits the temple.[16]

The five, and later six segments in the wheel of rebirth refer to the six realms within which beings can be reborn, depending on their merit. Though there are higher and lower realms, better and worse life situations, all are marked by suffering, and so existence is shown as an endless cycle of death, rebirth and suffering. Stephen Teiser has explained the significance of Mara clutching the wheel:

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[14] The Buddha's simile uses both intrinsic scale and a simile of substance, the latter by comparing the strength of a tree's living wood and the rock of a mountain. The same example again could be made without using substance, if the strong wind was blowing down a tree and the strongest wind failing to shake a mighty oak. This last example is purely based on intrinsic scale
[15] Teiser, 2008: p. 141
[16] Ibid.

> Grasping the entire wheel in his claws is the Great Demon of Impermanence. This painting portrays the demon as Yama [Mara], the overseer of the hell regions in Buddhist mythology. By placing all six paths under the control of Yama, who otherwise rules the lowest realm of rebirth, the painting shows how all forms of life are unavoidably subject to pain.[17]

It is notable that this story regarding the Buddha does not simply set out a literary metaphor of the wheel of rebirth, but makes it explicitly a visual image, with instructions to paint it on the outside of monasteries. The pedagogical intention of this is underlined by the inclusion of the preacher who is meant to explain the significance of the visual elements. Despite the expanded cosmology, the emphasis is still on Mara and escape from Mara. Were it not for the presence of Mara in the wheel of rebirth, beings could potentially live in the upper realms, living karmically positive lives and achieving favourable rebirths; the transcendental nature of Mara – transcendental in the sense of Mara encompassing all dimensions of the wheel of rebirth – is once more the motivating force behind spiritual work.

The Sanskrit vinaya was translated into Chinese in the eighth century and into Tibetan in the ninth century.[18] This is hundreds of years after the introduction of Buddhism to China, but in the same century as the founding of Tibetan Buddhism – the vinaya has correspondingly had a greater influence in Tibet than China. (Additionally, five vinayas were translated into Chinese before the modern period, whereas only the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya was translated into Tibetan).[19] One textual source of note which deals with the wheel of rebirth is the compiled songs of 11th Century itinerant poet Jetsun Milarepa. These songs and sayings show how a leading Tibetan poet had incorporated and developed the cosmology of the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya regarding the wheel of rebirth.

Concerning the six realms and their inhabitants, Milarepa's attitude is that these are entirely real – with accompanying joys and horrors:

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

The Jetsun said, "Yesterday I went out to preach the Dharma [cosmic law and order] to all sentient beings in the Six Realms. Seeing the joys of Devas and human beings and those who do good deeds, I laughed; but when I saw the miseries in the three lower Realms, and those who indulged in evil deeds, I wept."[20]

Elsewhere in his collected songs and sayings, Milarepa sings a song in response to attacking demons in which he cites the law of karma, again displaying faith in the reality of the Buddhist cosmological scheme and a sense of universal justice for beings who have, tragically, arrived in the realm of hungry ghosts:

> You pitiable Ah Tsa Ma demons [Tibetan name for Indian demons], hungry ghosts,
> You can never harm me.
>
> Because your sinful Karma in the past
> Has fully ripened, you have received
> Demonic bodies for this life.
> With minds and bodies so deformed,
> You wander in the sky forever.
>
> Driven by the fiery Klesas [passions],
> Your minds are filled with hostile and
> vicious thought.
> Your deeds and words are malignant and destructive.
> You screamed, "Kill him! Chop him! Beat him!
> Cut him up!"
> …
> A yogi, such as I, ignores the abuse of
> hungry ghosts!
>
> If the Law of Cause and Effect is valid,
> And one commits the deeds deserving of it,
> The force of Ripened Karma will drive him down
> Into the miserable Path
> Of suffering and grief.[21]

These passages again put the emphasis on understanding. Because Milarepa understands the nature of the demons, he cannot be harmed by them despite their large number and intimidating

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[20] Milarepa, circa. 11th century: p. 662
[21] Ibid.: pp. 13-4

appearance. Milarepa explains the functioning of the universe for the benefit of the audience, demons and Buddhist path-finders both.

Finally, Milarepa emphasises the terrors of suffering by describing demons – using the device of intrinsic scale:

> I see a demoness grin like a skeleton
> And lift up Mount Sumeru;
> I see a red one put out her tongue which drips with blood
> And swallow the ocean waters.
> The most dreadful one appears as Yamāntaka,
> Clashing a pair of sun-and-moon-like cymbals.
> I see an ash-smeared demoness dancing
> On the stars and planets, while she loudly laughs…
> There are also other vicious demons,
> Stretching out huge arms, without their bodies showing,
> They bend the forest trees,
> Toss rocks, and shake the earth…[22]

Distortions of intrinsic scale in this passage make the demons enormous, much larger than human size. Their behaviour is meant to be disturbing and a kind of perversion of nature – from the swallowing of an ocean to shaking the earth or dancing whilst smeared in ashes, laughing loudly dancing on the stars: all this behaviour is excessive, and a large part of this is shown through the device of intrinsic scale. For excess to be quite literally demonised here of course recommends a more balanced approach to life.

Wheel of rebirth *paintings* still exist in India dating from the 5th Century, and probably existed for a century or two before this – concurrent with the composition of the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya.[23] In Tibet, the earliest surviving paintings date from the 11th Century, though these are in poor condition.[24] A 19th Century Tibetan *thangka* painting on textile, shown in Figure 2, shows the three lower realms in the bottom part of the painting; from left to right, the realm of hungry ghosts, hell, and animals. The three upper realms show, from left to right, the human realm, the heavenly realm,

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[22] Ibid.: pp. 297-8
[23] Teiser, 2008: p. 142
[24] Ibid.: p. 146

and the realm of *asuras* or titans.[25] One noteworthy feature of this cosmology is that mankind "stands in the middle of the animate hierarchy, not, as in the post-Darwinian worldview, at the top."[26] Because of the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, death in one realm precedes rebirth in another. The wheel is shown to be held by Mara, whose four limbs, clutching the wheel of life, symbolise birth, sickness, old age and death. The depiction shows the demon of suffering clutching life – a fitting summary of the Buddhist view of the universe, and one which closely follows the Buddha's words in *The Dhammapada* and the apocryphal words from the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya.

In the top right corner, a Buddha points at the moon, on the way to liberation through enlightenment. In the opposite corner is a Bodhisattva, a being who has the potential to escape from the wheel of life and suffering but who chooses not to so as to aid other beings on the path to enlightenment.[27] The painting shows the relationship of humans to Ultimate Reality in the Buddhist worldview; indeed, it shows the relationship of all beings and creatures in the hierarchy of Ultimate Reality. A student of Buddhism could use this painting to envisage their past lives and future path.

In terms of intrinsic scale, there is a form of hierarchical proportion being used within the painting, though it is Mara rather than the Buddha or Bodhisattva which is emphasised. The most conventional use of space – which is to say, that which is closest to fixing the scale – exists in the three upper realms and animals. It is certainly possible to see the Buddha and Bodhisattva as small in the upper corners, though a more likely, and more theologically helpful, reading is that they are far away necessitating much work on the path to reach them. The many sectioned painting contains several sorts of ambiguity in terms of scale, however the relationships between sections are clear.

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[25] Pemberton, 2002: p. 11
[26] Robinson, 1977: p. 24
[27] Pemberton, 2002: p. 11

Figure 2: A Tibetan thangka painting on textile, 19th Century, (British Museum, 137 x 112 mm)

The vinaya describes Mara clutching the wheel, but the decision to make Mara so large in relation to

the wheel, as well as in relation to the Buddha and bodhisattva, is an artistic rather than canonical

one. The viewer's experience is that Mara dominates; the function is to emphasise both the terrible

power of Mara over those in the six realms, but also to emphasise the power of the Buddha in

triumphing over Mara. The religious imagery is reminiscent of the Bible's David and Goliath –

another example of the device of intrinsic scale being employed to suggest spiritual power.

None of this is to deny the other devices used in the thangka to convey an understanding of the

Buddhist universe. The painting is dense with iconography, with the bodhisattva at top left being

identified by the *samputanjali mudra*, a specific way of holding their hands, as the four-armed

bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara.[28] This is appropriate because of its suggestion of the

supportive understanding of the Buddhist community or *sangha*. The hub of the wheel shows a pig,

cockerel and snake, which represent the 'three primal poisons' of ignorance, desire and anger.[29]

These are the main obstacles which are supposed to be keeping beings from escaping the clutches of

Mara – fittingly they are placed at the hub of the wheel: without them, is the suggestion, the wheel

of suffering would not turn. The Historical Buddha points the way to the moon, which contains an

outline of a rabbit. The rabbit in the moon is a common symbol in China and Tibet, abstracted from

the same physical features that in the West became 'the man in the moon'. The rabbit may also

however be a reference to the Historical Buddha, who was said to have been reincarnated as a

rabbit in a previous life.[30] Such a reference would not be a mere attribute in a painting whose

subject is reincarnation and enlightenment; in referencing the journey the Buddha has undergone

from animal realm to escape from suffering, the iconography can be seen as drawing a linear

progression of the Buddha's journey from entrapment to enlightenment which contrasts strongly

with the circular repetition of the ever-turning wheel of endless rebirth.[31]

At another example of the wheel of rebirth, a Chinese relief carving from c. 1250 at Baodingshan,

shown in Figure 3, the features of intrinsic scale I have discussed remain present. Mara dominates,

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[28] Beer, 1999: p. 116-117, 151, 154
[29] Ibid.: p. 92
[30] Ibid.: p. 120
[31] See Teiser, 2007: pp. 239-54 for a different discussion of linear vs. circular narratives in the wheel of rebirth

and whilst the Bodhisattva of Compassion is absent, in their place are the Past and Future Buddhas.[32]

At Baodingshan, the wheel of rebirth is meant as part of a wider series of over ten thousand carvings and is meant as a preface to prepare pilgrims for the lessons of other works at the site.[33]

The Baodingshan wheel of rebirth is over 25 feet high.[34] Whilst the intrinsic scale elements are the focus of my analysis, it is worth highlighting that extrinsic scale is being employed simultaneously. I have defined extrinsic scale as a viewer's experience of the size relationship between themselves and the work; for pilgrims to approach such a massive carving is to for them to experience the dominant power of Mara whilst simultaneously being aware that spiritual power can be used to defeat him.

Figure 3: Wheel of Rebirth relief carving, Niche 3, Baodingshan
(After Bai 1985, pl. 62, from Teiser, 2008)

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[32] Teiser, 2007: p. 234; other iconographic differences include the inclusion of what is probably the founder of the site, Zhao Feng, in the hub with the pig, cockerel and snake, and Mara being shown standing on a dragon
[33] Teiser, 2008: p. 148
[34] Teiser, 2007: p. 221

As alluded to earlier, the same points could be made about the ubiquity of suffering in life and the

Buddhist path to escape from this without using the device of scale. By personifying Mara and

employing scale however, first the Buddha and then his followers have *dramatized* the Buddhist

struggle, giving complex ideas a form which is easily experienced because it is spatial.

5.3 Intrinsic Scale and Daoist Painting 1: Primordial Chaos

The remaining sections on the function of scale in traditional Chinese religious art deal with

landscape painting. This section introduces the way in which scale relates to Daoist metaphysics.

After noting the somewhat more complex religious affiliation of traditional Chinese landscape works,

the section goes on to argue that a distinctive form of intrinsic scale is central to understanding

Daoist texts and artworks. After looking at how this is expressed in the *Laozi*, I go on to consider how

it is expressed in a painting by Zhu Derun. After a detour to consider the concepts of yin and yang in

the *Yijing* in terms of scale, I return to look at Zhu Derun's painting and its accompanying

inscription.[35]

Whereas in the previous sections I have dealt with particularly clear instances of Confucian and

Buddhist art, the examples in the rest of the chapter, whilst most closely associated with Daoism,

have more complicated religious affiliations. This is due to the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the ninth

century, which attempted to integrate the three traditions in an enduring way. Art historian Wen

Fong has described it as follows:

> It was Buddhism that first introduced, from India, a system of metaphysics and a coherent
> worldview more advanced than anything hitherto known in China. With Buddhist thought,
> scholars of the Six Dynasties period [3rd to 6th Centuries AD] engaged in philosophical
> discussions of truth and reality, being and nonbeing, substantiality and nonsubstantiality.
> Beginning in the late Tang and early northern Sung [9th/10th Century AD], Neo-Confucian

[35] For ease of reference, I have standardised spellings to pinyin throughout this section and omitted diacritical
marks – bibliographic entries, however, appear as published. The text therefore refers to Dao, Zhuangzi, and
Yijing for example, rather than Tao, Chuang Tsu and I Ching. The exception to this is Kongzi, who will still be
referred to as Confucius, according to the Wade-Giles system, again for ease of reference

thinkers rebuilt Confucian ethics on Buddhist and Daoist metaphysics. A principal tenet of Neo-Confucian philosophy holds that the universe has a basis in morality. Because Neo-Confucian moral philosophy defines the human mind as engaged with the nature of being, the traditional focus of learning was self-cultivation. To the extent that the 'mind' (*xin*) reflects the perfect 'principles' (*li*) of nature, man can achieve union with the ultimate 'principles' of cosmic creativity only by realizing the innate moral mind within the self.[36]

A discussion of emptiness, a central aspect of the Daoist metaphysics mentioned, will follow shortly. For now, it should be noted that, unlike within the traditions of Buddhism and Daoism, in the new re-working of Confucianism, morality was still the overriding concern and motivation. Crucially however, moral self-cultivation was made compatible with following, or merging with, the Dao; providing a model which largely collapsed the difference between Confucian scholar-official and Daoist itinerant-hermit, whose external differences came to be seen as largely unimportant.[37] Furthering this drawing together of Daoism and Confucianism at this time was the fact that the imperial family of the Tang dynasty shared a family name, Li, with the mythological founder of Daoism, Laozi, and had officially deified him.[38] This endorsement of Daoism from the emperors, more usually associated with Confucianism, would have helped to create a tolerant climate for cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices.

More specifically regarding the extent to which Chinese landscape painting as a genre can be labelled Daoist, Jason Clarke has summarised the issue as follows:

> Of all the Chinese arts, landscape painting stands supreme and expresses most completely the Daoist vision of nature. It may be an overstatement to claim that these works "which are the glory of Chinese painting are of Daoist origin", for a number of cultural factors need to be drawn into the genealogy of this distinctively Chinese genre, including those which derive from Confucian, Buddhist and even shamanistic traditions. But there is no doubt that this art form was a particularly important medium for the expression of Daoist mystical impulses, even where pursued by Confucianists.[39]

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[36] Wen, 1992: pp. 74-5
[37] Granet, 1975: p. 105
[38] Little, 2000: p. 20
[39] Clarke, 2000: p. 150. Clarke is quoting Lagerwey, 1987: p. 288

I will therefore not dwell overly on the classification of the paintings I will discuss, instead drawing

attention to the way in which 'Daoist mystical impulses' are expressed within them.

The *Dao De Jing* (hereafter *Laozi* after the mythical author), historically the first and still today the

most important Daoist text, is made up of 81 page-length chapters which purport to describe the

structure of reality and how people ought to try to live and govern. Possibly written during the time

of Confucius or possibly compiled from various sources over the following few centuries, it dates

from the 5th to 2nd century BCE.[40] The *Laozi* discusses emptiness most directly in Chapter 11:

> Thirty spokes converge on one hub.
> Only with nothing [inside the hub], there comes use of the carriage.
> People mold vessels out of clay.
> Only with nothing [inside the vessels], there comes use of vessels.
> People cut out doors and windows.
> Only with nothing [inside the doors and windows], there comes the use of the rooms.
> Therefore, something can be beneficial because nothing makes use of it.[41]

The translator notes that their rendering of the second line emphasises nothingness, as *Laozi* does in

general, at the expense of somethingness, but argues that this is because of normative cultural

values privileging the something, or "being strong, prominent and knowledgeable."[42] Somethingness

and nothingness must coexist, and the translator notes a previous commentator on this issue: "Gu

Huan commented: "If the Way is solely of nothing, what benefit can it bring to things?[43]

This point is helpful as it clarifies Daoism's position on emptiness – that emphasising it is a question

of redressing an imbalance, and in fact that both nothing and something are needed in order for

things to function properly. Moss Roberts has summarised the chapter as follows:

> In this stanza Laozi uses three commonplace items to make his point: one should heed the
> unseen, the negative aspect, of anything, for that is the secret of its usefulness. *Dao* itself is
> the negative as philosophical principle, the negation that precedes and follows all

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[40] Moeller, 2006: p. ix

[41] Kim, 2012: p. 191; this translation is a recent scholarly one based upon the earliest extant full copy of *Laozi*. This chapter is the most commonly cited section of *Laozi* when considering Daoist art (see for instance Kwo, 1981: p.54; Fan, 2010: p. 565). It is, moreover, the same chapter cited in Chapter 3 in connection with Carl Andre which also features in Langer's unpublished notes, albeit a different translation

[42] Kim, 2012: p. 192

[43] Ibid.

existence.[44]

The Dao itself, the Daoist ineffable, is equated with emptiness. "The Dao which can be named is not the eternal Dao," are the opening lines of the *Laozi*, insisting that the Dao is beyond definition.[45] Emptiness, too then, will be beyond definition – though Hans Georg Moeller does a good job of clarifying certain points in relation to it:

> The hub is not made of something. All the spokes are made of a material substance, whereas the hub is nothing but an empty space; it does not have any positive qualities. Because the material the spokes are made of is necessarily always a specific one, it is exchangeable. The wood of this or that tree can be used, one can even use something other than wood. No matter which material is used for making the spokes, the hub remains untouched. It is always made out of the same nonmaterial. Materials like wood grow and wither, metal is cast and rusts. An empty space neither withers nor rusts. It is either there or not; its emptiness cannot increase or diminish in substance. There are no degrees of emptiness. (We say, of course, that a glass is "half empty," but this is said in regard to the glass, not in regard to the emptiness – when we drink more, the glass becomes increasingly empty, that is, the emptiness covers more space, but it does not change substantially – unlike the bourbon when we add ice.) All the spokes cannot but be material and therefore cannot but have a positive definition. The empty space lacks exactly this. If it was to be positively defined, it would not be *empty*.[46]

I will provisionally define emptiness as i) blank, contained space on a picture surface, used as a major compositional element and ii) the metaphysical Daoist concept that these blank spaces serve as a metaphor for.[47] Emptiness is the central device employed by artists working in the Chinese landscape tradition, and I will show that it can be understood in terms of intrinsic scale. The difference when considering intrinsic scale as it functions in the device of emptiness to the other

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[44] Roberts, 2001: p. 51
[45] Mitchell, 1988, p. 1
[46] Moeller, 2004: pp. 28-9
[47] This definition is based upon that of Fan Minghua who isolates three definitions of emptiness. The definition I have excluded is the first in his scheme and relates to emptiness as a meditative preparation which artists might undergo in order to put themselves into the right frame of mind for creation. See Fan, 2010: pp. 561-565. Complicating the matter is that Chan Buddhism also employs a related though distinct concept of emptiness, referring to the illusoriness of existence, which is represented by blank space. Additionally, in Chan Buddhism, the silence and emptiness of landscape are meant as a preparation for enlightenment. See Wen, 1992: p. 287

examples considered earlier in this chapter is that one or more of the visual elements in the size relationship is blank.

There is significant potential for confusion, because of the absolute nature of emptiness – Moeller's half empty glass being a statement about the glass, not the emptiness – and what I am including as the relative nature of blankness. The confusion is avoided so long as it is kept in mind that what I call blankness is a formal, pictorial element, and that it is only the metaphysical concept – not directly pictured – which is absolute.

Contained, as a part of the definition, does not work very well, and I will have to replace it almost immediately. *Surrounded* is better, though it too fails since, rather than fullness surrounding emptiness, the opposite frequently occurs. I keep *contained* to begin with however because, for some examples of the technique, it clearly and simply describes the functioning of the elements.

In one sense the containing could be said to be done by the edges of the support, the four sides of a rectangular sheet of paper, for instance, acting to contain blankness within. However, a blank sheet of paper does not depict space, therefore it is necessary to distinguish between the support and the medium – the latter providing the containments. For an ink painting, on paper, the blank space must be contained by ink. The blankness of blank space however does retain many of the properties of a blank sheet of paper, including, crucially, the aspect of possibility.

I have called the space that is to be contained blank – and often it literally is, with no marks put upon the picture surface at that point. Because the important fact is the viewer's experience however, the space does not need to be completely blank – seeming blankness will do. Moreover, since the crucial aspect of this emptiness is the range of possibility it suggests, blankness can be relative too. Emptiness of marks suggests fullness of possibility, because a lack of information is a sign that all sorts of things might be happening. In the Chinese landscape art I will be considering, the suggestion of mists and clouds are important areas of emptiness because of what they may conceal. These

mists and clouds are sometimes achieved technically by absolute blankness on the painting support, and often by light use of line and ink wash. In either case it is proper to consider these emptinesses, to the degree that *the proportions they suggest are ambiguous*.

It is notable too that the process of a painting coming into being is slightly more linear in the tradition of ink works. The medium of ink on paper is particularly unforgiving of mistakes – marks once made are almost impossible to get rid of, a significant difference to the dominant Western painting medium of oils which permit substantial reworking. Inked areas of a handscroll, potential having become manifested in form, are much more limited in what they can become; blank areas are only limited by their surroundings.

The 14th Century ink painting *Primordial Chaos* by Zhu Derun, shown in Figure 4, provides a useful situation for a discussion of both aspects of emptiness I wish to draw out in Chinese landscape works – both the formal and spiritual aspects of the works. The title of the painting relates to the central circle, which is a symbol of undifferentiated oneness – the primordial chaos of the universe. In the Daoist worldview, this is the true nature of reality – differentiating elements from it is an artificial process.[48]

Taking the portrayal of space as a whole in *Primordial Chaos*, there is significant ambiguity in terms of intrinsic scale. The only elements which seem to give the viewer a fix are the tree and grasses, though these might vary significantly in size. As will be a theme throughout this discussion of intrinsic scale in Daoist landscape works, whenever the viewer fixes on a single element, other elements in the painting appear to shift. This notable phenomenon will be explored as this chapter progresses.

The size of the blank areas can vary considerably, so in *Primordial Chaos* the blank areas inside the circle, outside of it, surrounding the pine tree and also between the pine needles are all examples;

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[48] Fong, 1996: pp. 41-2

and the unmarked surface blanks between rows of characters and between the strokes of individual characters are also examples.
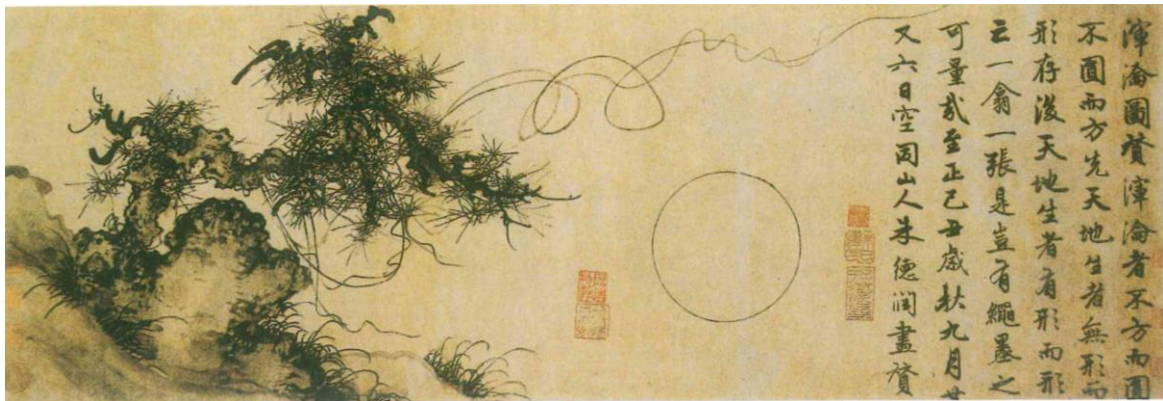

Figure 4: Zhu Derun, 'Primordial Chaos', 1349, ink on paper (Shanghai Museum, 864 x 298 mm)

What I mean by blankness, then, I have gone some way towards defining. However, what containment means in this context still needs to be further addressed. As noted, it is containment in the medium, most usually ink. In *Primordial Chaos*, the central circular form is both defined by and contained by the single line which describes the circle. The space within it is certainly contained by the line. However, the space outside of it is also affected by the line. This outside space cannot be said to be contained by the line. The alternative idea of hollow space also ceases to be so valuable when thinking about what is to be found outside. Locally, in this part of the picture, it seems reasonable to say that the blankness is structured by the line. A definition tending towards the structure of emptiness however threatens to be unhelpful. Happily, the Chinese tradition has a useful set of conceptual tools for understanding this issue – that of yin and yang.

Yin and yang first appear in the *Yijing*, The Book of Changes, a divination manual the core of which dates to before 3000 BCE.[49] Moeller writes that the paired concept of yin and yang "is an elementary

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[49] Sherrill & Chu, 1977: p. 3

part, so to speak, of the grammar of ancient Chinese philosophical semantics."[50] The *Yijing* strongly influenced the development of both Confucianism and Daoism, and, as just suggested, is much older than both – the *Yijing* having existed in some form for around 5000 years whilst *The Analects of Confucius* and the *Laozi* were both composed around 2500 years ago. The book purports to describe patterns of changes: the kinds of effect a diviner should expect to see in the world based on actions that the diviner is contemplating.[51]

References to yin and yang abound, but more significant is the symbolic core of the text which itself is built upon the concept of yin and yang. Yin and yang are interdependent notions; they do not exist without each other. The Ancient Greek notion of *enantiodromia* is contained within yin and yang: that when a thing reaches an extreme it is transformed into its opposite.[52] Yin and yang are opposites but, as mentioned, they contain each other and interact with each other. The symbolic core of the *Yijing* consists of sets of lines, each line being either yin (broken, yielding) or yang (unbroken, unyielding). This line-based formulation of yin and yang seems to be older than the Chinese written language.[53] The character for yin has the literal meaning 'mountain in the shade' and the character for yang has the meaning 'mountain in the sun'.[54] Each set of lines is a hexagram made up of six lines, which are each made up of a pair of three-line trigrams. Because each line can be either yin or yang, there are 64 possible combinations of lines.[55]

The first two hexagrams are 'The Creative' and 'The Receptive', formed of six yang lines and six yin lines respectively. Because one is fully yang and the other fully yin, the descriptions and commentaries on these two hexagrams represent the traditional views of these concepts. I will

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[50] Moeller, 2006: p. 34
[51] Moore, 1989: p. 13
[52] Sherrill & Chu, 1977: p. 13
[53] For the estimated age of the trigrams and hexagrams see Camman, 1991: p. 577; for the origin of Chinese writing see Boltz, 2000/2001: p. 2
[54] For original meaning of the characters see Moore, 1989: p. 14
[55] Because consulting the *Yijing* yields two hexagrams (including the possibility for the two hexagrams to be identical), there are 4,096 patterns of change contained within the system

quote sections of three translations, including their commentaries, in order to show some of the

breadth of the conceptions of yin and yang:

The Creative ䷀

The first hexagram is made up of six unbroken [yang] lines. These unbroken lines stand for
the primal power, which is light-giving, active, strong, and of the spirit. The hexagram is
consistently strong in character, and since it is without weakness, its essence is power or
energy. Its image is heaven. Its energy is represented as unrestricted by any fixed conditions
in space and is therefore conceived of as motion. Time is regarded as the basis of this
motion. Thus the hexagram includes also the power of time and the power of persisting in
time, that is, duration.
  The power represented by the hexagram is to be interpreted in a dual sense – in terms of
its action on the universe and of its action on the world of men. In relation to the universe,
the hexagram expresses the strong, creative action of the Deity. In relation to the human
world, it denotes the creative action of the holy man or sage, of the ruler or leader of men,
who through his power awakens and develops their higher nature.[56]

On the Judgement for the same, first hexagram, a different translation highlights the following:

The clouds pass,
The rains fall,
The Array of Matter
Flows into Form.[57]

This is explained as follows:

Nothing… illustrates better than clouds the continuous Gestation of Heaven, its continuously
evolving Flux, its Movement.[58]

In another recent translation, Alfred Huang comments on the Chinese character which names the

first hexagram:

The Chinese character [The Creative] is an image of a rising sun radiating its light and
energy… nourishing the whole world. The ancient Chinese ideograph… depicts a sun on the
left side of the picture. Above the sun, there is a shoot of grass with two tiny leaves
sprouting on the left and right. Underneath the sun, the root of the plant penetrates deeply
into the ground. On the right side the chi disperses from the sun and spreads out under the
sky.[59]

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[56] Wilhelm, 2003: p.3
[57] Minford, 2014: p. 10
[58] Ibid., p. 11
[59] Huang, 2010: p. 21

The identification of yang energy with unyielding energy, motion, clouds, mist, the sun and the growth of plants is a consistent theme in Chinese writings and, as will be shown, painting. It is contrasted with yin energy, described in pure form in the second hexagram of the *Yijing*, but in various mixtures with yang energy in the other 62 hexagrams:

The Receptive ䷁

This hexagram is made up of broken [yin] lines only. The broken line represents the dark, yielding, receptive primal power of yin. The attribute of the hexagram is devotion; its image is the earth. It is the perfect complement of The Creative – the complement, not the opposite, for the Receptive does not combat the Creative but completes it. It represents nature in contrast to spirit, earth in contrast to heaven, space as against time…[60]

Another commentary describes this image of earth in more detail:

Earth is the Prime Image of [The Receptive]… They are one and the same. Here we see the pliant, soft Potential Energy of [The Receptive]. We have seen the heights of Heaven [The Creative], now we see the depths, the lowliness of Earth. They are infinitely interconnected. [The Receptive] has utmost Softness, greatest Capacity; there is nothing it cannot contain, nothing it cannot sustain. The Dao of [The Receptive]… has as much Grandeur as the Dao of [The Creative]. Only the Sage can truly embody this Dao. Earth is broad, its Potential Energy soft and pliant… Inner Emptiness… the Open Space of Heart-and-Mind, enables Outer Acceptance. It enables the Daoist to sustain Others, to accept insult and injury, hardship and sickness, just as the Earth sustains Mountains, just as the Ocean takes into itself the Rivers.[61]

And finally Huang once more, on the significance of balancing The Receptive with The Creative:

The ancient Chinese believed that too much yang and too little yin is too hard, without elasticity and likely to be broken. Too much yin and too little yang is too soft, without spirit and likely to become inert. Yin and yang must coordinate and support each other. [The Creative] represents the most yang; [The Receptive] represents the most yin. In the [Yijing] all sixty-four [hexagrams] are derived from the principle of the mutual coordination and complementarity of yin and yang. One of the commentaries says,

> *Yin is the most gentle and submissive; when put in motion it is strong and firm.*
> *Yin is the most quiet and still; when taking action, it is able to reach a definite goal.*

How can this be? Yin is gentle but not weak. It is submissive, without necessarily giving up its initiative. Yin receives yang qualities from nurturing the yang.[62]

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[60] Wilhelm, 2003: p. 10
[61] Minford, 2014: p. 35
[62] Huang, 2010: pp. 43-4

When considering sizes of visual elements in pictures, yin and yang in their interdependent interaction gives a sophisticated way of thinking about intrinsic scale. This is because yin and yang are relative and interdependent concepts – an element on its own cannot be considered yin or yang. So, for instance, a shoot of bamboo in relation to the ground would be considered a yang element, but in relation to the teeth of a panda would certainly be a yielding, yin element.

Yin and yang are a pair of analytic concepts – they are used to break down what is fundamentally an indivisible unity into component parts so that it can be better understood. The indivisible unity might be the universe or the world or an artwork, it is fundamental to yin and yang that it is artificial to separate a unity into pieces, but also that thought cannot take place without doing so. The Dao itself – and metaphysical emptiness – can be considered in terms of yin and yang, but not accurately; yin space mimics the structure of emptiness, but yin is relative, emptiness is absolute. Intrinsic scale too, from this point of view, is an analytic concept that isolates certain features of a whole, and in doing so disregards certain elements; the fullest analysis never being complete.

In *Primordial Chaos*, the circular line which contains the blank space is a yang element which does not yield. As a form, it difficult to imagine a less yielding shape than a circle, with no corners even to suggest orientation. In *Primordial Chaos*, 'The Creative' aspects of the circle appear all the more starkly because of their context: on the right a brief and traditional cosmological treatise, to which I will return, and on the left the craggy pines and vines.

In terms of yin and yang, white is a yang colour, as is lightness more generally. Black and darkness are yin characteristics, and so immediately looking at *Primordial Chaos* there is a yin yang opposition set up between highly contrasting areas of ink and blank. Complicating this reading immediately however is the fact that the action of the brush on paper is very much a yang action, and the ink trails left behind record this yang action and embody it. Immediately then, and appropriately considering Zhu's literary strategy of denegation in the treatise (to be discussed shortly), the visual elements relate to each other in a balanced way – it is difficult to name a dominant feature. If

pressed most people would probably name either the lined circle or the tree to the left-hand side as the dominant visual element, but neither convincingly dominates the scene. The lined circle is small in size but powerful in terms of intrinsic scale in relation to the other visual elements, and the tree, though the largest visual element in size, seems almost a study of yielding itself, as crooked and craggy as trees have ever been, the trailing vines giving the impression that the tree itself is coming undone. As mentioned in the section on The Creative from *Yijing* above, a sprout breaking through surface of the earth is a pristine image of creative, yang energy, but in *Primordial Chaos*, the tree in question seem to have had a particularly challenging set of circumstances, to which it has yielded – an image of yang energy 'keeping to the yin', 'bending and so keeping whole'.[63]

The calligraphy to the right side is neat without being formal, it exists in columns but not rows. Because of this there is a certain suggestion of linearity and progression – even animation and life, but not order, or organisation. The painting plays with line. The most immediately apparent line is the one which describes the circle – the symbol of primordial chaos – the line clean but fragile. This sense of fragility comes both from the narrow width of line and also the clearly hand-drawn character. There is a modesty to it, whereas a perfect line, perhaps mechanically produced, would have a certain cold arrogance to it in this place, as if the artist thought they could point to the Dao of primordial chaos. The lines of the calligraphy might be characterised as legible, loose, heavy, and comfortable. These qualities are all very much yang qualities in relation to the yin, yielding fragility that describes the quality of line that describes the primordial chaos symbol, again a symbol itself which exists beyond or prior to yin and yang.

The other lines I want to draw attention to are the vines which arc and loop away from the tree over primordial chaos, and above the calligraphy. Of the two lines one is more yang in character (the one which loops twice, the slightly heavier line) and the yin line which appears to be behind it as we look towards the picture plane, seems to echo it, at least for the first loop, and then follows its general

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[63] Kim, 2012: pp. 227, 241

direction whilst playfully zigzagging on its way. These two lines in themselves are a sort of essay on the mundanity and playfulness of yin yang interactions, an essay which is expanded in the realisation of the tree.

Both the poetry and calligraphy of the inscription on *Primordial Chaos* are also by Zhu Derun, and read as follows:

> Primordial chaos is not square but round, not round but square. Before the appearance of heaven and earth there were no forms; yet forms existed. After the appearance of heaven and earth, forms existed but became undefined, their constant expansion and contraction, unfurling and furling, making them beyond measure.[64]

The paradoxical character of the inscription relates in part to the traditional ascription of heaven as being round and earth as square.[65] The first line therefore might be read as claiming that when one tries to ask if chaos has the form of heaven, one finds instead that it has the properties of earth, but when tries to confirm that chaos has the form of earth, one finds that it has the properties of heaven; because primordial chaos is undifferentiated oneness, fixing its properties is an elusive task. Continuing the interpretation, before the undifferentiated oneness of primordial chaos became differentiated ("the appearance of heaven and earth") there were no forms because everything was one, however there were metaphysical realities – the Dao itself, and ideal forms, such as exist in Plato's Ideal Realm.[66] Later these ideal forms "became undefined" because, manifested in the world, they became contingent. The transitory quality of form as it ebbs and flows is stressed in the final line, form as ephemeral and interdependent and embedded in the structure of both local and universal conditions. The inscription is a playful and poetic gloss of Daoist metaphysics which guides the reader to the hollow spaces between words; in this way it functions in a similar and complementary way to the craggy pines and the circular, central symbol of primordial chaos.

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[64] Watt, 2010: p. 224
[65] Zhao, 1992: p. 149
[66] Sherrill and Chu, 1977: p.11

Zhu Derun's paradoxical style is very much in the Daoist mode, and the linguistic contradictions and negations of this mode have been described as follows:

> It is not a negation, since the negation it makes denies itself as well by the doubling. It denegates itself, and, therefore, is not a total negation. Nothing ceases to be affirmed as it is in the ongoing process of interchanging itself and its other, in the dynamics of becoming toward its other. Thus we open to endless being and nonbeing, speaking and silence, right and wrong, yin and yang, and in this way we can move along with them…
>   Denegation carries a self-erasure or self-cancellation. By utilizing discursive or conceptual language in such a self-erasing manner, it becomes not solely negative, but it carves out a void within what is being said. This void, this absence, is what is unsayable and unspoken, namely, what is inadequate to, and therefore is excluded by, that which is sayable and spoken. It thus inscribes, carries, points to, what is lacking in, and what is outside of, this conceptual and discursive language.[67]

The inscription therefore is an integral part of the overall composition. Wen has written about the role of calligraphy in Chinese art, which was only integrated into landscape paintings from the 13th Century:

> Calligraphy for the scholar-artists was an art of paradigm, perceived as a means of partaking of the ever-dynamic field of nature's creativity. The physical act of applying brush to paper led the Chinese artist to characterize calligraphy's function in cosmogenic terms. The blank paper surface represents the universe, which in the beginning existed in undifferentiated oneness; the first stroke, born in the union of brush and ink, establishes on paper the primary relationship between yin and yang; and each new stroke, combining with the old, creates new yin-yang relationships, until the whole is reconciled and again united into the harmonious oneness that is that Dao of the universe.[68]

Painting makes use of the same tools and methods as calligraphy, the similarity of the two arts first noted by Chang Yun-Yuan, in the 7th Century, who wrote that the two mediums share not only materials but also principles and techniques of execution.[69] The quote above on calligraphy applies just as much to painting, the blank sheet the primordial chaos or undifferentiated oneness, the inked surface an interplay of yin-yang relationships. Again, I am not making claims for the blank paper surface since it does not represent space; *Primordial Chaos* preserves the primordial chaos in symbol form only, and the painting as a whole points towards this as an underlying reality behind the

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[67] Wang, 2003: pp. 153-4
[68] Wen, 1992: p. 122
[69] Kwo, 1981: pp. 3-4

interplay of yin-yang relationships in the world. As in *Primordial Chaos*, the emptiness in Chinese landscape painting can often be the dominant subject, ink washes and line acting to guide the viewer towards the perception of these emptinesses.

At this point, I can modify my provisional definition of emptiness as follows: emptiness is i) yin space on a picture surface ii) the metaphysical Daoist concept that yin space serves as a metaphor for. The advantage of replacing blank and contained space with yin space is that it more accurately describes the paintings under discussion – avoiding the problems discussed above regarding containment, surrounding, and structure as well as the need to stress the relativity of blankness.

In this section I have argued that the central Daoist concept of emptiness can be understood as a distinctive kind of use of the device of intrinsic scale, and looked at how emptiness can both be used and expressed pictorially. I have argued that some of the complexity regarding the interplay of visual elements in intrinsic scale is better understood using the concepts of yin and yang. I have also extended my argument into both the calligraphy and poetry of Zhu Derun's inscription.

5.4 Intrinsic Scale and Daoist Painting 2: An Immortal & Fishes and Dragons

This section continues the discussion of emptiness in Chinese landscape work. The section starts by considering a painting by Liang Kai, which has been interpreted as a bistable image, before going on to look at two examples from the fish and dragons genre of Chinese painting. I argue that it is the device of emptiness, understood in terms of intrinsic scale, which affords the potential for the bistability in Liang Kai's example, and that also affords the potential for the appearance of movement in a painting by Liu Cai. This section ends by looking at a landscape painting by Yu Jian in which emptiness can be said to be the dominant pictorial element.

A 12th century painting of *An Immortal*, by Liang Kai, shown in Figure 5, works with intrinsic scale in yet another way. The relation to emptiness and fullness is present here – emptiness literally the non-

Figure 5: Liang Kai, 'An Immortal', 12th Century, ink on paper (Palace Museum Taipei, 487 x 277 mm)

presence of ink, fullness the relative presence of ink. The figure seems to be outlined only by inked

suggestions of clothes and shadows. The main formal device the painter employs however is what

might be thought of as a kind of Wittgensteinian aspect-switching. As in Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit

picture,[70] the main subject of the painting can be seen in two quite different ways – in this case as a

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[70] Wittgenstein, 1953: p. 194. Wittgenstein acknowledges that his drawing is derived from Joseph Jastrow's *Fact and Fable in Psychology*

full-length portrait of a Daoist sage or a landscape painting of mountains and mist.[71] Examples such

as this and the duck-rabbit used by Wittgenstein are often known as bistable images.[72] Contrary to

the Wittgensteinian example however, not only is there a change of subject matter, but a change in

scale which comes with the change in subject matter.

Kristofer Schipper says:

> The expressionless face of the Immortal recalls that of a newborn infant. The skull has the
> shape of an egg. The big square cloak that covers his shoulders stands away from the body
> like wings. Both light and massive at the same time, the whole figure conveys a strong sense
> of interiority.[73]

Schipper also identifies the Immortal as Laozi, which Moeller follows. Moeller adds:

> Laozi not only looks like a baby and a mountain, but also like an old man! Liang Kai's Laozi is
> *without age*. He is an infant and an old man, an embryo and a corpse – and that is why he is
> also a whole mountain scene, young and old at the same time, a complete scenario of the
> Dao.[74]

The effect of this switching of scales is a change in characteristics – the Immortal seems here a

particularly grounded and solid body, but as a mountain the sense is of lightness and fluidity. The

device is employed in a way which expresses the Daoist principles of relativity and contingency.

I will take a detour at this point to consider two paintings from the 'Fish and Dragons' genre of

Chinese art which are relevant to this discussion of intrinsic scale and emptiness in Daoist works.

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[71] For a discussion of rhetorical strategies of the *Laozi* in terms of Wittgensteinian change of aspect, see
Moeller, 2007: p. 4
[72] The history of such images is often given as beginning in 1832 with the example of the Necker Cube, but, as,
this example shows, use of them dates back much earlier. For discussion of the Necker Cube and perceptual
studies on bistable and multistable images, see Kruse & Stadler (eds.), 1995.
[73] Schipper, 1993: p. 235n29
[74] Moeller, 2004: p. 81

Figure 6: Liu Cai, 'Fish Swimming and Falling Flowers' (detail), ca. 1075, ink and colour on silk
(St Louis Art Museum, 264 × 2,553 mm)

Both relate to the way in which manipulations of intrinsic scale have been used to give a suggestion of livingness – a spirited or animated quality. Figure 6 shows Liu Cai's *Fish Swimming and Falling Flowers*, a work which exemplifies Liu's success at giving an animated quality to his fish paintings. Richard Barnhart introduces the significance of Liu Cai's fish paintings in the following passage:

> By the time the imperial catalogue *Xuanhe huapu* was compiled in 1120, Liu Cai was acknowledged as the artist who had changed depictions of dead fish on the kitchen table into living, moving forms deep beneath the surface of the water… The Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi gave us the central image of fish in Chinese culture when he spoke of "the pleasure of the fishes" attained by losing all memory of things deep in the waters of the rivers and lakes. This became the always desired but rarely attained dream of the busy official. Before Liu Cai there was no visual correspondence to this ideal.[75]

The *Zhuangzi* was probably written around the 3rd Century BCE[76] and consists of parables employing literary devices, such as magical realism and the denegation discussed above, to exemplify certain philosophical debates. The ideal which Barnhart mentions is one heavily predicated on emptiness – in this case a forgetfulness of worldly affairs allowing one to be more present. The depiction of fish in Liu Cai's works does seem to be successful for the reasons Barnhart mentions – that the forms

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[75] Barnhart, 1997: p. 118; interpretations of Zhuangzi's conversation about the pleasure or, more commonly, the 'Happiness of Fishes' diverge more than Barnhart suggests here, and more than is common even for Zhuangzi stories. A recent conference book on the topic includes 14 authors' interpretations ranging from traditional to modern and philosophical to literary – see Ames and Takahiro, 2015.
[76] Moeller, 2004: p. 10

seem living and in motion – but this quality seems to come from the way in which they use and embody emptiness pictorially.

Pictures showing underwater scenes have not been common in the history of art, but it is worth noting that *Fish Swimming and Falling Flowers* does not employ many of the conventions found in Western examples of the genre: there are no bubbles, or blue-green wash, and the surface of the water is suggested only by waterlilies, angled in a way that does not straightforwardly agree with the placement of pondweed on the lower edge of the handscroll; the space is partly, though not especially, ambiguous. There is no sense of shadow or source of light, no sense of the water filtering light until deep and dark.

Figure 7: Davey Jones' Locker, William Wyllie, 1890, oil on canvas
(National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 1025 x 1360 mm)

A European example which employs several of these conventions is William Wyllie's *Davey Jones' Locker*, shown in Figure 7, in which the dark tones and subdued blue-green palette suggest deep water. The source of light seems to be coming from above the painting, an implied surface, and the

way the light seems to filter through the water suggests the depths too. The painting could be analysed in a similar way to how I have been analysing Chinese landscapes, with the background shipwreck which is obscured by the mass of water partially resembling the misty mountains, and ideas of emptiness *could* be read into it. Such readings seem inappropriate however, Wyllie's shipwreck reading much more as a mysterious and ghostly echo, functioning in a symbolic manner somewhat as the foreground skulls do. From a formal perspective it is noteworthy that Wyllie's depths of water are achieved with a lot of paint and blending, with the surface in stark contrast to the blank areas of Liu's handscroll.

Returning to *Fish Swimming and Falling Flowers*, I want to draw attention to the emptinesses which are what really qualify the genre to be considered alongside Chinese landscape works. I have mentioned the compositional emptiness of the blank areas of the silk, I want also to point out the emptiness used to partially depict the fish themselves. In Figure 6 it can be clearly seen how the sides of the fish are shown to be extremely light in colour, and this effect is achieved by leaving that area blank, the emptiness of the sides of the fish defined by the lines used for the tops of the fish and their fins. This certainly embodies the philosophy of *Laozi*, especially Chapter 11 quoted above – in terms of the necessity of emptiness for the functioning of life, but it also gives the fish the quality of being in motion in letting their bodies blend with the water. The viewer's gaze is able to fix the form of a single fish but peripheral vision causes a certain fluttering of the bodies of the fish in the viewer's experience. The fish are certainly the protagonists of *Fish Swimming and Falling Flowers*, in a way that they are not in *Davey Jones' Locker*, even though they are almost as prominent in the latter.

Liu invented a new visual idiom with this painting and others like it, and its success possibly hinges on how it makes the emptiness visible. People need air to breathe and empty space to move through, but the complexity of human life perhaps makes such needs less obvious when looking at figures in a landscape. Fish, on the other hand, seem inextricably linked in the popular imagination

to water. The Dao has often been compared to water, for example in the *Laozi* Chapter 8, and the way the fish seem to be swimming, playing, thriving, using and above all *living* in the emptiness of Dao and water are meant to serve as a rich reminder of the pregnant possibility of emptiness.

Information is another way of thinking about the interdependence of emptiness and fullness in Daoist painting, and has the benefit that it is possible to describe the functioning of the works without resorting to esoteric vocabulary. Information theory states that the quantity of information is greater the more unexpected the information is (a measure known as surprisal).[77] This is due to context, information not arriving in a vacuum, but arriving to also be incorporated and correlated into a wider fabric, possibly a notion of reality or a parchment map. Prediction, always a fuzzy business, helps us to look in the right place for further information, useful both for confirmation and denial, and to take action towards ensuring comfort, safety and food. Gaps in our information are interpolated, sometimes fantastically, and often in a mundane manner. The relevance of this for thinking about pictorial emptiness is that these emptinesses picture gaps in our information: they contain the potential for surprises.

This should be read in contrast to the argument made in Chapter 2 concerning Rembrandt (see Section 2.5). Whereas the unelaborated background of *Man in Oriental Dress* was read there as not salient, an area of low sensory sampling, the lack of detail in the emptiness of *Fish Swimming and Falling Flowers* is extremely salient. The depicted water in the painting is depicted through the device of pictorial emptiness, and so is both full and empty, a visual denegation.

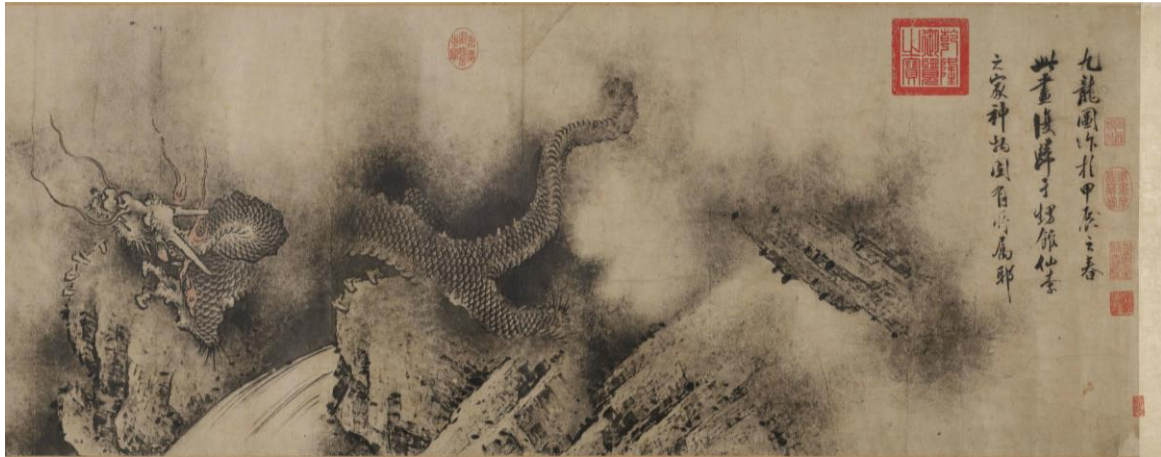[77] Surprisal is discussed in Chapter 2. See also Solms, 2021: pp. 172-3

Figure 8: Chen Rong, 'Nine Dragons' (detail), 1244, ink and slight colour on paper
(Boston Museum of Fine Art, 463 x 14,964 mm)

As noted in notes on The Creative above, yang energy is strongly associated with both clouds and emptiness, it can be added that the most yang animal in Chinese astrology is the dragon, and, additionally, that dragon pictures (the dragons invariably pictured amidst swirling mist) are a related genre to landscape.

Figure 8 shows a detail from the most famous of extant Chinese dragon paintings, *Nine Dragons* by Chen Rong. Janet Chao has written a detailed study of *Nine Dragons* and the many inscriptions found on it, including two by the artist. Of the line, 'When viewing from a distance, clouds and water appear in swift motion,' Chao writes the following:

> In this line, Chen Rong alludes to the dragon's association with clouds and thus rainfall. As described previously, Chen's Nine Dragons are not always fully-delineated and depicted to be moving swiftly and winding their bodies in and out of the surrounding clouds and water. When viewing the scroll from a distance, the dragons appear to blend within their natural environment.[78]

The dragons, Chao writes, seem to blend within their natural environment of clouds and water, and the sense I wish to take from this is the active fullness of clouds. Dragons are just below the surface of the cloud in a Chinese landscape work – even ones which do not picture them directly.

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[78] Chao, 2012: pp. 135-6

Figure 9: Yu Jian, 'Mountain Village, Clearing after Rain', mid-13th Century, ink on paper
(Idemitsu Art Museum Tokyo, 333 x 853 mm)

One of these works is shown in Figure 9. Yu Jian's *Mountain Village, Clearing after Rain*. The damp, casual brushwork seems yin in relation to the power of the mists, which, as subject matter, seem to dominate the scene without being inked in at all. The brushwork of the picture also appears yin in relation to the brushwork of the inscription, which is crisp and clear and firm, its four lines in both columns and rows (the left-most column, of four characters, is the title and does not follow the pattern of rows). There is order and organisation to the inscription, which seems in a way to buttress the figures as they climb blank space – the steps in front of them invisible.

Jerome Silbergeld has written on the way that emptinesses, which he calls voids, are used in different genres of Chinese art. Here, first, are his remarks on emptinesses in figure painting:

> The artist typically left the spatial environment to the viewer's imagination, using the empty areas between the figures as carefully measured intervals. These intervals established expressive visual tensions within the painting and regulated its rhythm… Skilfully handled, a void could give focus to a central event or register the intensity of psychological interaction between two figures. The amount of 'personal space' surrounding a figure could express the greater or lesser degree of individuality and social significance afforded that figure.[79]

Then on landscape painting:

> In many landscape paintings however, voids took on an added significance, expressive of the abstract Dao itself.

[79] Silbergeld, 1982: p. 48

Even closer to the Dao than solid mountain was the ephemeral mist that rose from its slopes, known as the [energy] of the Dao, coursing through the veins of the mountain, congealing into pools of water, and dispersing the pale atmosphere… not until the eighth century did the rise of ink-wash and splashed-ink techniques make it possible to suggest the softly atmospheric qualities of pale mist and the subtle interpenetration of solid and void.[80]

To clarify, Silbergeld ought to say that the ephemeral mist is expressive of the *yang* energy of the Dao. Silbergeld specifically draws on Yu's *Mountain Village, Clearing After Rain*, as an example of this atmospheric suggestion. He goes on to say the following about the emptiness there:

No Chinese critic would look at the voids of this painting as mere neutral ground, but as the Dao itself, giving birth to the still-moist mountains and clinging to its slopes in the form of nourishing vapors. The very process of creation and destruction is suggested here, the lingering clouds threatening to dissolve the mountains once again and draw them back into their fold.[81]

In terms of intrinsic scale, threatening clouds which Silbergeld writes of are a dominant element – despite being blank. The inscription is again a poetic composition by the artist, Craig Clunas has written of it that "the poem and the painting are conceived here as a unity, with neither an 'illustration' or 'explanation' of the other, and both ultimately supporting a view of representation itself as limited, contingent, never complete."[82] The full inscription reads:

Rain clings like a robe to the foot of the clouds, hiding Changsha [a city in Hunan Province]
A rainbow arches over the evening mist.
How beautiful are the meadows lying between the hamlet and the bridge.
The flag on the inn hangs slackly down and the traveller thinks of home. [83]

The bridge referred to in the inscription can be interpreted as the one shown in the painting's foreground, the hamlet that shown in the middle-ground. If this is correct, then the meadows are suggested only by blank space and the inscription itself, another instance of emptiness being used – the "beautiful" here not directly perceivable, the meadow not neutral ground, but, as Silbergeld says, fertile ground, full of potential.

[80] Ibid.: pp.48-9
[81] Ibid.: p. 49
[82] Clunas, 1997: p. 119
[83] Speiser, 1964: p. 204

This section has drawn out some of the more unusual effects which the device of emptiness has afforded the makers of Chinese paintings, arguing that these artists were able to deploy this distinctive variation of intrinsic scale in various ways to produce bistable images, paintings which image movement, and paintings in which the dominant visual element is not directly pictured.

5.5 Intrinsic Scale and Daoist Painting 3: 'Early Spring'

This section focuses on a single painting by Guo Xi. This painting was not only highly esteemed in its own time, being owned by and bearing an inscription from then Emperor Shenzong, it remains highly valued, being part of the permanent collection of the Palace Museum in Taipei and being the focus of much academic interest.[84] If the argument so far as to the centrality of the device of emptiness in Chinese landscape works is correct, then this analysis, based on intrinsic scale, ought to prove productive when looking at Guo Xi's work as well. After briefly introducing the painting, I begin by considering the treatise on painting which Guo left behind from the perspective of intrinsic scale. Considering the views of other academics, I then offer a reading of the painting in terms of intrinsic scale. Finally, I discuss an example of a 20th Century photographic attempt to achieve a similar effect.

Early Spring by Guo Xi, dated 1072, is shown in Figure 10. Silbergeld writes that, in *Early Spring*, "the human element [becomes] no more than an enlivening accent, an indicator of the monumental scale of nature."[85] He also writes of the ink wash techniques which make it possible for the interactions of fullness and emptiness to be suggested, as in *Mountain Village, Clearing After Rain*.[86] These qualities line up very much with the sort of painting I have been discussing in this section on landscape work so far, suggesting that *Early Spring* is another, albeit technically accomplished, 'mountains in the

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[84] Barnhart, 1997: p. 118-9
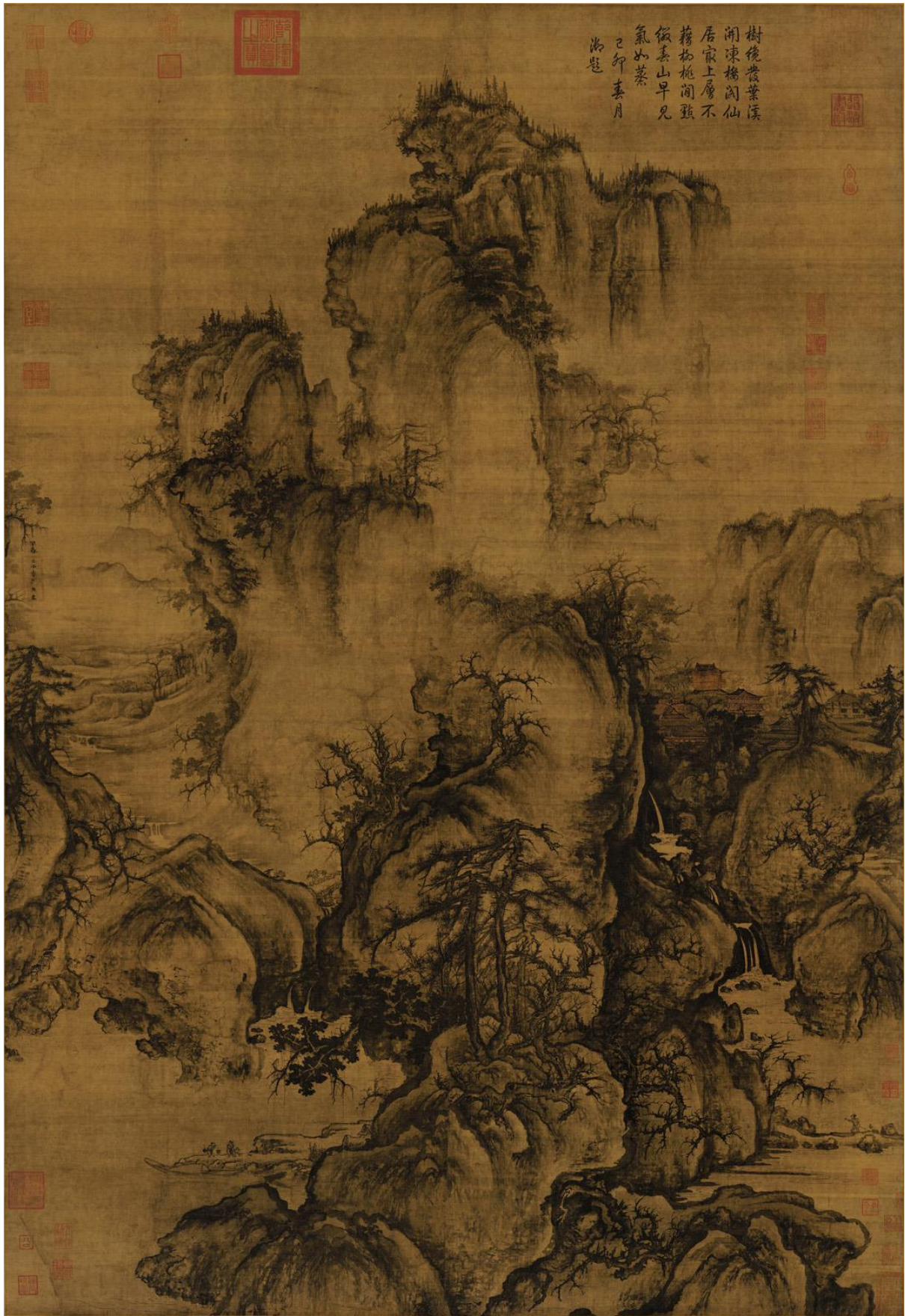[85] Silbergeld, 1982: p. 51
[86] Ibid.: p. 48

Figure 10: Early Spring by Guo Xi, 1072, Ink and Slight Colour on Silk (Palace Museum, Taipei, 1,583 x 1,081 mm)

mist' painting. *Early Spring* is more interesting, however, than these quotes suggest, in that the technical sophistication of the painting is in service of a spiritual or religious theme. I will be arguing that manipulations of intrinsic scale – what might be thought of as *dissolving* intrinsic scale – are the central device Guo uses to achieve his aim, and moreover that the concept of intrinsic scale can be used to understand literally many of the metaphorical claims that have been made about the painting.

Guo has left behind a treatise on painting, compiled by his son, Guo Suo.[87] Interestingly, the *Elegant Taste among Forests and Springs* contains numerous references to intrinsic scale:

> In landscape painting there are three degrees of magnitude: a mountain, which is larger than a tree, which is larger than a human figure. If the mountains are not piled up by the score, and if they are no larger than the trees, they will not look imposing. And if the trees are not stacked up by the score, and if they are no larger than the human figures, they will not look large.[88]

Here Guo has emphasised the size relationships between pictorial elements, as well as the viewer's experience of them – the landscape being meant to feel imposing. Guo also refers to the importance of using emptiness as a compositional element for the same purpose, to produce an experience of imposing landscape for the viewer:

> If one wishes to make a mountain appear high, one must not paint every part of it or it will seem diminished. It will look tall when encircled at mid-height by mist and clouds. If one wishes to describe a stream that stretches afar, one must not paint its entire course; only when its course is shaded and interrupted will it appear long.

Guo's fame however, and certainly his distinctiveness when considering intrinsic scale, is based on his idea of 'composite landscape':

> A mountain nearby has one aspect. Several miles away it has another aspect, and some tens of miles away yet another. Each distance has its particularity. This is called "the form of the mountain changing with every step." The front face of the mountain has one appearance. The side face has another appearance, and the rear face yet another. Each angle has its particularity. This is called "the form of a mountain viewed on every face." Thus, [when you

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[87] Wen, 1992: p. 117n32
[88] Ibid.: p. 86

integrate all these distances and aspects into a mountain image,] a single painted mountain can combine in itself the forms of several thousand mountains. How can a painter not explore this?[89]

Early Spring, Guo's own painting, is the pre-eminent example of this technique, presenting a combination of mountain views. Wu Hung helpfully describes a typical experience of viewing the painting, with the surprises discovered within it periodically recontextualising the viewer's experience:

> Our impression gradually changes when we look longer: it is not only a mountain, but an entire world. We find almost endless details: different types of trees, large and small valleys and gorges, hidden buildings and bridges, springs and waterfalls, and human beings engaged in different activities. Whenever we discover a detail, the mountain seems to increase in size, grandeur and richness.
>   Moreover, rather than a still, fixed image, this mountain seems to be moving, and our gaze is guided to follow its upward movement. In the foreground, large dark rocks form a mass, and two tall old pines are in themselves an excellent study of contrasting and complementary rhythms.[90]

Wu's suggestions that the image "seems to increase in size, grandeur and richness," and "seems to be moving," are echoed by Stanley Murashige:

> The absence of fixed borders permits movement through and among things, shedding objects of their exclusiveness. Shapes are permeable, protean, unfixed. Ceaselessly, they alter form and character, as one's gaze passes back and forth among them, a witness to the unfolding metamorphosis. Shapes startle by their unexpectedness and mystify by their seemingly infinite mutability. It is as if the image changes without cease, never quite returning to its previous condition. One wanders through the image, propelled by burgeoning chains of mysteriously changing appearances. One begins the journey at the bottom center of the painting, circles around the mountain, and ends where one begins. Yet the end does not spell the journeys end, but instead signals the beginning of a new cycle. The wandering begins anew, but time and circumstances have changed, and the viewer, too, has grown, so the repetition of the cycle cannot be the same.[91]

Murashige is writing in a metaphorical mode, with a collapsing of the cyclical nature of the seasons and a proposed cyclical viewing order that a viewer's eyes take around the silk; additionally,

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[89] Wu, 2005: p. 25
[90] Ibid.: p. 24
[91] Murashige, 1995: pp. 348-9

metaphors of transformation are layered in. The effect of this is a passage which mimics in literary form some of the effect of Guo's painting.

Early Spring shows a landscape which is spatially ambiguous, where is not even really possible to say how big the mountain is supposed to be. It does this by making most of both the fullness and the emptiness of the painting ambiguous in size. How this is done with emptiness has already been established in the rest of the section, it should only be added that the relatively empty sections of silk bottom left and bottom right of the picture seem a little more solid, the viewer can be a little more confident as to the expanses the emptinesses cover. With regard to the ambiguities of the other areas of the silk, Guo Xi takes advantage of the self-similarity of many shapes in nature with fractal characteristics. Fractals are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, for now it should be said that certain forms in nature, such as mountains, clouds, and branching vegetation, resemble themselves when viewed at different degrees of magnification. One implication of this is that depictions involving these elements can be ambiguous in terms of intrinsic scale. Regarding *Early Spring*, the ambiguity of intrinsic scale is relative rather than absolute – the tall trees in the bottom centre foreground seem at least 15 feet tall, though given they seem to be growing out of rock their roots may be constrained as bonsai trees are, making them in fact much smaller, their seeming height as shown an effect of foreshortening. Nonetheless the height cannot be less than a couple of inches or more then 100 or perhaps 150 feet at most. This is a significant ambiguity, nonetheless it is relative rather than absolute ambiguity. Most of the details of the fullness of the silk painting are similarly ambiguous, the exceptions being figures and the boat in the foreground, and pagoda architecture in the central right section which contains the suggestion of storeys. Both the figures and the storeys are less ambiguous in terms of the range of possible sizes, and locally they give much suggestion as to the size of the surrounding areas, fixing these areas more precisely in terms of scale.

As the viewer's gaze strays further from these focus points *of scale*, the ambiguity increases, it becoming progressively unclear if the tree just further on is smaller or further away, if the hill bends

or stays straight, the full sections of the silk elaborating into ambiguity just as much as the emptinesses do in their misty haze. The sense of "[wandering] through the image, propelled by burgeoning chains of mysteriously changing appearances" that Murashige writes about is due to these progressions of ambiguous intrinsic scale, with scale relations only making sense locally, as one moves from considering one section of the silk to the next. In this the way, viewing the painting resembles making a journey where steps forward are contextualised by what came immediately before them. The summit is itself only comprehensible in scale terms in a relative and local manner.

The painting is full of proportion, balanced finely, but intrinsic scale is employed in a deliberately diminished way with the human figures of the foreground giving way to only the sole slight fixing of the storeys in the middle-ground, beyond which there are no solid elements to pin the scale to.

Guo has unified a range of views from a range of perspectives, at a range of times, and has been able to do so without the pictorial elements clashing because of the inherent ambiguity of size of the fractal elements, especially of mountains, trees and clouds.

I have shown that the painting is spatially ambiguous and employs intrinsic scale. I hope to show that this use of intrinsic scale is what gives the painting the qualities which have been interpreted as spiritual.

Wu, for instance, claims that the significance of the composite landscape in *Early Spring* is spiritual:

> [W]hat is the purpose of this synthesis? To Guo Xi, the significance of this synthesis is not purely physical or topographical. Any physical existence must be momentary and thus cannot be truly transcendental… In [*Early Spring*], naturalistic images of buildings, boats, and figures are subordinated to dramatic contrasts of light and dark. The mountain embodies a strong sense of motion, and the clouds and mist seem to be flowing around the mountain while constantly changing shape. Such a landscape is, in a sense, "spirited" or "animated." It is no longer merely a formation of rocks and soil, but has acquired its own life and power.[92]

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[92] Wu, 2005: p. 26

Wu here is claiming that the spiritual quality in landscape painting is the sense of animation. The painting as a physical object, of course, is not moving. The viewer's experience of it however has movement. This motion that the viewer experiences, the "growth" that numerous sources ascribe to the painting, is based on ambiguity of intrinsic scale. As the viewer's gaze travels around the painting, the scale of the pictorial elements looked at shifts, conditionally upon the scales surmised previously. But if the viewer is attentive, the ambiguities compound, and the further from the focal points of scale the viewer's gaze travels, the greater the shifts, or growth, of scale.

In the 20th Century, photographer Lang Jingshan set out to translate the technique of composite landscape to photography. In *Majestic Solitude*, shown in Figure 11, Lang used two negatives, taken on different occasions, and blended them in the darkroom to make a composite print, what he called 'composite photography'.[93]

Lang explicitly linked his work to traditional painted landscapes, and claimed for it a spiritual aim, rather than, Wu notes, "mere visual trickery":

> The most important principle of Chinese painting is "spiritual consonance." Although we do not have an exact theory of what this means, the essential idea is to imbue a painting with a spirited and animated quality… To be sure, a painting may capture the actual appearance of its subject. But if it does not have an inner life, it only has an external appearance and no soul. This is also true with photography.[94]

Again, here there is an equivalence made between motion and spirit. Looking at the upper of the original photographs used to composite *Majestic Solitude* (Figure 5B, top) the mountain peaks all seem approachable, in relation to the ground. There is still ambiguity of intrinsic scale due to the

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[93] Ibid.: p. 35
[94] Ibid.

Figure 11: Lang Jingshan, 1934, Majestic Solitude, Black-and-white photograph:
A) Composite Picture, B) Original photographs (from Wu, 2005)

lack of any element which might fix scale, but this ambiguity is heightened in the composite picture

(Figure 5A). In this, darkroom dodging and burning have been used to obscure the base of what were

the foreground and are now the midground peaks which in the composite seem to disappear at their

base into the mist. The addition of the foreground element, the silhouetted tree, creates a valley in

the composite picture, an emptiness. The contrast however, emphasised by the choice to darken the

foreground tree into a silhouette, does not provide scale, the misted valley existing in ambiguous

proportions. The ambiguities of scale, as in *Early Spring*, compound, and lend a sense of motion to

not only the misty void, but the growing foreground of vegetation, and the cliffs which now appear

to float, their relationship to the ground unclear.

Murashige also links *Early Spring*'s ambiguities to its sense of motion, and links its composition to an

S curve, and in turn to the taiqi or yin-yang diagram.

> The S curve is also a place of spatial ambivalence, a place of spatial possibility. What has been read as spatial inconsistency, may instead be viewed as the moment of a startling metamorphosis. It is always during those conditions of greatest ambivalence that *Early Spring* effects its most dramatic transformations. Among the three different points of view, the center is the moment of the straight on view, and it is also the moment of greatest spatial ambivalence. This place, where vertical and horizontal cross, churns like of the spinning "eye" of an expanding and contracting maelstrom. With its circling, *yin-yang* rhythm, it engenders all forms and binds in all directions – up, down, left, right, in and out. It is the heart of the Great Mountain. The center joins different, but mutual points of view: it is where the view up towards the summit meets the view down towards the great boulders; it is where the summit and the great pines meet, the pivot around which the misty valley and temple gorge turn. Turning counter-clockwise against the mountain's clockwise rotation, the central spiral mirrors the grand scheme of the Great Mountain. Center and circumference, the small within the large, spin in mutual response, circling one another like concentric rings, their resonance generating the unfolding of nature.[95]

Murashige's analysis is compelling; the only note I would make is that the experience of motion is an

effect of the dissolving intrinsic scale. My account of *Early Spring* in terms of intrinsic scale has the

advantage of avoiding the hyperbole and metaphor of Murashige's account. To the extent that my

account, which otherwise agrees essentially with Murashige, is correct, it emphasises the Daoist

concepts of contingency and relativity, on roaming among the mountains, and on nature more

generally and on the relative insignificance of people in relation to "heaven and earth". And as far as

this is true, it also shows intrinsic scale as a device has been employed for almost a thousand years

as the way of imbuing a landscape painting with spiritual significance.

This section has argued that Guo's idea of composite landscape is best understood as another

application of the device of emptiness, a distinctive variation of the device of intrinsic scale. The

sense of motion, discussed in the previous section with *Fish Swimming and Falling Flowers*, is

experienced in the landscape of *Early Spring*, and that emptiness, understood literally, in terms of

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[95] Murashige, 1995: pp. 353-4; Silbergeld analyses the painting's composition differently and somewhat less convincingly, focussing on an upward zigzag through the centre of the composition. See Silbergeld, 1982: pp. 51, fig. 21, 21a, d, i, k

intrinsic scale, offers a way to understand this animation, and in turn the spiritual claims made for the painting.

5.6 Intrinsic Scale and Daoist Painting 4: Differing Ineffables

From a European perspective, paintings such as Shen Zhou's *Poet on a Mountain Top*, Figure 13, resemble many of those made in the Romantic tradition. For instance, Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, shown in Figure 12, also depicts a single figure standing atop a mountain, gazing at cloud which has formed in a layer beneath him. Colin Bailey has linked the fog in
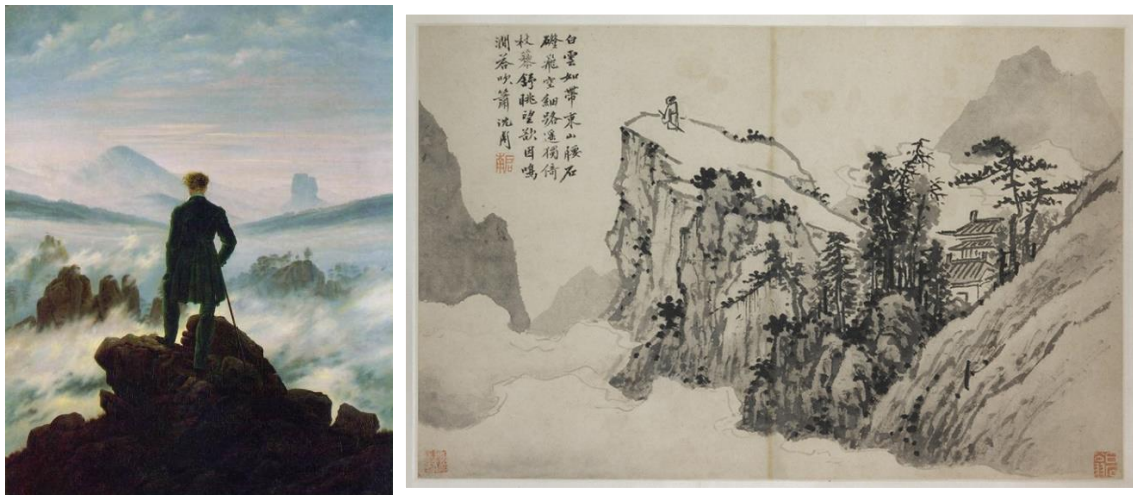

Figure 12: Caspar David Friedrich, 'Wanderer above the Sea of Fog', 1817 (Kunsthalle Hamburg, 950 x 750 mm); Figure 13: Shen Zhou (1427-1509), 'Poet on a Mountain Top', album leaf, ink on paper (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, 387 x 603 mm)

Friedrich's painting to the divine ineffable, writing that the clouds are meant "to allude to the mysteries of the divinity,"[96] and superficially this seems somewhat similar to seeing the Dao in the mist; viewing these works side-by-side, it is easy to look at Shen's painting and see in it the same kind of sublime landscape that Friedrich depicted. I hope to demonstrate however that this is not only anachronistic but also incorrect in its importing of European philosophical and ultimately

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[96] Bailey, 1988: p. 19

religious ideas into the Chinese context. I will do this by utilising analysis, by Moeller, of differing

conceptions of 'the ineffable' in Christianity and Daoism.[97]

Daoist emotional ideals are extremely temperate, following the advice in *Laozi* in Chapter 29: "the

sage rejects the extreme, the excessive, and the extravagant."[98] The stories contained in *Zhuangzi*

provide more detail on what this was meant to look like in the emotions of a sage:

> Too much happiness, too much unhappiness, out of due time, men are thrown off balance.
> What will they do next? Thought runs wild. No control. They start everything, finish nothing.
> Here competition begins, here the idea of excellence is born, and robbers appear in the
> world.[99]

This section demonstrates the Daoist commitment to emotional balance, and perhaps more

surprisingly the idea that excellence too is also ultimately destructive. This idea is a version of

rejecting the extreme and excessive, and one which appears to be uniquely Daoist. Other anecdotes

in the *Zhuangzi* include two instances of Zhuangzi explaining his actions when rebuked for not

grieving sadly when Laozi and Zhuangzi's wife die.[100] "Perfect joy," the *Zhuangzi* states, "is to be

without joy," and so, as mentioned above in relation to Daoist denegation, the *Zhuangzi* carves out a

discursive void where an ideal emotion can exist in an undefined way – empty emotion, or what

Moeller has translated as "comfort," "safety," or "contentment,"; "to adapt perfectly to a situation

without the slightest friction and thus to be perfectly present in it."[101]

Writing on European experiences of landscape, Marjorie Hope Nicolson has traced the history of

English descriptions of the sublime emotion. In *Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory*, she claims that

John Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, was the first English poet to practice what she calls the 'Aesthetics of

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[97] It is also the case that whilst both appear to present a *Rückenfigur* to the viewer, a figure seen from behind as they contemplate landscape, only Friedrich's painting should be seen this way, as Zhou's figure exists in the mid-ground rather than the foreground, the compositional choice which prevents the viewer identifying with the figure
[98] Kim, 2012: p. 245
[99] Merton, 2004: p. 70
[100] Watson, 1996: pp. 48-9, 113
[101] Moeller, 2004: p. 111

the Infinite' – "the transfer of vastness from God to interstellar space, then to terrestrial mountains."[102] This pattern was repeated by writers over the following centuries, with the source of the sublime emotions ultimately being attributed to a reflection of God. The emotions associated with the sublime are oxymoronic extremes; Nicolson focuses on John Dennis, an English writer travelling in the Alps in the late 17th Century, who wrote about experiencing "delightful Horrour," and "terrible Joy." [103] Dennis's ideas are worth using because he is the prototype of the kind of emotional sublime which Edmund Burke and Emmanuel Kant would develop; Robert Doran argues that Dennis "developed to a large degree many of the elements of the aesthetic sublime: the exaltation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* as an archetype of modern sublimity; the concept of mixed pleasure ("Enthusiastik Passion") as the essence of sublimity; the nexus between sublimity and terror."[104] Doran points out that Dennis's example of the "wrath of God" reoccurs in both Burke and Kant.[105] Hope Nicolson notes that "delightful Horrour," and "terrible Joy," are sublime feelings, and claims moreover that they are religiously motivated:

> The true source of the Sublime, for Dennis, was in religion. Beauty might be found in the works of man. The source of sublimity was in God and in the manifestations of His greatness and power in Nature.
> …the sources of his Sublime were listed by Dennis in three categories. First he named "God, Angels, and other Creatures of the immaterial World." The second group comprised..."the Heavens and Heavenly Bodies, the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, and the Immensity of the Universe, and the Motions of Heaven and Earth." To these Dennis added a third group, "Ideas of Sublunary Things; as of the four Elements… Winds and Meteors of all sorts, Seas, Rivers, Mountains." All these were the same in kind, if different in the degree to which they aroused the "Enthusiastick Passions" Admiration, Terror, Horror, Joy, Sadness, Desire. Man cannot think of God without "Enthusiastick Terrour," compounded of awe and rapture. The manifestations of God's majesty and power in Nature must evoke in sensitive minds some degree of the awe they feel for God Himself, which is the essence of the Sublime

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[102] Nicolson, 1959: p. 273
[103] Ibid.: p. 279
[104] Doran, 2015: p. 124
[105] Ibid. The Burkean sublime will form part of the discussion of Chapter 6. The Kantian mathematical sublime is not relevant to this discussion, as it relates only to reason or logic; Kant's dynamical sublime could take the place of Dennis here, since this relates to the experience of an individual's power in relation to Power (of Nature or God). Dennis is preferable in this instance due to the clarity of the presentation of the emotional element of the sublime. For this characterisation of the Kantian sublimes, see Doran, 2015: pp. 247, 260

experience.[106]

This is not the place to consider the idea of whether notions of the sublime must be rooted in religious or perhaps Christian feeling specifically.[107] What is important here is that sublime feeling was often rooted in Christianity, and that the emotion was turbulent and extreme rather than balanced and moderate.

Moreover, Friedrich himself was an artist whose subject matter was often explicitly Christian, and even when not, whose artistic approach has generally been seen, both at the time and since, as Christian.[108] Friedrich justified his landscapes in Christian terms – they were significant because they were about the sublime emotion, which was prompted by the contemplation of God through being immersed in a vast landscape.

I am claiming therefore that Friedrich's painting is about the sort of experiences that Dennis had when immersed in landscape – "Joyful Terrour," and suchlike. The importance of stressing this point is that this emotional content is extremely unlike that of the Daoist sage immersed in landscape, and correspondingly of Daoist landscape works.

The gap between the ideal of the sublime and the ideal of contentment can be explained by Moeller's analysis of the difference between God and the Dao, the ultimate ineffables which respectively underlie these ideals. Moeller contrasts two patterns of signification – the pattern of representation, epitomised by the Christian tradition in both philosophy and painting; and the pattern of presence – epitomised by the Daoist tradition:

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[106] Ibid.: pp. 281-2
[107] Nicolson's idea, that "the essence of the Sublime experience" quoted above is "manifestations of God's majesty and power," suggests an Old Testament God – a Torahic sublime seems at least possible. 13th Century Sufi poet Rumi has a poem the title of which is often translated as *Sublime Generosity* which addresses extreme positive and negative emotions felt about living "in the light," of God. Whether Rumi's poem can be accurately translated as *Sublime Generosity* depends on whether the sublime is historically or philosophically determined, and on whether it must rest on Christian foundations
[108] For an analysis of Friedrich's written defence of his altarpiece painting *The Cross in the Mountains*, see Bailey, 1988: pp. 6-8

The pattern of representation is based on the gap between the full reality of the signified and the deceptive reality of the signifier. Within this pattern the two constituting elements (signifier and signified) are not equally real. One *is* more than the other. This representational structure creates an "ontological" hierarchy between the signifier and the signified.

The "ontological difference" entailed in this pattern is quite alien to the ancient Daoist philosophy of presence. Daoist philosophers did not tend to ascribe different levels of reality, validity, or authenticity to the signifier and the signified. Regarding names (as signifiers) and actualities (as signified) as the components of the thing, the *Zhuangzi* says:

> It has a name and it has an actuality [*shi*], this is what a thing resides in.

A thing consists of a name and an actuality. The name of a thing is not thought of as an arbitrary linguistic addition to its actuality, but rather as an equally real part of it. The name "horse" and the actual horse together constitute the "thing" horse. Signifier and signified are both present with the presence of the thing. The name is not a secondary "representation" of the thing, but rather believed to be an inherent aspect of its presence.[109]

This idea seems unusual when approached from outside of a Chinese cultural context but is consistent with Daoist scripture. In unpacking it, it is important to remember that naming something is seen as identical to *pointing it out*. Moeller quotes from 3rd Century Neo-Daoist philosopher He Yan, who writes, "being pointed out by people brings about that which has a name. Not being pointed out is that which has no name."[110] The first chapter of the *Laozi* states that "naming is the origin of all particular things,"[111] suggesting that before being pointed out, things are undistinguished – part of the primordial chaos. Pointing out is the beginning of analysis – of yin and yang relations – of names and things themselves. Something that has not been pointed out does not exist *in itself*, as a particular thing, because it exists *in the whole*. The Dao itself does not have a name, the significance of which is uniquely Daoist:

> It has been frequently mentioned that the Dao is without a name. Being without a name, the Dao is surely not adequately described in language; it is some kind of ineffable ultimate. Christian theology, especially so-called negative theology, also pointed out the ineffability of God. If, however, Daoist and Christian philosophy were operating with different conceptions of the sign, then it is likely that this ineffability has a specific significance in each tradition. Conceptions of the unnamed have something to do with conceptions of the named, and if conceptions of the named differ, then conceptions of the unnamed may also differ. Or, in

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[109] Moeller, 2004: p. 140
[110] Ibid.: p. 146
[111] Mitchell, 1988: p. 1

other words: while the *ineffable within a paradigm of representation tends to be that which cannot be represented, the ineffable within a paradigm of presence tends to be that which is nonpresent.*[112]

Moeller quotes Pseudo-Dionysius, who asserts that the world is merely the representation of God, and, as such, is "infinitely and incomparably subordinate to Him."[113] The image Pseudo-Dionysius uses to explain this relation is that of a seal and its impressions, stating that "the impression is always similar to the seal – it is its genuine sign – but it is also always dissimilar to it – it is never the seal itself."[114]

Moeller sees this contrast of images as valuably explanatory – the relation between God and the World as that of a seal and its impressions; and the relation between the Dao and the world, following *Laozi* Chapter 11 quoted earlier, as that of a hub and its spokes:

> There is an "ontological" hierarchy included in the relation between the seal and its impressions: by representing the seal, the impressions are of less "being" or reality – they are always secondary. Between the hub and the spokes there is not such a hierarchy. The spokes in no way "represent" it – and they do not lack any authenticity of being in comparison with the hub. Ancient Chinese philosophy in general, and Daoist thought in particular, does not tend to suppose an "ontological" gap between the realms of representation and presence. An ancient Chinese "semiotics of presence" rather conceives of *both* the signifier and signified as equally present. The realm of the present includes everything that "is"; and between this realm of presence (the space of the spokes) and the realm of nonpresence (the space of the hub) there is no "representational" relation. As opposed to the "representationalism" of the Pseudo-Dionysius, the ineffable is not equated with the absolute present. The Daoist ineffable, the Dao, is rather the nonpresent pivot around which everything that is present revolves. It is that central element in the world that is empty of both name and form.[115]

It is for this reason that the Dao cannot be defined. Moeller summarises:

> The Dao is not "beyond" names, it is simply the unnamed element in the midst of all names. It is not that names "fail" to fully describe the Dao, it is rather that the Dao cannot be given a name because it has no qualities. The perfection of God does not allow him to be adequately represented with necessarily limited and incomplete names – God is too *full* to be named.

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[112] Moeller, 2004: p. 142
[113] Ibid.: p. 143
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.: p. 145

The Dao, however, is too *empty* to be named. God is ineffable because He is not "representable," whereas the Dao is ineffable because it is nonpresent.[116]

Returning to Shen's *Poet on a Mountain Top*, the figure seems grounded: not so much in the wilds of nature, as away from the wildness of the city. The brushwork, whilst assured, is modest – it is not a show of technical accomplishment. Perhaps most notable is the placement of the inscription, in such a way that the figure seems to be contemplating it. This impression is reinforced by the painting's title. Inscriptions are a part of most of the paintings I discuss in this chapter, however the relationship between the figure and the inscription gives the inscription a particular emphasis in Shen's painting. As I have been discussing, the inscription *exists* in a way that text outside of the Daoist tradition does not. The inscription reads as follows:

> White clouds encircle the mountain waist like a sash,
> Stone steps mount high into the void where the narrow path leads far.
> Alone, leaning on my rustic staff, I gaze idly into the distance.
> My longing for the notes of a flute is answered in the murmurings of the gorge.[117]

The inscription identifies the poet on the mountaintop as Shen himself, the painting therefore being both a self-portrait as well as a landscape work. The figure, whilst simply drawn, clearly has a sash around his waist, and so is identified somewhat with the mountain with the white clouds like a sash

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[116] Ibid.: pp. 147-8; The preceding discussion has introduced the elements needed to consider what might be involved in answering the philosophical question 'Do Holes Exist?' using Daoist metaphysics. Holes can be seen as a kind of emptiness. The central issue is of presence and non-presence, and the preceding discussion brings out many images of this pattern – especially the spokes and hub image. Moreover, the Chinese paintings I have discussed all make use of emptiness as a compositional element – blankness on the picture surface. Blankness and ink, from this perspective, are another kind of hole and substance – or hole and hole-lining, to use David and Stephanie Lewis' terminology (Lewis & Lewis, 1970, p. 207). A Daoist perspective might be that holes do not exist, and so cannot be investigated within the sub-disciple of ontology, which only deals with the existence of things. Metaphysics is needed to compass the broader structure of reality – and non-existence or emptiness is a part of this structure of reality – an equal part. Holes are local emptinesses. Containments make emptinesses visible, but whether or not an emptiness is contained, it does not exist. This is in disagreement with Tucholsky who claimed that "[t]here is no such thing as a hole by itself," implying both that holes could exist under certain circumstances and that the material adjacent to the hole was essential to this existence (See Tucholsky, 1931). The Daoist perspective seems to be that this is a natural language problem which disappears once the pervasive nature of emptiness is acknowledged; moreover, the emphasis of Tucholsky's claim is backwards: from this point-of-view there is no such thing as an is without a hole (for an overview of progress on this discussion see Casati & Varzi, 2019.
[117] Tregear, 1997: p. 158

around its waist – and so in a somewhat subtler manner the painting utilises some of the same sort of intrinsic scale that Liang's mountain-like portrait of Laozi discussed above does. Shen identifying with the mountain demonstrates aspirations of naturalness and tranquillity. The white clouds themselves, of course, invoke the emptiness which here encircles of the mountain, surrounding everything that exists.

The central pair of lines describes a long, elevated journey, which the poet mainly declines to take – gazing into the distance, but gazing idly. The poet does not wish to reach heights, or seek achievement, and while they may look at the far away they will stay centred and grounded.

The final line is a reference to a story from Zhuangzi relating the three types of pipe music – the pipe music of men, the pipe music of the earth, and the pipe music of heaven. The music of men is made by bamboo pipes or flutes – it is this which Shen longs for in the inscription. The music of earth is made by in the wind – it is this which answers Shen through the murmurings of the gorge. Zhuangzi's description of this is particularly vivid:

> That hugest of clumps of soil blows out breath, by name the "wind." It is not now starting up, but whenever it does ten thousand hollow places burst out howling, and don't tell me you have never heard how the hubbub swells! The recesses in mountain forests, the hollows that pit great trees a hundred spans round, are like nostrils, like mouths, like ears, like sockets, like bowls, like mortars, like pools, like puddles. Hooting, hissing, sniffing, sucking, mumbling, moaning, whistling, wailing, the winds ahead sing out AAAH!, the winds behind answer EEEH!, breezes strike up a tiny chorus, the whirlwind a mighty chorus. When the gale has passed, all the hollows empty, and don't tell me you have never seen how the quivering slows and settles![118]

The music of heaven goes on to be described – it does not need an initial puff, and does not bring something into being. It is not as literal a pipe as even the pipe of earth, rather it is the emptiness surrounded by fullness through which flows the energies of the universe. As Moeller notes, this pipe

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[118] Moeller, 2004: p. 135

of heaven is another image of the same structure as the Daoist hub and spokes – emptiness

surrounded by fullness.[119]

This section has contrasted a work from the Chinese landscape tradition with one from the European

Romantic tradition, arguing that the superficial similarities between the works conceal deeper

differences in terms of what the works are meant to be expressive of. I have then drawn on the

analysis of Hans Georg-Moeller on the differences between God and the Dao, in order to show the

systematic philosophical basis behind such differing emotional ideals, before finally returning to

Shen Zhou's painting and offering an analysis based on the Daoist ideal.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter the idea has been to show instances of Chinese traditional religious art that

utilise scale, and to show how scale can explain in a literal way the metaphorical and spiritual claims

that have been made for these works.

I have argued that in Confucian architecture, scale is used to perform social relations, whilst in

Buddhist painting and sculpture, scale has been used to dramatize the existence of suffering and so

motivate those on the Buddhist path. In the sections on Daoist artworks, I have shown that the

central Daoist concept of emptiness can be understood in terms of intrinsic scale, and sought to

show how the textual foundations of this have been taken up by artists in the Chinese tradition to

give visual representations of these metaphysical concepts. In particular, I have sought to show that

the appearance of motion in these works is dependent on manipulation of the device of intrinsic

scale, and that spiritual readings of these works are heavily predicated on this animated quality.

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[119] Ibid.: p. 136

Finally, I have contrasted a Daoist landscape work with a European Romantic landscape work, arguing that the deep discontinuities are the result of differing conceptions of the ineffable.

The broader suggestion, made more tentatively, is that the artistic manipulation of scale is a natural fit for portraying any relationship between individuals and some wider sense of the world, be that a social hierarchy, a deity, or an idea of ultimate reality; other avenues of exploration might include nationalist propaganda and corporate art. *Intrinsic scale suggests power dynamics*; whilst the preceding chapter, and that on intrinsic scale and abstraction, shows this can occur in a wide variety of ways, with these dynamics existing contingently with other properties of the artwork including the cultural context within which the work has been produced, the core idea is stable.

Chapter 6

Abstract Expressivism: Scale and the Sublime

This chapter seeks to better understand abstract painting by an application of Langerean aesthetics and the concept of relative scale, with particular attention given to how scale has been used in the picturing of what Robert Rosenblum has called 'the abstract sublime'. The introduction sets up terms of the debate, briefly outlining Langer's views on abstract painting and how this compares to contemporary views.

'Revisiting Size and Scale' then considers how a number of abstract artists, including Barnett Newman and Robert Motherwell, differentiated between size and scale and used scale in their work, before going back to consider relative ambiguities of scale in works by Pablo Picasso and Wassily Kandinsky as well as the post-painterly abstraction of Jules Olitski, and the arguments the latter's work provoked, with scale shown to give a way of navigating these arguments.

Then follows a section on 'The Sublime', considering the concept in antiquity and modernity, and how the Romantic movement used the sublime as a form of resistance against the secularizing influence of modernity. Three detailed sections follow, looking at paintings by Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock respectively.

Langer does not write much about abstract painting – mostly bringing it up to make help make the distinction between scientific, or generalizing, abstraction, and objectifying, or presentational, abstraction.[1] For Langer's purposes, non-objective works by Kandinsky and Rothko are no more abstract than figurative depictions – the subject matter has all been 'abstracted' in one way or

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[1] Langer, 1951: p. 171

another from life, and then objectified.[2] Langer cites the artists' statements of Hans Hofmann and

Jackson Pollock but does not discuss their art; her brief dismissal of Malevich's "magic squares" was

discussed in Chapter 1. Langer's most substantial comment on what this study refers to as abstract

pictures occurs during a discussion of motifs – which may or may not unambiguously resemble

objects in the world:

> Even a non-representational picture is an image – not of physical objects, but of those
> inward tensions that compose our life of feeling; almost as quickly as we construe a
> pure appearance confronting us, we interpret it, which is to say, we have an immediate
> intuition of meaning and "realize" that intuition… by giving the form a locus in our
> universe.[3]

Langer uses non-representational as I have used abstract or non-objective, so the first part of

this quote might be rephrased to say that even an abstract picture is an image, representing not

physical objects but a life of feeling – the life of feeling being the continuity of tensions

discussed in Chapter 2, the awareness of human consciousness. She then goes onto write of

another sort of projection – a viewer's projection of meaning into the abstract picture. Langer

here refers not to artworks but to pictures, though her discussion of Hofmann and Pollock

demonstrates that she considers them artists.[4] Of the first claim – that an abstract painting is an

image of a life of feeling – much has already been said, and more will follow in this chapter;

Langer recognises the distinction between abstract and non-abstract, but does not think it a

particularly large distinction – something echoed by the principal two writers on abstract

depiction in the analytic tradition – Richard Wollheim and Michael Newall.[5]

Langer's claim that abstract paintings prompt an almost immediate interpreting, and that this

interpretation is objectified for us in the work, has also appeared in the work of art historian

Kirk Varnedoe, who writes that "Almost as fast as artists can open blank slates, others hasten to

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[2] Ibid.: pp. 179-81
[3] Langer, 1967: p. 146
[4] For Hofmann see Langer, 1967: pp. 159-61; for Pollock see Langer, 1967: p. 145n87
[5] See Chapter 1 for a full discussion

inscribe something on them, trivially at first… but eventually with more serious freights of

meaning…"[6] Art historian Pepe Karmel has recently published a global history of abstract art,

and credits Varnedoe with both this "blank slate" approach to abstract paintings and also the

idea that abstractions are "representations in a broadened sense" – both ideas which can be

found in the Langer quote above.[7]

Art historian Peter Vergo has written of the difficulty of separating abstract from figurative

painting, since some seemingly abstract works, such as Giacomo Balla's *Mercury Passing in*

Front of the Sun (1914) were produced based on close observation. Vergo suggests that if Balla

had kept this to himself that he might be considered among the pioneers of abstraction. Vergo

goes on:

> What of seemingly abstract works which have no 'representational' title, but which are
> clearly based on the same compositional structure as one that does – something that occurs
> again and again in Kandinsky's *oeuvre*? Can *any* painting, strictly speaking, be defined as
> 'abstract', since even the most hard-edged form-and-color composition indisputably bears
> some relation to aspects of our everyday visual experience?
> These questions reveal, if nothing else, the need for a better definition of abstraction than
> we have been offered so far.[8]

Karmel addresses the concerns Vergo raises. Echoing Vergo's statement about abstract paintings

always bearing some relation to everyday visual experience, Karmel writes that abstract artists

"always begin with a visual theme or archetype combining abstract forms with meanings generated

by associations with the real world."[9] Karmel then, however, more controversially, gives what is in

effect a new definition of abstract painting:

> Modern artists rebelled against [the] demand that every element of the picture be
> subordinated to the goal of spatial illusionism… Abstract artists drew on [Impressionist and
> Cubist] models of non-perspectival space and invented new ones of their own. What they all
> had in common is that they no longer proposed a fixed viewpoint. The viewer's gaze was
> liberated to roam across the height, breadth and depth of the picture… What made the new
> art 'abstract' was not the absence of resemblance, but the destruction of a fixed viewpoint.
> The ultimate goal of abstraction was freedom: a new freedom of expression for the artist, a

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[6] Varnedoe, 2006: pp. 32-3
[7] Karmel, 2020: pp. 28-9
[8] Vergo, 1980: p. 11
[9] Karmel, 2020: p. 29

new freedom of interpretation for the viewer.[10]

This view has several compelling elements. For a start, the issue of recognisable imagery is set to one side, avoiding the issue of Kandinsky's landscape elements in otherwise abstract works that Vergo mentions, not to mention human figures in works such as *Mural* (1943) by Jackson Pollock or *Woman I* (1950-2) by Willem de Kooning. Moreover, Karmel's emphasis on freedom accords well with artist's statements, particularly the first European wave and the Abstract Expressionist wave, not only in content but also in tone. The oft-noted seriousness of intent of abstract painters goes well with the rhetoric of freedom, whether it is understood in political, social, economic, perceptual or other terms. Chapter 5 considered the Confucian hierarchy performed by The Forbidden City in Beijing, with social relations made explicit in spatial terms – abstract painting could be seen as a freedom from, among other things, this kind of inflexible social performance. Finally, the definition itself – that abstract painting has an absence of fixed viewpoint – is not only clear, but seems to match examples of abstract paintings well.

However, Karmel's take on abstraction is over-inclusive, to the extent that it only really excludes paintings made with consistent use of perspective. Karmel's history looks only at modernist and post-modernist works, but his idea that abstract painting is that without a fixed viewpoint includes most of the broader history of painting: from works on the walls of caves to ancient Egyptian stone and plaster paintings, as well as Medieval European manuscript illuminations and all the Chinese paintings from Chapter 5. In the case of Egyptian painting, hierarchical proportion, in the varying size of figures by social status, enacts precisely the kind of inflexible social structure that Karmel's proponents of freedom in abstraction might be said to be combatting.

This final chapter in the thesis seeks to better understand abstract painting by considering it in terms of scale. In particular, the device of intrinsic scale, introduced in Chapter 5, seen as an example of a

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[10] Ibid.: p. 31

Langerean artistic gradient, is pursued. The way scale was understood in Chapter 5 was adopted partly because it coincides with most uses of the term in aesthetics and art history.[11] This chapter continues with this understanding of intrinsic scale as defined by the relationships of sizes between pictorial elements, and extrinsic scale as the relationship of sizes between the work itself and the body of the viewer. The chapter provides a new framework for understanding abstract paintings: that they feature completely ambiguous intrinsic scale. This framework enjoys the benefits of Karmel's approach but is less inclusive – though notably more inclusive than the canonical account based on an absence of recognisable objects.

As manipulations of intrinsic scale were seen to be pictorially able to occasion experiences of, and reflections on, Taoist emptiness, complete ambiguity of intrinsic scale is examined in this chapter particularly in terms of how it can occasion experiences of, or reflections on, the sublime. This chapter is not meant to claim that all abstract painting produces a sublime effect, or that it intends to. Moreover, painting need not be abstract to produce a sublime effect – John Martin's *Belshazzar's Feast*, discussed in the introduction, and Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog*, discussed in Chapter 5, are both examples of figurative works which aim to produce a sublime reaction in viewers. Maurice Tuchman, however, has pointed out the "astonishingly high proportion" of abstract painters who have been engaged in one way or another with the spiritual (the relationship of the spiritual to the sublime will be considered shortly).[12] The chapter contends that abstract painting has resources at its disposal which make it particularly suited to the depiction of the sublime – notably ambiguity of intrinsic scale, a property that to my knowledge has not been pointed out for abstract painting in general, though it has been noted of particular works.[13]

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[11] But not all – in a recent study on the use of scale in contemporary sculpture, Rachel Wells, following Henri Bergson, assigns essentially the opposite meanings to the terms, where scale is a property of objects in extension and size is an experienced, subjective quality. See Wells, 2013: pp. 5-6

[12] Tuchman, 1986: p. 17

[13] Sheldon Nodelman writes about the Rothko chapel partly in terms of scale and T. J. Clark writes about Pollock's *Number 1, 1948* in terms of scale – both are discussed later in this chapter

Writing on the abstract sublime is not new – indeed, statements from Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian, as well as those of Hilma af Klint discussed in Chapter 1, all make reference to a desire to make paintings with an air of transcendence.[14] Abstract Expressionist artists also often thought about their works in terms of either transcendence or the sublime directly; both these statements and their pictorial expression will be explored in this chapter. Art historically, Robert Rosenblum has given an account of Romanticism in terms of the sublime in painting in a tradition starting with Friedrich and ending with Rothko, making explicit the continuities in the presentation of the sublime despite varying pictorial strategies. Rosenblum, moreover, makes frequent reference to scale both when discussing figurative and abstract art in his book – again, these will be discussed as part of this chapter. In terms of analytic aesthetics, the function of scale in painting has not received any sustained attention so far. Scale is frequently used as a device in literature as well as painting to evoke the sublime, but can be used to other ends, as shown in Chapter 5, and the sublime can also be evoked in other ways, as will be shown in poems by William Blake. The present chapter provides a basic account of how scale functions in abstract paintings, and also, as in the larger study, aims to model one way in which an aesthetic concept can be employed within the discipline of art history.

6.1 Revisiting Size and Scale

In this section I revisit size and scale, which have already been discussed in both the introduction and Chapter 5 but are now examined from the point of view of abstract painting. Beginning with a discussion of the statements of Barnett Newman on size and scale, I go on to look at examples of when physical properties of objects change with differences in scale and when they do not, bringing Langer's ideas back in at this point to consider what scale is for from a Langerean perspective. I then go on to a discussion of paintings, starting with a canvas by Newman, before going on to discuss the

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[14] Kandinsky, 1911: pp. 2, 4, 9, 20; For Malevich see Douglas, 1985: p. 186. Mondrian's mystical tendencies were not nearly so pronounced as Malevich and Kandinsky, nonetheless he was interested in theosophy and the esoteric for a few crucial years – see Blotkamp, 1985: pp. 89, 96-109

statements and a work by Robert Motherwell, focusing on issues of size and scale. I then consider a

semi-abstract work by Picasso in contrast with an abstract work by Kandinsky, arguing that it is

completely ambiguous intrinsic scale which makes the latter an abstract work. I use this argument to

look at a second painting by Kandinsky, arguing that it is not abstract, before the section ends by

considering the debate between Clement Greenberg and Leo Steinberg in the 1960s regarding the

opticality or tactility of painting, arguing that considering abstract works in terms of clarity of

intrinsic scale helps us to negotiate their argument.

In 1969, on his first visit to the Louvre, Newman remarked of Paolo Uccello's *Battle of San Romano:*

> "Fantastic. Absolute totality. One image. I suppose this is so because the light is even from
> corner to corner. No spotlights – Courbet and Pissarro are like that. Monet, for instance, was
> always spotlighting theatrically, except in his late work. Hence his popularity. Physically, it is
> a modern painting, a flat painting. You grasp the thing at once. What a fantastic sense of
> scale!"[15]

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[15] Newman, 1990, p. 292. It is impossible to write about Newman in a thesis as heavily predicated on the
aesthetics of Susanne Langer as this one without mentioning their meeting, which has become somewhat
notorious within aesthetics. Jason Gaiger gives a helpful summary: "In a panel discussion held in 1952 on the
subject of 'Aesthetics and the Artist', the American painter Barnett Newman made an observation that has
passed into the folklore of twentieth-century art. Responding to Susanne Langer's suggestion that the research
she and her colleagues were carrying out in aesthetics might be of interest to contemporary artists, he replied:
'I have never met an ornithologist who ever thought that ornithology is for the birds.'" (Gaiger, 2008: pp. 4-5).
A slightly fuller version of what Newman said is: "I consider the artist and the aesthetician to be mutually
exclusive terms… I would also like to bring up the question here of Mrs. Langer's book [*PINK*], since she is
present and a member of the panel, and particularly since it not only sets up a science but actually claims to
have created a philosophy of art. I find that no philosophy has been created in this book… I feel that the
aestheticians, the theoretical aesthetician who's on the mountain and the practicing aesthetician who is doing
the work, are involved in something very, very specific. They don't want to have anything to do with the artist,
but they're very anxious to capture the public. I feel, if Mrs. Langer will pardon me, that her book is
propaganda for this direction… I have insisted on coming here as a citizen because I feel that even if aesthetics
is established as a science, it doesn't affect me as an artist. I've done quite a bit of work in ornithology, and I
have never met an ornithologist who thought that ornithology was for the birds. It's true that ornithologists
have saved some rare species, and they save them by teaching people not to shoot the birds, by keeping the
feeding grounds for the birds. Perhaps I'll finish by saying that maybe what the aestheticians should do is to
stop taking potshots at the artists and let them have their own feeding grounds." (Newman, 1952, in Newman,
1990: pp. 242-7) Richard Shiff writes of the exchange, "During the discussion [Neman] bickered with [Langer]
over definitions of reality. Newman claimed that any reality worthy of attention was a human product made by
an artist… whereas Langer, countering his sarcasm with measured disbelief, viewed every material thing,
whether created by man or by nature, as possessing a potential for reality of the highest order. Newman's
terminological qualifications, at one incisive and eccentric, confused most of those present, irritated nearly
everyone (whether or not they were laughing), and caused a general ruckus." (Shiff, 2005: p. 163) Jerrold
Levinson, in conversation with Hans Maes, points out the double meaning of the phrase "for the birds" as
meaning also "of dubious quality or interest." (Maes: 2017: p. 43) To my knowledge, it has not been pointed

To which his interviewer, art critic Pierre Schneider, asked, "By 'scale,' you don't mean size?"

Newman replied:

> "It is beyond the problem of size. It looks big. The content and the form are inseparable:
> that's scale."

A little later, on the same visit, Newman praised Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* for, among other

things, scale:

> "Fantastic! The scale is marvelous. You feel the immensity of the event rather than the size
> of the canvas. Great! Wild painting! The space does engulf one."[16]

A year later, just two months before he died, Newman had this to say about size and scale:

> "In the end, size doesn't count. Whether the painting is small or large, it's not the issue. Size
> doesn't count. It's scale that counts. It's human scale that counts, and the only way you can
> achieve human scale is by content."[17]

Much earlier, in 1951, after completing *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, a canvas eighteen feet wide by eight

feet tall, Newman had said he "felt intoxicated with scale."[18] And, perhaps most straightforwardly, in

the preface to his lithograph series of *Cantos* from 1964, Newman wrote that, "In painting, I try to

transcend the size for the sake of scale."[19]

In Newman's comments are a number of ideas based on the notion that size and scale are not the

same property – size is objective whereas scale is perceptual. Newman's idea that scale is to do with

content and form being inseparable needs interpretation. It seems clear that he is suggesting that

the form needs to be of an appropriate scale for the content, that is, it needs to feel big enough – as

in *Raft of the Medusa* where you feel "the immensity of the event," and so transcend the mere "size

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out that Clive Bell much earlier wrote quite a similar formulation, that "A critic no more exists for artists than a
paleontologist does for the Dinosaurs." (Bell, 1921: p. 259 in Bywater, Jr., 1975: p. 18)
[16] Newman, 1990: p. 300
[17] Ibid.: p. 307
[18] Reported in Reid, 1972: p. 46
[19] Newman, 1963-4, in Schiff, Mancusi-Ungaro & Colsman-Freyberger, 2004: p. 455. Newman also includes a
discussion in this preface on the challenges of scale in lithography due to the relationship of border to print

of the canvas." This seems to not be to do with abstraction and figuration either, with Newman's remarks concerning his own work as well as Gericault and Uccello.

It is unclear exactly what this appropriateness is based on. It is not, for instance, even in figurative works, based on life-size – 1:1 scale – depiction, which is relatively unusual. One suggestion comes via Langer. Langer, writing on a different topic, approvingly cites physicist and biophysicist John R. Platt writing on 'Changes of Physics with Changes of Scale':

> We usually say, of course, that the fundamental principles of physics and chemistry do not change with a change in molecular dimensions. But this is only a theoretical dictum and… we generally use a different set of rules or equations for problems of different ranges of size. The basic laws may not alter, but they are combined in different proportions, so to speak; … consequently the dominant physical forces and the distinctive properties of matter change, with every alteration in scale.
>   Small water waves, for example, are governed principally by surface tension, while large ones are governed by gravity, although both forces are always present. Atoms and small molecules must be described by quantum mechanics, but this… goes over more and more exactly into classical mechanics in describing macroscopic properties of large molecules.
>   In biology… the complete change of structure and mechanism with every change of scale is particularly striking.[20]

Whilst it is possible to quantify these forces, the emergent differences which Platt and Langer draw attention to, the "distinctive properties of matter," are qualitative ones. In physics, chemistry and biology, materials and forms often have different qualities at different scales. In landscape painting, the greying that is associated with distance and hazy conditions near the horizon is called atmospheric perspective because of how this greying conveys scale information, albeit less precisely than linear perspective. In astronomy, the phenomenon known as 'red shift', where the wavelength of light alters, for instance because objects are moving away from each other, provides a macroscopic visual example of a scaling phenomenon.[21]

Whilst many objects, such as those listed by Platt, display this kind of scaling quality, many others do not. Why this should be the case may not be immediately apparent – why, to a significant extent, a footprint provides its own scale but a flower does not. This is because of the property of fractal self-

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[20] Platt, 1961: pp. 342-3, quoted in Langer, 1967: pp. 271-2
[21] Zeilik & Gregory, 1998: p. G-25; Despite several uses of the title 'Red Shift', including Helen Frankenthaler, I am unaware of any paintings which depict the phenomenon

similarity which many natural objects possess, where an object looks similar at different scales (see

Figure 1). The same property is found in clouds, coastlines and mountains. The viewer recognises the

potential range of sizes of footprint – a very much narrower range than for flowers or clouds or

mountains.
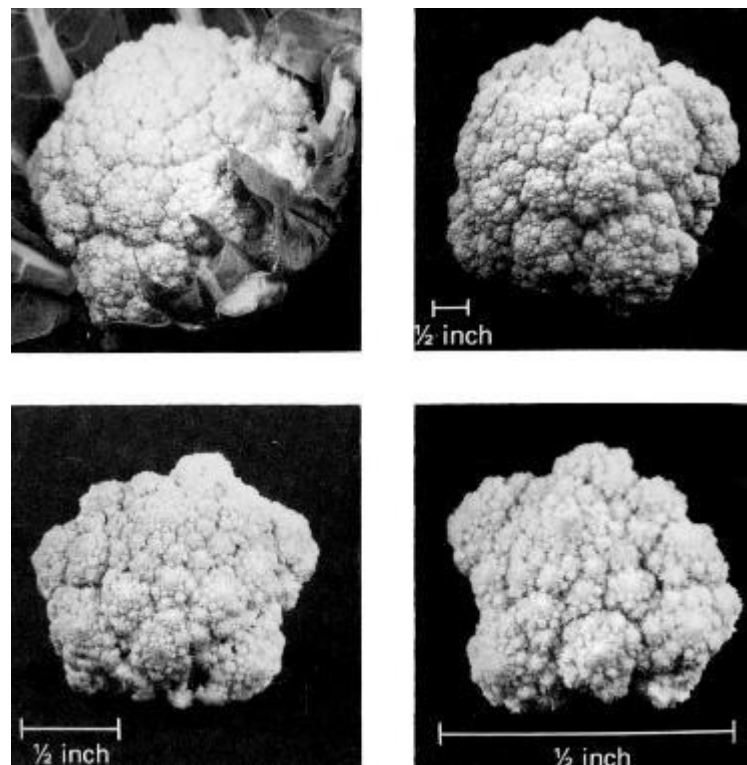
Figure 1: Cauliflower Self-Similarity, "the small pieces look similar to the whole cauliflower head"
(Peitgen, Jürgens, Saupe, 1992)

The gradient under discussion is clarity of intrinsic scale, with one pole of complete ambiguity

represented by abstract painting and the other pole of minimal ambiguity represented by

illusionistic painting. The choice to use fractal imagery will allow an artist to represent space much

more ambiguously, whereas the choice to use imagery of a sort that its properties alter with changes

in scale will allow an artist to depict with greater clarity of scale. Langer does not use the word scale

directly as it concerns art, however she does write that if "the artist presents semblances of objects,

people, landscapes, etc., it is for their visual values as portions of perceptual space... Representation,

in other words, is for the sake of creating individual forms in visible relation to one another."[22] This is really a view of the depiction of objects which rests on scale – incorporating scaling objects in order to achieve clarity of intrinsic scale. This view, in fact, seems too extreme – in Christofano dell'Altissimo's portrait of *Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici* (shown in Chapter 1, Figure 8), Langer's position would seem to be that the depiction of a person helps to establish what she calls *virtual proportions*, but that it is insignificant both to us and to a contemporary viewer exactly who is being represented, a position that seems unattractive in its generalising people and objects to types.[23] Nevertheless, setting aside this kind of documentary value, Langer's view is otherwise compelling.

Newman's comments on the appropriateness of light effects are also unclear – whilst the lighting in the Louvre *Battle of San Romano* is indeed even from edge to edge, this is not at all true for *Raft of the Medusa*. Newman's comments on spotlighting seem to refer to how, from his perspective, Monet did not achieve a sense of scale, apart from perhaps in his late work, because, it seems, of his spotlighted forms seeming isolated and disconnected from their surroundings. Writing of his own zips, he says that they do not divide, rather they unite surfaces.[24] A sense of scale, for Newman, seems very linked to this sense of connection – in Uccello's painting the form and content are "inseparable," and it is "fantastic," because it is "one image."

Schneider understands Newman to be interested not in depicting what Newman called "a slice of space", either flat or recessional, but in depicting abyssal or infinite space.[25] Newman sees this in *Raft of the Medusa*, according to Schneider, because of the wave that rears up behind the raft "thereby plunging the shipwrecked survivors – and the spectator – into another, third type of space, one that although enclosed in the same measurable material substratum… is perceived by us as bottomless and unlimited."[26] Schneider points out that the medieval tradition of seascape paintings,

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[22] Langer, 1953: pp. 75-6

[23] Chapter 4 considers this aspect of Langer's position, arguing that it is a rhetorical position designed to emphasise intuitive as against intellectual responses to artworks

[24] Schneider, 2005: p. 141

[25] Ibid.: pp. 136-7

[26] Ibid.: pp. 134-5

"a diluvian motif of a finite figure on an unbounded sea," dies out during the Renaissance, only to reappear with Gericault; the argument is that with perspectival space, measuring and containing space, the unbounded sea was no longer a fitting subject.[27] Gericault brings it back because the concept, and Romantic tradition, of the sublime had made it a tenable subject again – a subject I will return to. Schneider describes Newman's zips as directed both down and upwards: "down it is God's lightning bolt (in French the word for zipper is *fermeture-éclair*, literally, "lightning," *and* "bolt"): sharp, decisive, infallible. But going up, it betrays human hesitation and human strain. Sometimes this duality manifests itself in one and the same zip."[28]

Schneider's analysis is compelling here, though it cannot be rephrased to completely avoid metaphor. In *First Station* (1958, Figure 2), from Newman's *Stations of the Cross* series, the relationship of the two zips to each other is ambiguous, as which appears to recede further behind the picture plane is unclear (*Stations of the Cross* is a title which refers to an image tradition depicting stages in the crucifixion of Jesus). The zips in *First Station* are parallel, but other than orientation they differ in most ways – the left zip at the edge of the canvas whilst the right is surrounded by space, the left a crisp, thick black line whilst the right is a thin negative space defined by uneven wisps of dust-like paint. The gradient of ephemerality – presence and absence, or duration – is being evoked pictorially here, and Newman's title pushes back against potential formalist readings. To make a too literal connection to the title, but one acceptable as long as it is understood not to fix but merely to orientate the reading, the left zip shows something like divine law or fate, whilst the right zip provides a semblance of the path Jesus is trying to navigate amidst terrible forces; that path itself, by the doctrine of *Imitatio Christi,* an analogy for the suffering with suffering that people must endure before death, made visible only by the sin or stain of those close to the path but nonetheless irredeemably fallen. The left zip could also be the public view of the strength of Jesus on the way to the cross – strength and constancy most characteristic – whilst the

[27] Ibid.: p. 138
[28] Ibid.: p. 143

right zip shows the inner vacillations and doubts. Whatever the interpretation of the paired zips, there is an abyss between them.

Figure 2: Newman, 'First Station', acrylic resin on canvas, 1958
(National Gallery, Washington, D.C.,1,978 x 1,537 mm)

Like Newman, Robert Motherwell preferred to work on a human scale – that is, in terms of extrinsic scale, he sized his canvases so that they were approachable by people, recognisably made by human hands. In a 1963 interview, Motherwell explicitly discussed the qualitative nature of working with artistic media and scale:

> [Working with a medium is ideally] a living collaboration, which not only reflects every nuance of one's being, but which, in the moments in which one is lost, comes to one's aid not arbitrarily and capriciously…, but seriously, accurately, concretely with you, as when a canvas says to you: this empty space in me needs to be pinker; or a shape says: I want to be larger and more expansive; or the format says: the conception is too large or too small for me, all out of scale…[29]

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[29] Terenzio, 1992: p. 139 in Hobbs, 2020: pp. 80-1; These remarks are reminiscent of Henri Matisse, who refers to it in terms of composition: "Composition, the aim of which is expression, alters itself according to the

The conception being too large or small, all out of scale – this is very similar to Newman's joining of form and content, inseparably. Motherwell goes even further in insisting that human scale is what is important rather than monumental size:

> Sheer size is one current way of pulling one's self out the mass [standing out from the crowd of artists currently working], in some ways a vulgar way, unless it's beautifully done; at this point it is mind-jolting to see a sculpture 1,200 feet long. But maybe twenty years from now it would seem small; no doubt sculptors will begin to design projects related to the stars and the moon. So in a way, I'm a very old fashioned painter. I like things humanly scaled, i.e., in relation to the physical size of people.[30]

Motherwell here jumps between discussing sculpture and painting, but with both considers extrinsic scale – expressing a strong preference for work which is centred on a human scale. Nonetheless, in terms of intrinsic scale, Motherwell worked ambiguously. Consider critic Marcel Pleynet discussing readings of the *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* (see No. 109, 1965-7, in Figure 3) paintings by Robert Motherwell:

> Are the ovoid forms found in *Elegies to the Spanish Republic* representations of male genitalia, gargantuesque fruits, literal renderings of one of Lorca's verses: ("Death placed eggs in the wound") or are they the visual interpretation of the artist's encounter with an infinitely more complex set of elements cristallizing [sic.], sublime and massive, around Lorca's poem?[31]

Pleynet suggests the latter, but as part of valid multiplicity of readings around the series. The sublime and massive, "gargantuesque," elements, are as justified as those suggesting "eggs in the

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surface to be covered. If I take a sheet of paper of given dimensions, I will jot down a drawing which will have a necessary relation to its format." (Matisse, 1908, in Flam, 1987: p. 38. Langer quotes part of this but does not comment on its relation to scale, instead focussing on living form (Langer, 1953: p. 81)). Matisse here notes that the size, the dimensions or format, suggest appropriate content, or composition. Whilst Matisse is noting how, in Newman's terms, a form suggests a content, it could just as well be that a content suggests a form. Looking at the work of Jackson Pollock, for instance, the artist appears to have worked in both ways, and sometimes even cut canvas down after painting had finished, an option more readily available for Pollock than most painters due to his habit from around 1947 of stretching his paintings only after completion. Number 2, 1950, for instance, appears to have been cut down, whilst *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)* does not. 'Scale at any Size: Henry Moore and Scaling Up' by Wells, 2015 is a discussion of Henry Moore's sculptural practice of imaginatively working at full size even when working with scale models, so that, despite appearances, there is no scaling up of the work
[30] Ashton, 2007: p. 254
[31] Pleynet, 1989: p. 42

wound," eggs which seem necessarily to be much smaller than gargantuan. Part of what Pleynet

refers to here is due to the ambiguity of intrinsic scale in the Motherwell canvases; partly he writes

about abstract painting in terms of imagery, a very common occurrence in art criticism and art

history but one which ought to be less common if abstraction were really always about getting rid of

recognisable depicted objects.

Figure 3: Robert Motherwell, 'Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 108' oil on canvas, 1965-7
(Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2,082 x 3,511 mm)

The argument about intrinsic scale can be better considered by looking at how the pictorial logic of

scale functions. In Picasso's *Composition with Violin* (1912, Figure 4) the depicted depth is created

mainly with the shading on the lower right side that is apparently 'under' the instrument's body,

with other shading in the lower middle third of the picture also playing a part. There is the

semblance of a face just above centre – or perhaps it is better to say Picasso has balanced the

elements so as to suggest the face whilst encouraging conflicting readings to a sufficient extent that

the face does not completely resolve. Scale is ultimately provided more by the painting's title than

any other element; on the evidence of the image alone, a cello or double bass would be equally correct interpretations of the depicted object and scale (the scroll precludes seeing a guitar).
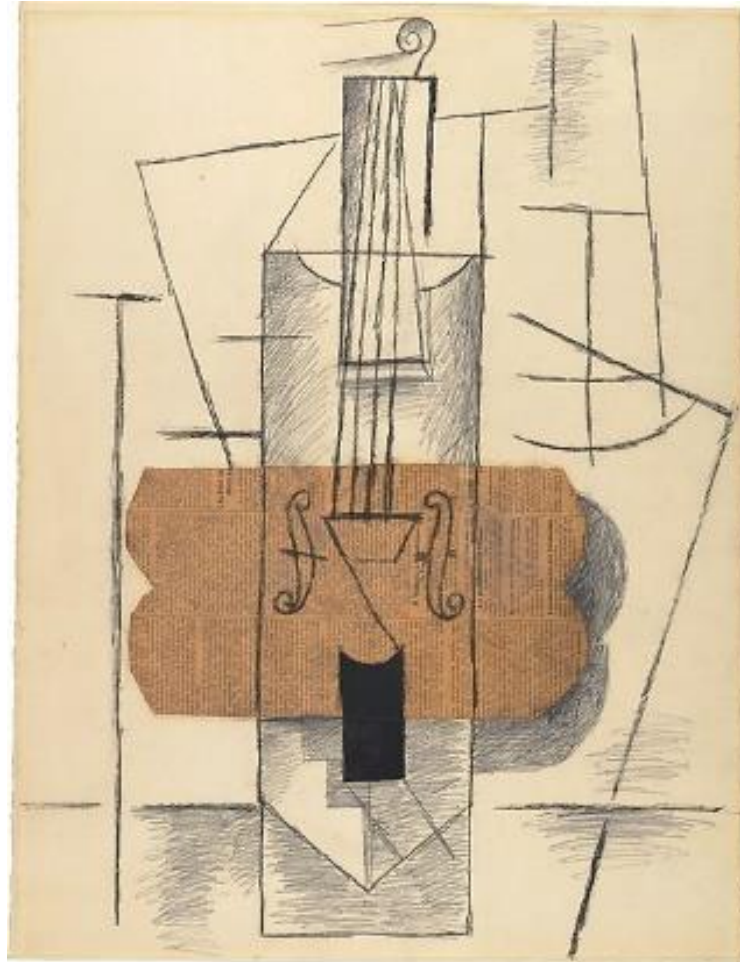
Figure 4: Pablo Picasso, 'Composition with Violin', 1912
(Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 610 × 467 mm)

Abstract paintings – fully abstract, non-objective paintings – have this kind of ambiguous spatiality, the sort that can be seen-into the Picasso but generally much stronger so that the space depicted might be millimetres or light-years deep. With a fixed spatiality a painting is no longer abstract, and when visual cues which would fix scale are eliminated a painting becomes abstract. This is an argument about depicted space rather than depicted objects.

Figure 5: Wassily Kandinsky, 'On White II', 1923 (Centre George Pompidou, Paris, 1,050 x 980 mm)

Kandinsky's *On White II* (1923, Figure 5) demonstrates this: the existence of lines and planes which seem to partially occlude other shapes implies depth. Michael Newall has written about this aspect of depth in Kandinsky works such as this, noting that "overlapping, transparency, illumination, shadowing and the space they imply are not present in the actual painting, but the paintings

nevertheless occasions the experience of seeing them."[32] The extent of this depth, however, is

absolutely uncertain, as is whether to read the thickening and thinning along the length of some

lines perspectively. The size relationships between secondary virtual forms in the painting are

ambiguous, which is to say that intrinsic scale is ambiguous. The virtual tensions set up in the

depicted space cannot be resolved by the viewer.

T. J. Clark writes that, "[p]art of what is special about [Jackson Pollock's] *Number 1, 1948*, for

example, is the degree to which it never makes up its mind about its own non- or super-humanness.

The picture is labyrinthine but centred on a possible human scale."[33] This remark applies as well to

On White II, the possibility of human scale given by the canvas's extrinsic scale, its relation to a

human artist and viewer. Whether the space is understood microscopically or macroscopically, the

range of possible values is enormous. We are well beyond the potential sizes of the foot (scaled

forensically in the introduction), or the range from viola to double bass. Poet and art theorist Radka

Donnell wrote that:

> …one tends to vacillate between the desire to see the small in big terms (still life orientation)
> or the vast brought down to scale (landscape orientation). Abstract Expressionists seem to
> rely on this switch-over from outdoor to indoor scale and its opposition in a cultivated jump
> of scale…[34]

Donnell's choice of verb, 'cultivated,' describes well the sense that in abstract works ambiguity is

managed, with certain possibilities encouraged and others cancelled. Abstract painters of all periods

manage the associations that viewers bring by depicting space as having certain properties, even in

the absence of fixed scale. In the above Kandinsky, for instance, imagining the depicted space as

wider increases the depth; there may not be fixed scale, but there are fixed proportions of scale.

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[32] Newall, 2011: p. 172
[33] Clark, 1999b: p. 332
[34] Donnell, 1964: p. 247

There is meaning in describing a shallow depicted space in abstract painting, and this claim does not depend on the depiction of fixed scale.

Pepe Karmel asks whether Kandinsky's *Last Judgement* (1912, Figure 6) is an abstract painting, drawing attention to how some of the curved shapes can be perceived as people and elements from a landscape.[35] Kandinsky certainly seemed to believe that recognisable imagery is a distraction for a painting's audience.[36] At the borderline between what is generally considered abstract and semi-abstract painting, a sun or a circle are often indiscernibly alike, as are a horizon and a line. This distinction would often be understood as that between a motif drawn or not drawn from recognisable objects; understanding abstract painting as having absolutely ambiguous intrinsic scale means that the distinction is understood instead as an ambiguity of how the motifs relate to each other and the depicted space as a whole. In *Last Judgement*, it is not that visual elements are recognisable, but that the *configuration* of visual elements is recognisable: the positioning and colouring of the sun, behind lines of hills which partly define a horizon, and even the suggestion of foreshortening in the foreground. The triangle to the right of centre, in its orientation and with its blue background suggesting water, seems like a sail, and behind it, on what seems like the far bank of what reads as a lake, is a building with towers – possibly a cathedral (likely standing for New Jerusalem, given the subject matter, but this is unnecessary). Very few, if any, of these elements are recognisable in isolation – the sun is more shoe-shaped than round, for instance, and whilst the building is the most recognisable object it would read very differently if placed in the bottom left corner – the fact that this would interrupt the painting's spatiality is telling. To answer Karmel's

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[35] Karmel, 2020: p. 16. Karmel also brings out the substantial pictorial parallels with Kandinsky's *All Saints Day II* from 1911
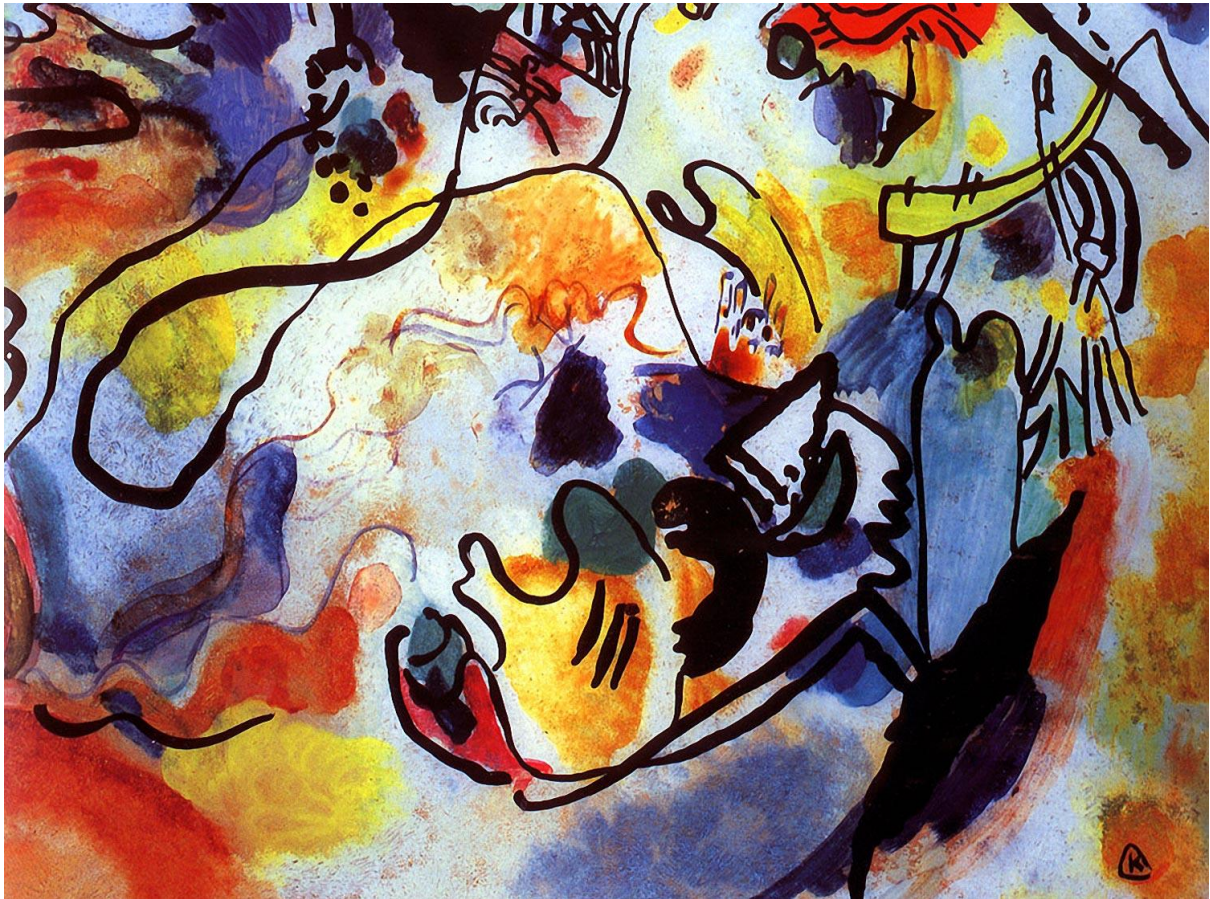
[36] Kandinsky, 1911: p. 3

Figure 6: Kandinsky, 'Last Judgement', 1912, reverse glass painting (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 336 x 453 mm)

question, I believe *Last Judgement* is not an abstract painting – spatially, it shares much with Guo

Xi's *Early Spring*, discussed in Chapter 5, where a few areas of relative clarity of scale merge with

large areas of a depicted landscape which shift in the viewer's imagination as they try to grasp the

space: the power in how space is depicted in both works comes from being able to understand some

but not all of the space, and yet the space being perfectly continuous.[37]

This has implications for the debate about whether the spaces of abstract painting are purely optical

or involve a sense of tactility as well. Some of the boldest and best-known claims made for the

opticality of abstract painting were made by Clement Greenberg:

> The flatness towards which Modernist painting orients itself can never be an absolute
> flatness. The heightened sensitivity of the picture plane may no longer permit sculptural
> illusion, or *trompe-l'oeil*, but it does and must permit optical illusion. The first mark made on
> a canvas destroys its literal and utter flatness, and the result of the marks made on it by an

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[37] Karmel argues that the painting functions as an 'abstract apocalypse' despite noting recognisable imagery

artist like Mondrian is still a kind of illusion that suggests a kind of third dimension. Only now it is a strictly pictorial, strictly optical third dimension. The Old Masters created an illusion of space in depth that one could imagine oneself walking into, but the analogous illusion created by the Modernist painter can only be seen into; can be travelled through, literally or figuratively, only with the eye.[38]

Figure 7: Jules Olitski, 'Draky', 1966 (Private Collection, 3,048 × 2,337 mm)

The work Greenberg championed by the mid-1960s was exemplified by the paintings of Jules Olitski

(see Figure 7), and one response to Greenberg's claim that an Olitski can be travelled through only

with the eye came from Leo Steinberg:

> Greenberg apparently can imagine himself trudging through a Rembrandtesque gloom, but he cannot conceive journeying through an Olitski. Do we need to be reminded that in an age of space travel a pictorial semblance of open void is just as inviting to imaginary penetration as the pictorial semblance of a receding landscape was formerly to a man on foot?[39]

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[38] Greenberg, 1960: p. 311-2
[39] Steinberg, 1972: p. 71

One could imagine with the Olitski, so far as it resembles a nebula, travelling into it by spaceship. This seeing-into seems very possible. However, it is also true that radically different seeings-in are also possible. For comparison, Figure 8 shows an image which is not an an image from space but could be read in that way. Steinberg could persuade us to imaginatively rocket into it, like the Olitski. It is a photograph, but in fact it is a microscopic long-exposure of particles suspended in water, blown up approximately 500,000 times life-size.[40]

Figure 8: Chris Parks, 'Centrifugal Flight 2', 2015 (Private Collection, 820 x 1,020 mm)

That this was the method used does not make the microscopic seeing-in the 'correct way' to view the image – the key again is the ambiguity of depicted space. And whatever vehicle we have at our disposal, it is necessary to have a reasonably clear, fixed idea, of the scale of the space we are to travel through. Though a journey of a thousand miles and one of a few feet both begin with a single

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[40] http://www.chrisparksart.com/ (accessed 16/11/21 at 13:42 GMT)

step, this may be too far, and so this spatial ambiguity enforces a kind of paralysis on the viewer who keeps it in mind, who keeps the space open in its scaling. On the one hand, this argument seems to resolve the issue in favour of Greenberg, however, Greenberg's remarks above do not do justice to the experience of the distinct spatiality of abstract paintings, a spatiality that some figurative works, such as *Raft of the Medusa*, partly share. Schneider's comments, quoted above, on abyssal space seem appropriate – we are worried about falling down abysses, and this is a physical worry; taken seriously, abstract paintings are not so much 'pictures of nothing' as Varnedoe characterises them, as pictures of the infinitely large and infinitely small, with no way of resolving which is which - *pictures of infinity*.[41]

In this section I have put forth the core argument regarding how looking in terms of clarity of intrinsic scale amounts to a new framework for understanding abstract painting. Considering both artists statements and paintings, I have shown that this way of understanding abstract works is plausible and productive.

6.2 The Sublime

In this section I look at the sublime as it relates to abstract painting. I start by looking at the source of writing on the sublime, the Greek writer Longinus, before making connections to the European Romantic tradition, starting with Caspar David Friedrich. Drawing on the work of Rosenblum, and his arguments concerning the progress of Romanticism, I then go on to look at two paintings by Georgia O'Keefe, considering them in terms of both the sublime and clarity of intrinsic scale. The section

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[41] Whilst the sublime is most commonly considered in terms of the very large – mountain landscapes and the infinite, it can also relate to the very small. Rosenblum writes of Klee that, "It was, in fact, Klee's particular genius to be able to take any number of the principal Romantic motifs and ambitions that, by the early twentieth century, had often swollen into grotesquely Wagnerian dimensions, and to translate them into a language appropriate to the diminutive scale of a child's enchanted world." This idea of enchantment will reoccur in the following section. See Rosenblum, 1975: p. 150

ends by returning to look at the views of Newman and Motherwell on the sublime, and at various thinkers who have seen the sublime as a form of resistance to modernity.

The concept of the sublime dates back to a Greek theoretical text, *Peri Hypsos*, thought to be from the 1st Century ACE, traditionally attributed to Longinus.[42] Around a third of the book is missing, with six long lacunae, with the most significant loss being what appears to be the discussion of emotion, though this is dealt with indirectly in several places in the extant text.[43] Longinus does not define the sublime but does discuss its effects, noting that "…the true sublime naturally elevates us: uplifted with a sense of proud exaltation, we are filled with joy and pride, as if we had ourselves produced the very thing we heard."[44] Whilst this seems to be a description of a sublime that is purely elegant, Longinus makes it clear that this is not the case, writing that "[orator and Statesman] Demosthenes' strength is usually in rugged sublimity… with his violence, yes, and his speed, his force, his terrific power of rhetoric, burns, as it were, and scatters everything before him, and may therefore be compared to a flash of lightning or a thunderbolt."[45] The subjective effect of the sublime is often a mixed one – Robert Doran has argued that, from Longinus onwards, the experience of the sublime is marked by a dual structure of being both elevated and overwhelmed.[46]

Longinus distinguishes five sources of the sublime:

> There are, one may say, some five most productive sources of the sublime in literature… The first and most powerful is the power of grand conceptions…and the second is the inspiration of vehement emotion. These two constituents of the sublime are for the most part congenital. But the other three come partly from art, namely the proper construction of

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[42] Longinus begins his treatise by briefly discussing another treatise on the sublime by Caecilius of Caleacte in Sicily. Robert Doran writes "That Longinus effectively creates the concept of 'the sublime' is a function of the fact that no other ancient text on *hypsos* is extant." (Doran, 2015: p. 33)

[43] See Russell's introduction, Longinus, 1st Century ACE (translated by Frye, revised by Russell, 1995: pp. 148-9)

[44] Longinus, 1st Century ACE: p. 179

[45] Ibid.: p. 209

[46] Doran, 2015: p. 286. Sandra Shapshay has recently argued for a different kind of dual structure in the experience of the sublime – a *thin sublime*, which is an immediate, physiological response that relates to the experience of awe, and a *thick sublime*, which develops from the thin response with reflection and interpretation of the experience. This distinction is very like the one between basic emotion and emotion schemas discussed in Chapter 2, though it up for debate whether or in what way the sublime ought to be seen as an emotion (this is no real problem for a Langerean view, since these experiences are plainly *felt*). See Shapshay, 2021: p. 132

figures…[and] nobility of language… The fifth cause of grandeur… is dignified and elevated word-arrangement.[47]

The first two are the focus of most writing on the sublime, and indeed the final three do not transfer in any straightforward way from poetry and prose to the visual arts. That vehement emotion and grand conceptions generally go together is no issue for a Langerean aesthetics and philosophy of mind where thoughts are always felt. Longinus' purpose of the sublime, however, is fundamentally spiritual in character:

> What then was the vision of those demigods who aimed only at what is greatest in writing and scorned detailed accuracy? This above all: that Nature has judged man a creature of no mean or ignoble quality, but, as if she were inviting us to some great gathering, she has called us into life, into the whole universe, there to be spectators of her games and eager competitors; and she therefore from the first breathed into our hearts an unconquerable passion for whatever is great and more divine than ourselves. Thus the whole universe is not enough to satisfy the speculative intelligence of human thought; our ideas often pass beyond the limits that confine us.[48]

Longinus discusses writers here, and there has been a long tradition of separating the *rhetorical sublime* from the *philosophical sublime*, the latter associated with Edmund Burke and Emmanuel Kant whilst the former is associated with Longinus and, to lesser degree, Nicholas Boileau and John Dennis. Doran has recently defended the idea of continuity between these traditions however, based on passages such as the one above: there is a philosophical claim being made in Longinus, not merely a stylistic one: that to some extent all people admire what is greater than themselves, with greatness in nature understood both as physical size and also as the sacred; this can be reformulated as a relation of extrinsic scale.

Longinus takes several examples from Homer, including an example from the *Iliad* which functions through the device of intrinsic scale, noting how "Homer magnifies the powers of heaven":

> Far as a man can see with his eyes in the shadowy distance,
> Keeping his watch on a hilltop, agaze o'er the wine-dark ocean,
> So far leap at a bound the high-neighing horses of heaven.

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[47] Longinus, 1st Century ACE: p. 181
[48] Ibid.: pp. 273-5

He uses a cosmic interval to measure their stride. So supreme is the grandeur of this, one might well say that if the horses of heaven take two consecutive strides there will then be no place found for them in the world.[49]

Longinus discusses this in the section on 'great thoughts', and his choice of 'magnify' as a verb is both literal and figurative, as Homer both enlarges and dignifies his subject matter. This use of scale is not dissimilar to the presentation of Mara in the 'Wheel of Life' depictions discussed in Chapter 5, though Mara is not dignified but figured as a formidable adversary in these.

Art historian Joseph Leo Koerner, writing on Friedrich's partial "ambiguity of scale" in works such *Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog* (1818) and *Woman before the Setting Sun* (1818, Figure 9), notes that "by rendering his landscape insubstantial and spatially unstable, the artist forces us to participate directly in what we see."[50] Koerner then makes the connection to a specifically Burkean sublime, noting that Burke "valorized obscurity and strength of expression over the Neo-classical ideal of clarity, precision and adherence to rule. Burke argued that terror, the passion [most] associated with the sublime, is best aroused by things 'dark, uncertain, [and] confused', while vastness and infinity, chief attributes of the sublime in nature, can only be elicited through obscurity."[51] Ambiguity of scale

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[49] Homer, 8th Century BCE, 5.770-2 in Longinus, 1st Century ACE: p. 187. Langer does not cite extensively from Homer, but, coincidentally, she does cite a fragment of this same verse – discussing how "the wine-dark sea," refers to the common quality of the "translucent blue in the curve of a wave and the glowing red in a cup of wine." (Langer, 1967: p. 106)

[50] Koerner, 1990: p. 180

[51] This and other claims Koerner makes regarding a specifically Burkean, and later Kantian, sublime, are debatable. Doran writes that "the idea of the 'sublime' as an aestheticized terror at the limit of the sacred has its roots in the Greek terms Longinus uses [*ekstasis* and *existemi*] to describe the experience of sublime intensity," noting that Burke makes the same point in his *Enquiry* (Doran, 2015: p. 43)
Koerner argues that it was "Kant, of course, who first located sublimity purely within the beholding subject, rather than in objects themselves." (p. 181) Doran contradicts this, based on properties of the ancient Greek language: "unlike the Latinate 'sublime, ' *hypsos* loses its metaphoricity when applied to objects in the world, where it refers only to things that are *physically* high or elevated, such as mountains, platforms, buildings, clouds, and so on. Hence the absurdity of calling the ocean 'elevated,' though we might call it 'sublime.'…*hypsos* pertains *exclusively* to the human realm, analogising human words, thoughts, or actions to the imposing aspect of physical height." (Doran, 2015: pp. 39-40) Nevertheless, Koerner seems correct in positing Friedrich's notion of the sublime having been directly influenced by Burke, and likely no other theoretical writer. Doran notes, in agreement with Koerner, that "For Burke, it is the *confusion* of images – which is more easily achieved in poetry than painting – that produces the effect of sublimity. The poetic representation does not achieve sublimity through mimesis, but through an *intrinsic affective power*." (Doran, 2015: p. 165, emphasis original)

Figure 9: Friedrich 'Woman before the Setting Sun', 1818 (Museum Folkwang, Essen, 220 x 300 mm)

is linked here to the sublime. Koerner notes that Friedrich himself wrote that "when a landscape is covered in fog, it appears larger more sublime, and heightens the strength of the imagination and excites expectation..."[52] The fog, for Friedrich, makes the landscape less clear, partially through making the size relationships ambiguous – this increases the appearance of the sublime.

Robert Rosenblum sees Friedrich as one of the pioneers of Romantic painting who drew on the then recently available Burkean sublime for a specific purpose. Rosenblum's argument sees Romanticism as growing out of the crisis in Christianity that had been prompted by, or come to a climax with, the Enlightenment, drawing a tradition from Friedrich to Rothko:

> Friedrich's dilemma, his need to revitalize the experience of divinity in a secular world that outside the sacred confines of traditional Christian iconography was, as we can still intuit in his works, an intensely personal one. Yet it was also a need that was shared, on different levels, by many of his contemporaries who responded to the eighteenth century's repeated

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[52] Koerner, 1990: p. 181

assaults upon traditional Christianity and who hoped to resurrect or to replace the stagnant rituals and images of the Church.[53]

One of Rosenblum's examples is William Blake, though he does not mention Blake's poems, 'The Little Vagabond' and 'The Garden of Love', both from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. The former poem locates the magic in an ale house, re-enchanting the secular, whilst the latter laments the absence of love in the church of his day, which is portrayed as joyless, for instance having a sign over the door reading only "Thou shalt not."[54] Whilst both can be understood in terms of the sublime – evoking transcendent joy and transcendent terror respectively – it is noteworthy that they cannot be understood in scale terms; 'The Little Vagabond' functions using imagery of heat and cold, whilst 'The Garden of Love' uses imagery of a lawn that had been used for play converted to a graveyard with "tomb-stones where flowers should be." Scale is frequently used as a device in literature as well as painting to evoke the sublime, but can be used to other ends, as shown in Chapter 5, and the sublime can also be evoked in other ways, as shown in these examples from Blake.

The literal meaning of *hypsos* is elevation, and the sublime has an etymology from the Latin *sublimis*, with *sub* meaning 'up to' and disagreement as to whether the remainder is from *limen*, 'a threshold, surround or lintel of a doorway', or *limes*, 'a boundary or limit'.[55] It is the imaginative crossing of this boundary which gives the sublime its character, what Doran describes as the transcendence-structure of sublimity: "the paradoxical experience of being at once overwhelmed and exalted,

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[53] Rosenblum, 1975: p. 14. Rosenblum also considers Van Gogh's work as a pastor, noting that in his *Iris* (1889) he has "inherited from the Romantics that strange, anti-Renaissance sense of a scale unrelated to human hierarchies. His iris plant looms as large as a tree, its energies igniting, flame-like, a background of blossoming greens and spring flowers that seem to exist in a world of primal intensity unrelated to human dimensions or calibrations." (p.81)
[54] Blake, 1794: p. 150
[55] Morley, 2016: p. 5

humbled and elevated, an experience that recalls, and to some extent reconfigures, the religious or mystical experience of transcendence."[56]
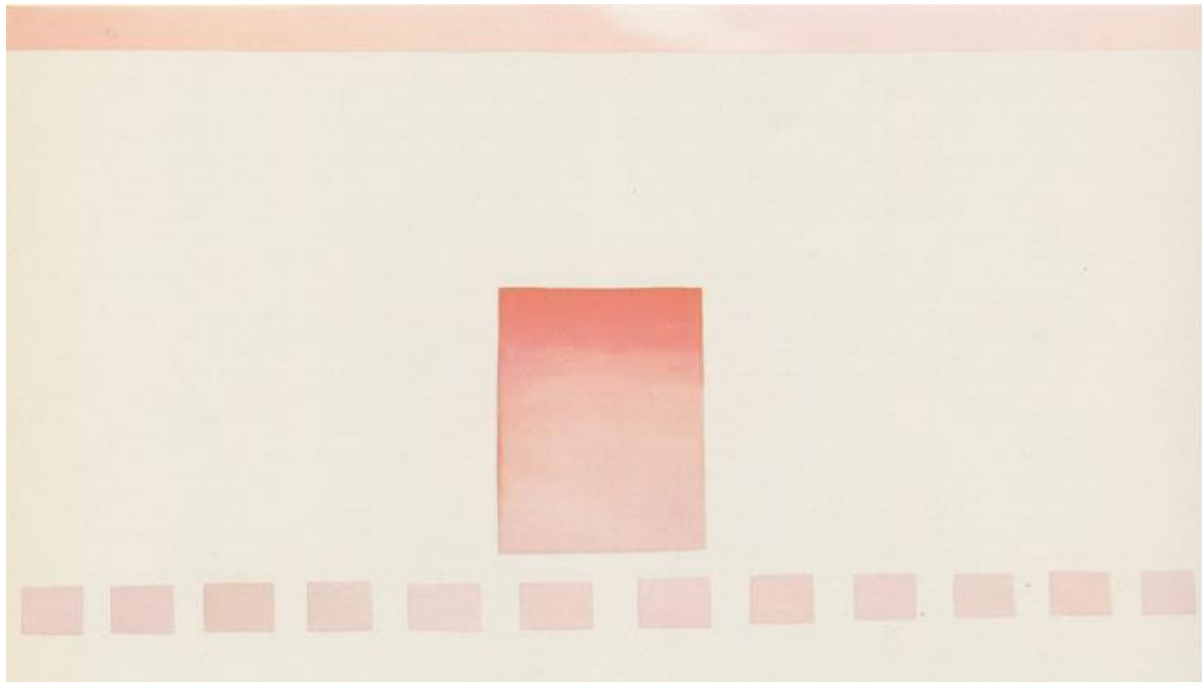
Figure 10: Georgia O'Keefe, 'White Patio with Red Door', 1960, oil on canvas
(Myron Kunin Collection, Minneapolis, 1,219 x 2,134 mm)

This door or boundary has been pictured literally; abstract forms associated with doorways have also been recognised on numerous occasions in pictures linked to the sublime – for instance Mark Rothko's Seagram series' floating, door-like forms.[57] Georgia O'Keefe made a series of paintings from 1946 to 1960 in which she arguably did both; Georgiana Uhlyarik argues that the use of the motif "surpasses its assigned frame of reference and the repeated assertion, by the artist and then by scholars, that it is first and foremost about a real thing and thus 'realistic'. The 'wall with the door in it' is only part of the painting's content."[58] There is ample documentary evidence concerning the actual doorway and wall in O'Keefe's property in Abiquiú which inspired the paintings – O'Keefe

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[56] Doran, 2015: p. 286
[57] Nodelman, 1997: p. 201
[58] Uhlyarik, 2016: p. 220

frequently remarked that it was the reason she had bought the house.[59] Of the final work in the

series, *White Patio with Red Door* (1960, Figure 10), Heike Eipeldauer and Florian Steininger write:

> O'Keefe transformed the patio wall motif into an intangible, metaphysical vision. The
> composition is ambivalent, situated between abstraction and figuration, daily reality and
> something beyond it, the near-monochromatic white surface suggesting an otherworldly
> realm of infinite space… [the doorway] evokes the impression of a luminous void, opening
> onto an endless space beyond.[60]

These writers do not invoke the sublime here, but their descriptions can clearly be seen as treating

White Patio with Red Door as working with the tradition (the disagreement as to whether the canvas

is abstract or figurative is, from the perspective on scale adopted here, resolved in favor of abstract:

despite recognisable imagery and being painted from life, the internal size relationships are

absolutely ambiguous). Ambiguity of scale, moreover, provides the functional explanation for how

the work is able to suggest both "daily reality and something beyond it."

Rosenblum discusses Georgia O'Keefe in terms of both the sublime and scale:

> [She painted] sublime sites in the American West, describing those breathtaking infinities of
> unspoiled nature where the absence of human beings prevents us from determining
> whether we are looking at mountains or mole hills. At times, as in *Red Hills and Bones* of
> 1941, she includes in this uninhabited desert landscape, remote from man, his history, and
> his works, the bleached and dried remnants of an animal skeleton, a fossil fragment that
> affirms metaphors of a prehistoric landscape and that perpetuates, in its ambiguous size (is
> it much larger or smaller than a man?), that characteristic Romantic sense of scale which
> leaps from the microcosm to the macrocosm, from the infinitely large to the infinitely
> small.[61]

Rosenblum slightly stretches the point here – as *Red Hills and Bones* (1941, Figure 11) features only

partly ambiguous scale – as in the paintings discussed in Chapter 5, there is significant ambiguity but

the bone, whether dinosaur or something smaller, provides a possible range of sizes, and the hills,

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[59] Ibid.: p. 220
[60] Eipeldauer & Steininger, 2016: p. 190
[61] Rosenblum, 1975: p. 201

Figure 11: Georgia O'Keefe, 'Red Hills and Bones', 1941, oil on canvas
(Philadelphia Museum of Art, 756 x 1,016 mm)

whilst ambiguous, are less than Himalayan. Whilst *White Patio with Red Door* evokes the infinitely

large and the infinitely small, *Red Hills and Bones* presents a milder version of the same effect –

using partially ambiguous scale.

Rosenblum continues his argument to discuss fully abstract work however, noting the links to earlier

Romantic work and also how the abstract works nevertheless contain recognisable imagery – and a

telescoping of scales:

> The genealogical table that can be constructed for the erratic configurations and gigantic
> scale of [Clyfford] Still's paintings would seem to lead back through the history of Romantic
> landscape painting. The situation is also the same for much of the work by Jackson Pollock,
> whose images, like Still's, may be abstract but nevertheless elicit metaphors within a range
> of natural, organic phenomena rather than evoking the rational constructions of the
> intellect. Indeed, the classic Pollock of the late 1940s and early 1950s almost becomes a
> spectacle of nature, a whirlwind vortex of sheer energy that may take us to the cosmological
> extremes of microscopic and telescopic vision – glimpses of some galactic or atomic
> explosion, or in more terrestrial terms, the overpowering forces of nature's most impalpable

elements, air, fire, and water.[62]

This chapter will soon examine works by both Still and Pollock, endorsing this view from Rosenblum

and arguing that it is the device of complete ambiguity of intrinsic scale that makes these effects

possible.

Not only critics and art historians but also abstract artists themselves have often written of the

sublime. Newman wrote an article called 'The Sublime is Now' in a special issue on the sublime in

Tiger's Eye magazine in 1948. This nationalistic, manifesto-like statement describes the history of

Western painting in terms of capitulation to or heroic rejection of the beautiful, arguing that

modernism is a reaction to the Renaissance and that "We are reasserting man's natural desire for

the exalted," before building to a powerful conclusion:

> We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend,
> myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting. Instead
> of making *cathedrals* out of Christ, man, or "life," we are making [them] out of ourselves, out
> of our own feelings.[63]

Newman's sublime is a matter of building cathedrals out of feeling, artifacts which give access to

some kind of beyond. Motherwell contributed to the same special issue on the sublime in *Tiger's Eye*

that Newman's remarks appeared in. Motherwell only cites Longinus, not mentioning either Burke

or Kant, also using the same Homeric examples that Longinus cites.[64] Dore Ashton connects

Motherwell's artistic motivations to a speech by Wallace Stevens:

> Motherwell craved…a cenacle of kindred spirits not only in his own neighborhood but also in
> the world at large, going back to the painting cavemen, with whom he felt a kinship as well.
> Like Wallace Stevens, who had suggested in 1951, at the Museum of Modern Art, that poets

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[62] Ibid.: p. 203
[63] In Newman, 1990: p. 173
[64] Longinus, 1st Century ACE: p. 185. Motherwell's text is a polemical one which argues that the dominant
history of modernism from Manet onwards is a reaction against the concept of the sublime, arguing also that
the sublime represents a form of institutional authority which needs to be resisted. Motherwell concludes,
however, that whether an individual experiences the sublime is "according to one's fate and character,"
implicitly endorsing the sublime in the experiential and philosophical sense. See Ashton, 2007: p. 66

and painters filled the breach in a world that had lost religion, Motherwell believed in what he had early determined to be spiritual values, but, like every other modernist, found them exceedingly difficult to define. Stevens [said]: "that in an age in which disbelief is so profoundly prevalent or, if not disbelief, indifference to questions of belief, poetry and painting, and the arts in general, are, in their measure, a compensation for what has been lost.[65]

Clark gives an intense summary of the same crisis of modernity that Stevens discusses:

> "Modernity" means contingency. It points to a social order which has turned from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future – of goods, pleasures, freedoms, forms of control over nature, or infinities of information. This process goes along with a great emptying and sanitizing of the imagination. Without ancestor-worship, meaning is in short supply – "meaning" here meaning agreed-on and instituted forms of value and understanding, implicit orders, stories and images in which a culture crystallizes its sense of the struggle with the realm of necessity and the reality of pain and death. The phrase Max Weber borrowed from Schiller, "the disenchantment of the world," still seems to me to sum up this side of modernity best... The disenchantment of the world is horrible, intolerable. Any mass movement or cult figure that promises a way out of it will be clung to like grim death... "Secularization" is a nice technical word for this blankness.[66]

Modernity, which, for Clark, ran from the two centuries from the French Revolution until the fall of

the Berlin Wall, is something very much to be escaped – or transcended, even if only imaginatively.

Rosenblum's Romanticism is a counter-current to this disenchantment, arguing this in terms of scale:

> Such a polarity in Romantic art between the finite and the infinite, the microcosm and the macrocosm, might perhaps be considered a reflection of the period's restless and disturbing awareness of the individual pitted against the universe, whether in terms of a single human spirit that searches for its place in a mysterious totality, or of a single manifestation of nature that can offer a key to the unlocking of a cosmic whole.[67]

Doran similarly quotes Dominick LaCapra, writing on the postsecular, but very much in the tradition

running back to the pressures of the Enlightenment:

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[65] Ashton, 2007: p. 11. In 1949, Motherwell gave a speech on 'Susanne K. Langer and Visual Thinking' in which he endorses Langer's views of an expanded realm of meaning. Hobbs writes, "[Motherwell] quotes at length from her *Philosophy in a New Key* to elucidate the way in which meaning can inhere in a work of art. This selection of passages from Langer's text is used to explain how symbols can be understood as a form of meaningful communication different from everyday speech. Motherwell held Langer's explications of the ways symbols function in the highest esteem "as some of the most moving passages in modern philosophy." See Hobbs, 2020: p. 81
[66] Clark, 1999b: p. 7
[67] Rosenblum, 1975: p. 62

> The postsecular is neither the secular nor the religious or sacred but somehow both – or betwixt and between. It comes into its own in the attempt to re-enchant the world…[68]

The Romantic sublime, therefore, is a part of the attempt to resist the encroaches of modernity – either to claw back some meaning or to retain it. This clearly has echoes with Karmel's idea, quoted in the introduction to this chapter, that "the ultimate goal of abstraction is freedom." It also makes sense when thinking about the pre-abstract Romantic works of artists such as Friedrich and William Blake, who were not only Protestant, a religious movement predicated on the idea of individuals gaining religious freedom, but who had quite personal and extreme religious commitments.[69]

This section has introduced the sublime as it relates to Romanticism and to abstract painting. The remainder of this chapter will look in detail at works by Still, Rothko and Pollock, considering scale and the sublime from a Langerean perspective.

6.3 PH-960

The following three sections concentrate on works by individual artists, drawing out further complexity in terms of how scale and the sublime manifest in these artists' work. This section looks at Clyfford Still. Beginning with a discussion of Still's Wordsworthian sublime, I then make links between it and Still's painting *PH-960*, noting the visual resemblances in terms of imagery between the two, resemblances which it seems perverse to deny but which must be denied if the painting is to be considered abstract in terms of not containing recognisable imagery. I then go on to consider the work of Jenefer Robinson on expressive works of art. Looking at one of Robinson's own examples, I argue that her notion of implied persona is inadequate to deal with not only this example but also *PH-960* due to its overdetermining readings. This leads into a discussion on whether artists comment on the world in their work, which Robinson claims to be the case but

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[68] LaCapra, 2013: p. 136 in Doran, 2017: p. 287
[69] Blake's position in this regard is well-known, for Friedrich see Koerner, 1990: pp. 25-8, 47-68

which Langer explicitly denies. The section ends by contrasting a photograph by Yves Klein with *PH-960* in order to show the implications of Robinson's view, and by offering a Langerean reading of *PH-960*.

Abstract Expressionism specialist, and curator of the Clyfford Still Museum, David Anfam, writes that Still's sublime is inspired by William Wordsworth:

> Without a doubt, Still's sublime – as volumes in his library attest – was the Wordsworthian species of cadenced inwardness, not the much-touted (in the routine literature on Abstract Expressionism) theatrical type espoused by Edmund Burke. Its apotheosis was the electrifying "Simplon Pass" passage in "The Prelude," which has many, and key, parallels with Still's visual metaphysics.[70]

Anfam does not elaborate on what these parallels are, beyond noting that they are visual. The Wordsworthian sublime is distinct from the Burkean not only in being less theatrical, as Anfam notes, but in having a more holistic approach; where Burke emphasises terror, for instance, Wordsworth is apt to emphasise the mutual interdependence of emotional states and natural forms, as in the lines from the "Simplon Pass": "Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light –/ Were all like workings of one mind…"[71] In Langerean terms, the "Simplon Pass" can be read as a description of a mountainous landscape viewed with an artist's eye – as living form (the repeated use of simile for this connection in the Wordsworth makes this semblance link especially clear). Wordsworth writes in this passage of "The immeasurable height/Of woods decaying, never to be decayed," and "winds thwarting winds," as well as "unfettered clouds and region of the heavens."[72] For height to be beyond measure, in relation to the speaker, is a relation of ambiguous scale given in imagery of eternally rotting forests, an image that is simultaneously of decay and regeneration. The "winds

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[70] Anfam, 2012: p. 112n237
[71] Wordsworth, 1850: p. 219. On the relation of the Burkean to the Wordsworthian sublime, see Heffernan, 1968: pp. 608-12
[72] Ibid.: p. 219

thwarting winds" are great, invisible forces in a shifting balance, linking to the freedom that the

clouds enjoy stretching up to the sky, which is dignified as "the heavens."

Figure 12: Clyfford Still, 'PH-960', 1960 (Clyfford Still Museum, Denver, 284.5 x 365.8cm)

PH-960 (1960, Figure 12) is from the end of Still's time in Manhattan, from soon before he moved to

Maryland from New York.[73] Dean Sobel notes the artist's daughter's linking of the painting to

another, *PH-259* – one of, if not the, first painting Still produced in 1962 after moving to Maryland:

"Sandra Still Campbell believes that *PH-259*, 1962, is an extension of the composition introduced in

PH-960, 1960, made in New York."[74] Sandra Still Campbell curated the exhibition 'A Daughter's

Eye/A Daughter's Voice' in 2018, including this pairing of works to show continuity between the New

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[73] Sobel, 2012: p. 29
[74] Sobel, 2020: p. 20n5

York and Maryland works – see Figure 13 – in an interview she said that "He ended there [pointing to *PH-960*] and picked up where he left off [*PH-259*]. They are answering back to one another."[75]

In terms of the overall feeling, *PH-960* has a light and joyful quality that is simultaneously serious – it is not a silly joy but a soaring one, which corresponds to the quality of elevation in the Wordsworthian sublime. Most of the colour regions (the overall ground, but also the blue and tan and red) are not uniform, there is no modelling but there is tonal variation which increases the feeling of the work's specificity – it makes the contrasts starker and encourages the viewer to weigh the detail more carefully.

Figure 13: Exhibition View, 'A Daughter's Eye/A Daughter's Voice', Sep 14, 2018 – Jan 13, 2019, showing PH-960 (1960, left) and PH-259 (1962, right) (Clyfford Still Museum, Denver)

In terms of gradients, perhaps the most immediately striking aspect of *PH-960* is the dynamic quality of the virtual forms. The imagery just noted from the "Simplon Pass" of "decaying woods," and "winds thwarting winds," are appropriate visual parallels for the secondary virtual forms. It is worth noting that these associations are associations by visual resemblance, which is why it is appropriate

[75] Boyd, 2019.

to discuss them as imagery – despite its ambiguities, this is recognisable visual subject matter

despite the fact that *PH-960* is an abstract painting. Surprisingly, nothing has really been written

about the painting.[76] This provides an opportunity to see how far Langerean aesthetics can get us,

particularly since it is a difficult painting to discuss without resorting to metaphor; that the intrinsic

scale is ambiguous gives an opportunity to consider Langer's position in relation to a more recent

account - the idea of persona in the aesthetics of Jenefer Robinson.

Robinson has repeatedly defended the idea that expressive works of art are best interpreted in

terms of persona – either an implied or actual author. Robinson writes that "artworks that express

emotion in the Romantic sense manifest an emotion that their author has either actually

experienced or has vividly imagined experiencing."[77] Moreover, Robinson argues that expressive

pictures "exercise and enhance our empathic skills, namely, by giving us practice in taking the

emotional perspective of another person."[78] In this, Robinson is at odds with defenders of a contour

theory of expression, defended for musical expressiveness by Peter Kivy and Stephen Davies and in

pictorial form by Dominic Lopes.[79] Lopes argues, in contrast to Robinson, that a persona need not be

posited, that a melancholy look in a picture, whether a figure or a scene or design, can be expressive

without having to be attributed to an implied or actual author.[80] The position developed thus far

concerning ambiguous intrinsic scale in abstract works can be seen as providing a way of navigating

between these positions.

To understand the implications of Robinson's position, it is necessary to look at one of her examples.

Whilst Robinson does discuss paintings, she does not do so in enough detail for the present

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[76] The Clyfford Still Museum bibliography for the painting consists of four entries, one of which (Sobel, 2012: p. 37), appears to be in error as *PH-960* does not appear in any form in the chapter or its footnotes. The following two illustrate but do discuss the work - see Anfam, 2012: pp. 97-9, 216-7; Sheets, 2011: pp. 118-27. The final entry concerns the already noted link Sandra Still Campbell makes between *PH-960* and *PH-259*

[77] Robinson, 2017a: p. 249

[78] Robinson, 2017b: p. 349

[79] Kivy, 1980: pp. 57-68; Davies, 1994: pp. 201-278; Lopes, 2005: pp. 49-90

[80] Lopes, 2005: pp. 50-90

argument as she does not consider the presentation of space in painting;[81] she does, however, discuss musical examples in greater detail. Robinson's claims regarding Brahms' *Intermezzo, Opus 117 No. 2*, present a plausible reading of the piece.[82] Particularly the earlier section of her analysis, detailing the structure of the piece in musicological terms and characterising the elements descriptively, is persuasive. Robinson characterizes the piece as "bittersweet", before noting that "like all complex Romantic music, it does not express just a single emotional state."[83]

Figure 14: Still, 'PH-960' (detail)

 What I would like to take issue with, however, is her notion of persona, that the work can best be interpreted as a psychological drama, a claim which she spends the latter half of her analysis

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[81] Robinson, 2017a: pp. 252-4; 2017b: pp. 350-5. Robinson discusses Lopes's views on space in painting but does not venture her own views on space
[82] Robinson, 2005: pp. 337-47
[83] Ibid.: p. 340

defending. Not that the piece cannot be understood as a psychological drama, which it plausibly can, but that, in the claim that this is the best understanding, Robinson is overdetermining the reading. It is worth pointing out that this position is not isolated to a single example, but one defended by Robinson on a number of occasions – including as it relates specifically to paintings which express emotion in the Romantic or Expressionist sense.[84]

From a Langerean point of view, the meaning of Brahms' *Intermezzo* is everything it can logically mean, which is to say experiences its relational structure affords. Certain possibilities are closed off – many others are left open and even encouraged. Other possibilities include spaceship navigation and germinating seeds; the scale is not fixed. Langer's gradients are helpful (as is a musicological analysis), there is a projection of both necessity and freedom, with the latter part of the piece feeling more inevitable in the counterpoint of melody and bass. This inevitability can be experienced as a psychological drama, as Robinson recommends, but it is not limited to being experienced as such; experiencing this semblance of inevitability as linked to the entropy of stars is similarly appropriate, but most appropriate is to experience this semblance of inevitability without imaginatively populating an abstract work with figures.

As further evidence for her persona account, Robinson gives biographical evidence from Brahms' and introduces the idea that he was commenting on the emotions expressed in the music:

> Composers can 'comment' on the emotions expressed in their music: the composer can manipulate the unfolding emotions expressed in the music just as a dramatist does in a play. Is there any evidence that Brahms was saying something about the emotions his protagonist is expressing in the Intermezzo? I would say that we can find in Brahms's biography ample justification for his thinking of these late piano pieces as conveying his own deepest, most intimate thoughts and feelings…[85]

Robinson seems clearly correct to write that composers and dramatists can manipulate expressed emotions. There does not, however, seem to be any inevitable link between this and the idea of

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[84] See Robinson, 2017a, 2017b for the view as it relates to painting
[85] Robinson, 2005: p. 346

comment. Moreover, the idea of comment and the *conveying* of thoughts seems to suggest that the

value of artworks is not intrinsic – an issue discussed in Chapter 4 – since, if a listener understood

the comment and thought conveyed, they might reasonably put the work itself aside, the meaning

separable from the form of the work. Robinson elsewhere seems to suggest she does not hold this

view.[86] Langer discusses the idea of artist's commenting within their work directly:

> 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. [87]

This is the sense in which all art, for Langer, is abstract, its content having been isolated from its

initial context, clarified and then objectified.[88] Langer here elides feeling and emotion in a manner

she would later not – the *Mind* works keep them distinct in the manner discussed in Chapter 2.

For the *Intermezzo*, Langer would have us contemplate not Brahms, but the music itself:

> The art lover who views, hears, or reads a work from "the audience standpoint" enters into a
> direct relation not with the artist, but with the work. He responds to it as he would to a
> "natural" symbol, simply finding its significance, which he is likely to think of as "the feeling
> in it." This "feeling" (which may range from a fleeting small experience to the subjective
> pattern of a whole human life) is not "communicated," but revealed; the created form "has"
> it, so that perception of the virtual object—say, the famous frieze from the Parthenon—is at
> once the perception of its amazingly integrated and intense feeling.[89]

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[86] Robinson, 2017a: p. 262, "In good pictures form and content are interdependent…" Whilst this falls short of
claiming, as Langer and Budd do, that form and content are inseparable, it does not seem to be a
'communication' view of depiction. See also Budd, 1995: pp. 12-6
[87] Langer, 1953: p. 394
[88] Langer, 1951: pp. 171, 179-82
[89] Langer, 1953: p. 394

Note the range of possible scales that Langer claims for the feeling, something facilitated theoretically by the elasticity of the act concept. This Langerean perspective explains why listeners can find meaning in Brahms' *Intermezzo* beyond the biographical.

To bring the analysis back around to *PH-960*, a Robinsonian reading of it would seem to fix the scale to a human drama. In Yves Klein's *Leaping into the Void*, also from 1960 (Figure 15), there is a strong resemblance between the leaping figure (Klein himself) and this black form in Still's canvas shown in Figure 14. It seems unlikely that there is a direct connection – Klein is highly unlikely to have visited Still's studio in New York, and Klein's photograph was only published in November that year, and then only in Paris – but Klein's work provides an opportunity to examine this type of form fixed at human scale. The works are dissimilar in several ways – there is, for instance a flippant and absurd character to Klein's photograph, as well as an absence of colour – but not only do the works have significant formal parallels, the most salient secondary virtual form in each has the quality of instability: it is this which makes it salient. The major formal difference between the works is that Klein's photograph is not abstract, whereas *PH-960* is. Robinson's view, however, does not seem able to accommodate this, unless she insists that *PH-960* is not a Romantic work, or that a persona can vary drastically in scale. The former is an unattractive view, as Still's links to the Wordsworthian sublime have shown, whilst the latter is also problematic due to Robinson's insistence that what is expressed is "somebody's actual emotional states." Robinson's position necessitates seeing *PH-960*, in other words, as something akin to Klein's photograph.[90]

Langer's view, by contrast, is that artworks must have a semblance of living form, rather than persona. This criterion is more easily met – secondary virtual forms such as lines and shapes can

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[90] Here the comparison rests on the analogy between Klein's leaping form and the secondary virtual form in black shown in Figure 14. Robinson's position could, instead, be said to be that the whole of *PH-960* is expressive of the author or implied author's emotional states, but this similarly fixes the scale disbarring the micro and macroscopic

Figure15: Yves Klein, 'Leaping into the Void', 1960, Gelatin Silver Print
(Metropolitan Museum, New York, 259 x 200 mm)

seem animated, as can figurative contents, organic or not. Crucially, there is a continuity of feeling

from the level of a human persona down through the evolutionary ladder, and up into potentially

more advanced forms such as Gods or intelligent alien races. Robinson could maintain that these

examples merely present a human persona imagining such alternative living forms, but this seems to

assert nothing more than that the artist is human.

Having said this, Robinson's claim that expressive works present opportunities for taking the

"emotional perspective of another person," seems more promising, though it still unduly fixes scale

for abstract works. Rephrasing this to avoid scale and soften emotion to feeling gives a Langerean perspective: expressive works afford an experience of the feeling tone of another life or living form.

The living form of *PH-960* then, is ambiguously scaled, which is to say that its range of associations is very wide, not necessarily the scale of an organism, but it could be either less or more than that, a universe with life in it, an ecosystem, an organism, or unicellular.

In *PH-960*, not only the semblance of scale but also of volition of the form shown in Figure 14 is ambiguous – it can be read as leaping away or also as being ejected. This has implications for whether the form "has options" in Langer's phrase, and relates directly to the gradient of freedom and necessity. Part of how this gradient is negotiated pictorially is through what seems to be a trailing part of the form that is carried behind the main form, providing a semblance of motion as well as freedom. This acts in contrast to the many hard lines in nearby secondary virtual forms, which seem like a limit has been reached, either a limit of extension by internal organic action or an environmental limit that cannot be pushed past. The hard lines read, therefore, as constraint, as not having an option, as necessity. The dry brush work seems on the other hand like there are options, that the forms could be in other configurations than they are. There can be enormous significance to a member leaving a group, whether it is a pioneering exploration, death or imprisonment, a genetic mutation, or a breaking loose of an orbit. In terms of the fractal imagery characteristic of much abstract expressionist work, and especially Still's work, *phase transitions*, where a material changes its form substantially based on small changes in the physical environment (for instance water freezing) are a helpful and literal reading.

The painting reads too as stages of organic development – which leads us back to stages of an act. The secondary virtual forms can be read very plausibly in terms of inception, development, climax and cadence. As well as freedom and necessity, transience and permanence is another salient gradient.

Whether the secondary virtual form shown in Figure 14 should be seen as a climax, or an inception, or a cadence or development, depends very much on how the overall painting is seen. Part of what is remarkable about Still's painting is that it supports each of these readings – and Langer provides support for this, noting how the cadence of an act often causes the inception of a further act continuously.

In this section I have shown how considering Still's work from the perspective of clarity of intrinsic scale gives quite a different reading to considering it from the point of view of an absence of recognisable imagery. I have also used Still's work as an opportunity to discuss implied persona in works, arguing that whilst this can be true, it need not be the case. I have also brought Langerean aesthetics to bear in providing a reading of *PH-960*.

6.4 Number 22, 1949 and the Rothko Chapel

This section looks at two works by Mark Rothko, considering Rothko's relationship to scale and the sublime. Beginning with Rothko's words on scale, I then consider the evidence for his position on the sublime, before looking at a Rothko work – *Number 22, 1949* – and considering the ways scale and the sublime can be seen to function in it, making use of Langerean aesthetic resources in providing a reading of the work. The second part of the section looks at the Rothko Chapel, making particular use of the ways Sheldon Nodelman has described scale as functioning in the Chapel, both in extrinsic and intrinsic terms. The section ends by claiming that scale effects are, to some degree, part of all uses of virtual space.

Rothko wrote on scale in the late 1930s or early 1940s, the remarks surviving in a notebook that was acquired from his first wife in 2002:

> The scale conception
> involves the relationship
> of objects to their surrounds –

>   and the emphasis of things
>   or space.
>   It definitely involves
>   a space emotion. A child
>   may limit space arbitrarily
>   and then heroify his
>   objects. Or he may
>   infinitize space, dwarfing
>   the importance of objects,
>   causing them to merge
>   and become a part of
>   the t space world.[91]

That Rothko refers to the creative action of a child does not seem to limit this only to what children do – Rothko's comments here are in the midst of a discussion of artistic activity; by relating his comments on scale to children Rothko seems to be emphasising how fundamental the manipulation of scale is to creative activity. Noteworthy too is the disjunctive nature of the emphasis Rothko believed scale could effect – dignifying either objects or space but in either case involving "a space emotion."

Rothko also wrote that: "Space is the philosophical basis of a painting, and its kind usually determines how the plastic elements are to function within the picture."[92] This comment differs in terminology but is otherwise similar to Langer's idea of an image in virtual space, described in Chapter 1.

Rothko did not write directly on the sublime, though he does write of what he sees as the crisis of modernity with people having lost their faith, and how the function of the artist is to make transcendent works.[93] Perhaps the clearest words Rothko gave on the subject were about his artistic interests – that he was "only interested in expressing basic human emotions – tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on," which is a strange list of basic emotions (compared to Ekman's basic emotions of fear, anger, joy, sadness, disgust and surprise) but makes much sense if Rothko means *sublime*

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[91] Rothko 'Scribble Book' in Phillips and Crow, 2005: p. 252
[92] Rothko, 2004: p. 55
[93] Ibid.: pp. 5, 58-9, 95-7

emotions.[94] Rosenblum's narrative of the Romantic sublime from Friedrich's figures in the landscape to Rothko's abstract sublime works has already been mentioned.

Art Historian Anna Chave has written the following commentary on Rothko's *Number 22, 1949* (Figure 16), drawing attention to the multiple potential readings available and the interplay between colour and emotion:

> Rothko is said to have regarded *Number 22, 1949*... as a tragic and violent image, though his insistence on this point was evidently directed in part at countervening most viewers' reaction to it as a glorious Apollonian outpouring of consoling yellow and orange light. It does not follow from the existence of these two contradictory readings that the picture has no meaning at all, however; it follows instead that the picture has at least two meanings, with the contradiction between them being part of the affective tension and the large sphere of reference that the picture engenders. [95]

Chave is referring to the opposition of Apollonian and Dionysian that Rothko had found convincing and productive in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*; Briony Fer writes that Rothko "revelled in Nietzsche's metaphorics of vision," even as he struggled to convey transcendental subject matter, subject matter that was both sublime and, somehow, intimate.[96] Fer agrees here with Chave that the experience of Rothko paintings is mixed but both the dual readings that Chave brings up and Fer's readings are fundamentally emotional ones.

The spatial recession of *Number 22, 1949* is effected by the yellow at the edges of the support. In terms of the picture surface this yellow is a border, however in terms of the virtual space created it does not present as one, instead it reads as behind the other depicted elements. The gradient being negotiated here is *shallow recession – deep recession;* at first glance it seems very immediate and approachable, perhaps most especially in the orange bottom third, but greater familiarity with the canvas makes all the regions appear to have deeper recession – allowing for the fact that the scale is ambiguous, but even the *proportion* of width and height to depth is ambiguous here. Note that this

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[94] Rothko in conversation with Seldon Rodman, 1956, in López-Remiro, 2006: p. 119; See Ekman, 2003: p. 218
[95] Chave, 1989: p. 123
[96] Fer, 2005: p. 163

seems a better expression of the gradient than the Wölfflinian *planar-recessional* since planar

implies too much flatness which even a cursory examination contradicts. Since the primary virtual

element can be seen as the feeling tone or mood in Langer's scheme, this space is also the *affective*

context for the rest of the painting. Describing it is a challenge – the yellow blends towards green

and white and brown in different sections of the canvas and could be seen to continue across the

canvas above and below the red element, though this yellowish-white could also be read as a

separate element entirely.[97] This primary virtual element has gradients, but, with the possible exception of its continuation above and below the red, reads as a single element. Feeling tone is a continuous activity, the current subjective state of the organism, other things being equal. And in *Number 22, 1949*, this affective context could perhaps be described as murky and opaque.

Other salient gradients for the work include *clear – murky* and *crisp – fuzzy*, what Chave puts forwards as *harmony*, on the one hand, with the complementary colour progression of yellow, orange, red; and *dissonance*, on the other hand, with the violent or anxious quality of the climactic central section. The gradient of *linear – painterly* is negotiated mostly through the interplay between the scratch lines and the painterly, fuzzy borders, with Rothko engaging the linear more in this work than usual for his mature works, though notably the linear here does not straightforwardly correspond to the Apollonian. Nonetheless, all of this can be usefully subsumed under Rothko's Nietzschean *Apollonian – Dionysian* opposition. There is also a gradient of t*ogetherness – separateness* being negotiated, the secondary virtual forms are adjacent and even touch, but, with the exception of the top mustard float and its small yellowish white top float, the forms are 'alone together' rather than truly together – it is this antagonism with such mild or limited means, complementary colours, that produces much of the strange effect of the piece.

The secondary virtual elements are distinguished mainly by colour: the white rectangular form near the upper edge of the canvas, the mustard coloured form which seems to lie just behind it and which takes up most of the upper half of the canvas, the red central form, and the orange form beneath it. There are also the three thin lines which have been scraped over the red form, the distance between them uneven. This last element is the most salient of all the visual elements, it stands out both because it is an unusual feature of a Rothko painting, and also because of the tension conveyed by the lines.

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[97] Keeping this ambiguity open – retaining both these readings – is, I have been arguing, essential when considering abstract and semi-abstract works

It is possible to read the secondary virtual elements as a single act, splitting them in a chart-like fashion from top to bottom, with a white acting as inciting incident, the mustard section functioning as development, and the red functioning as climax, the orange as cadence. I have no particular issue with thinking along these lines, so long as it is taken as part of a broader reading. There does seem to be some truth in seeing the red as the climax of the work. Nonetheless, it does seem overly schematic, and other painting will doubtless not break down so easily – even here the reading frays around the edges. In particular, the top to bottom viewing order seems misleading, the painting does not really seem to develop along these lines. Langer again can help us here, in her idea that paintings like this are seen, fundamentally, in a single act of vision:

> The import of an art symbol cannot be built up like the meaning of a discourse, but must be seen *in toto* first; that is, the "understanding" of a work of art begins with an intuition of the whole presented feeling. Contemplation then gradually reveals the complexities of the piece, and of its import.[98]

Langer does not argue here that we see paintings all at once, though her position has been misinterpreted this way.[99] Instead she argues that she first experience a gist of the whole, with detailed understanding following (assuming the painting is contemplated for long enough to move beyond the first stage). To understand Langer's position it is useful to consider a case study in the phenomenology of seeing and getting to know pictures. Clark has published his diary account of several months of repeated looking at Poussin's *Landscape with a Calm* and *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, a form of art historical work rare enough that he subtitles the book 'An Experiment in Art Writing.' The former painting is new to Clark at the start of the process, nonetheless, in 250 pages he never gives his first impression of the work. He does however write of the mountains in the background that "up to now all I had registered in this part of the picture was the general idea of turbulence and momentariness," which I think accords well with the sort of initial experience Langer

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[98] Langer, 1953: p. 379
[99] For example, Hagberg,1984: p. 15

claims art symbols provide – a general idea, a feeling of the atmosphere of the work.[100] Note that

"turbulence and momentariness" can be felt, and can be characteristic of emotions, but are not

emotions themselves. Langer's views are entirely consistent with the sort of account of sustained

looking at art which Clark provides.

What we are looking for, then, is not a mapping, though it is a projection. Langer tells us that the

elements, moreover, need not be discrete, but may be exhibited simultaneously.[101] Looking at the

Rothko, the apparent weightlessness of the forms is striking. This is a frequent characteristic of

abstract works, in contrast to figurative works which need to convey the weights of the various

elements if they are to be effective. Part of the achievement of Dürer's *Rhinoceros* (Figure 17), for

example, is the sense of the animal's existing in gravity and being pulled downwards.

The elements in *Number 22, 1949*, in contrast, appear to float. The artist's son, Christopher Rothko,

strongly objects to talk of the elements as 'stacked':

> Rothko's rectangles when stacked become grounded, yoked to a physicality from which my
> father has worked hard to liberate them. They become decidedly material objects, with
> palpable mass and an ineluctable subjugation to gravity…
> By contrast, seeing Rothko's rectangles as afloat undercuts their weight, imparting
> movement to the forms and loft to the shapes…
> The forms of a classic Rothko are allowed to float free, their interaction with each other
> dictated neither by their own mass nor by the mass of the other forms around them… One
> can sense the electricity, the seemingly magnetic attraction and repulsion of the rectangles
> across these gaps – a magnetism which would be defused if the rectangles were simply
> *stacked* one upon the other.[102]

Floating forms, moreover, are more ambiguous – the semblance of gravity disambiguates the

orientation of the virtual forms, grounding them, when a major concern is for them to seem to

transcend such a grounding.

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[100] Clark, 2006: p. 23
[101] Langer, 1953: p. 373
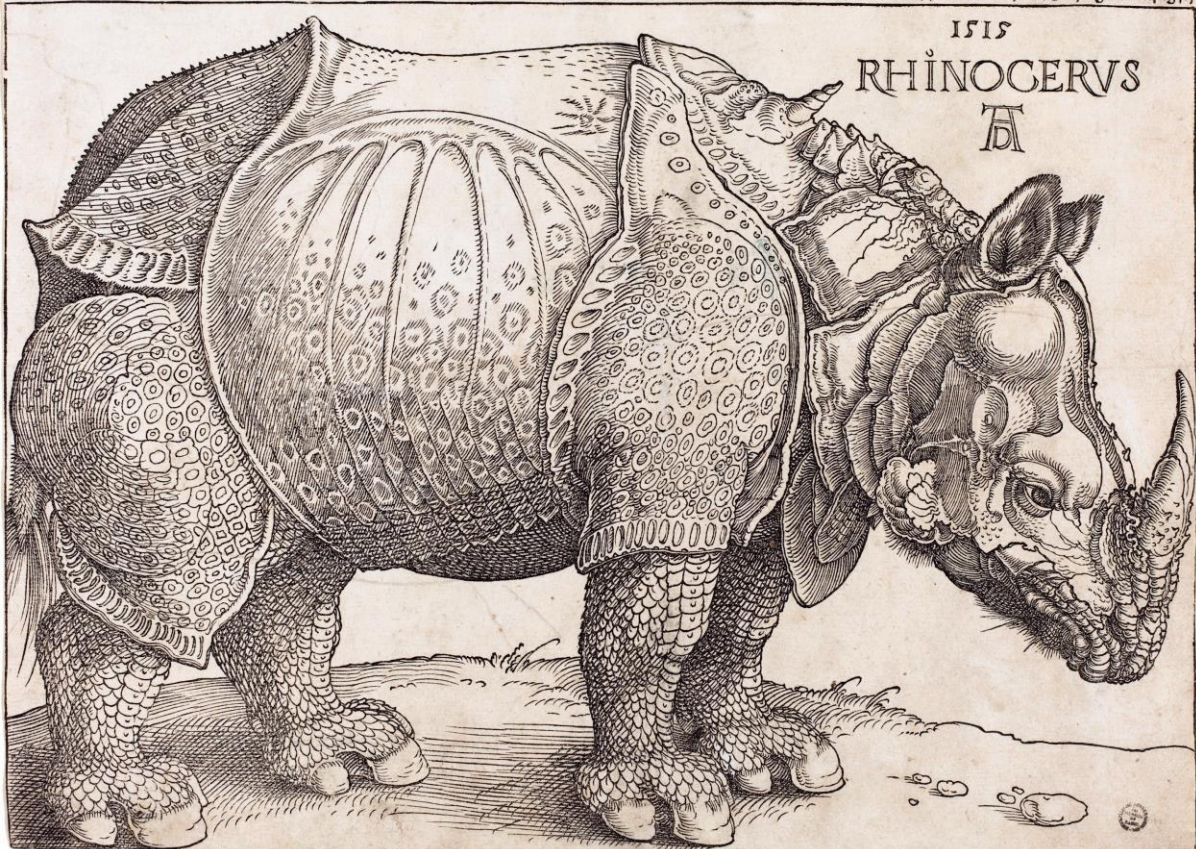[102] Rothko, 2015: p. 115

Figure 17: Albrecht Dürer, 'Rhinoceros', 1515, Woodcut (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 235 x 298 mm)

As discussed in Chapter 2, Langer notes that millions of processes are normally unfelt, passing below the threshold of awareness; the limit of our interoceptive awareness is far from being a complete view of our internal state – Langer writes of some feelings which have a "less precise location in the organism, like a shock of terror."[103] In Langerean terms, *Number 22, 1949* presents an image of feeling by picturing epicentres which are regions rather than points, a less precise fuzzy specificity which is true to the phenomenology of much feeling.

The most prominent example of artistic emphasis on curatorial factors comes with Rothko's Chapel commission, where the artist was given not only free reign over the paintings but close to complete

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[103] Langer, 1967: p. 22

control over the internal environment of the chapel.[104] Whilst the previous example of Rothko's painting considered intrinsic scale and other gradients, this section will look at the Rothko chapel from the point of view of the gradient of extrinsic scale: the relationship between the size of the work and the size of the viewer.

Parenthetically, I am unaware of an artwork which makes use of ambiguous *extrinsic* scale, though such a work seems possible. Both the desert and ocean, when absent of landmarks, provide experiences where it is difficult to estimate distance to the horizon; the absent landmarks are absent measures, and whilst sand dunes and waves respectively provide some measure, their scale is sufficiently variable and uncertain as to make these environments – at least in their pristine form – ambiguous. Artists could exploit such environments, and perhaps also planetariums or similar projections of ambiguously scaled objects. That this may be possible theoretically, however, does not mean it needs to be accounted for straightforwardly in terms of existing media. For current purposes, it can be stated that painting and sculpture function with unambiguous extrinsic scale.

The chapel installation consists of fourteen panels spread over eight walls, with a single panel on the entrance wall (Figure 19), three triptychs on the other main axial walls, and single, 'monochrome' panels on the four diagonal walls. In order to make the case I want to regarding scale, I will consider just the entrance wall panel and its opposite, 'monochrome', triptych on the north wall (Figure 18). Despite referring to seven of these works as 'monochromes', as is common in the literature on the Rothko chapel, they are not true monochromes, such as the monochromes of Yves Klein, as they exhibit much surface incident and evidence of facture.

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[104] Limiting factors over this control over the environment of the chapel stem from Rothko's death in February 1970, a year before the installation of the paintings. Issues with lighting, in particular, have troubled the chapel, with the intensity of light in Houston being much stronger than that in New York where Rothko worked. Three major changes to the design of the skylight have been undertaken, most recently in 2021. In addition, whilst Rothko left instructions on hanging heights for the panels, accurate to a quarter of an inch, these have not been followed exactly in the case of the one of the side triptychs. At a lecture in the chapel in June 2021, Sheldon Nodelman notes this discrepancy still exists, and speculates that the reason for it is to eliminate asymmetry. See Nodelman, 2021 (Livestream)

Rothko had long painted large works; in 1951 he said this about his reasons for doing so:

> I paint very large pictures, I realize that historically the function of painting large pictures is something very grandiose and pompous. The reason I paint them however – I think it applies to other painters I know – is precisely because I want to be intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience, to look upon an experience as a stereopticon view or with a reducing glass. However you paint the larger picture, you are in it. It isn't something you command.[105]

This description of the painter's perspective of larger pictures operates similarly for viewers – extrinsic scale becomes a salient gradient as the painting seems not only to activate an internal virtual space but also to activate space adjacent to the painting itself, the pictorial elements operating as much in relation to the viewer as in relation to each other. This effect is sometimes described as sculptural or architectural, since in sculpture and architecture the viewer shares space continuously with the work's virtual space; it is an effect more easily available in abstract painting – figurative painting techniques tend to cancel it. Writing of the chapel, art historian Sheldon Nodelman notes how the lack of subordinate pictorial elements in the paintings emphasises the paintings' size in relation to the viewer – their extrinsic scale:

> The chapel paintings are, of course, very large in comparison to the viewer, and the parts into which they are divided are also very large. There is a rigorous absence, at the overt compositional level at least, of any divisions sized to relate to the body's capacities for manipulation or convenient accommodation, elements whose presence might signify a world at one's disposal. These proliferate in traditional painting, of whatever absolute size, so as to mediate – as part of an ascending ladder of compositional scale – the size disparity between viewer and painting and to populate the latter with elements to which the viewer can comfortably relate. (In traditional figurative painting, this relationship is both actual and virtual: the viewer situates himself or herself simultaneously in respect not only to the "real" size of the compositional unit but to the fictive size designated for it in the internal representational system of the painting...[106]

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[105] Transcript from symposium at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, originally published in *Interiors*, May 1951. In López-Ramiro, 2005: p. 74
[106] Nodelman, 1997: p. 298

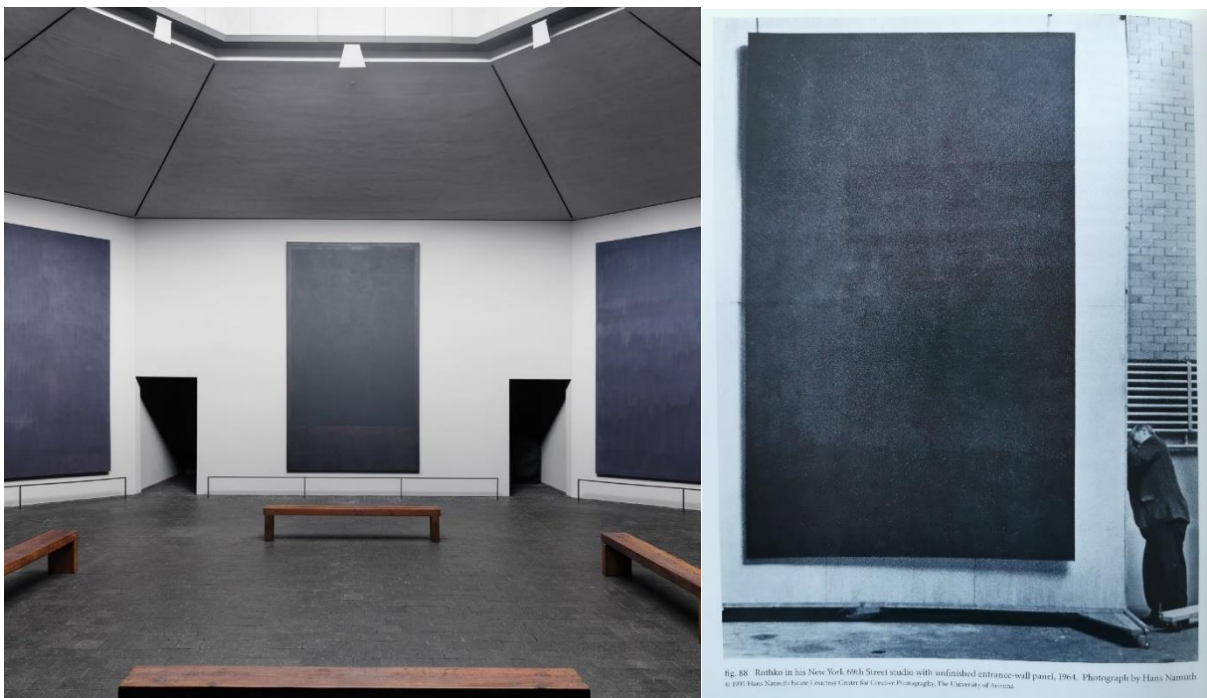*Figure 18: North Wall Apse Triptych, Rothko Chapel, Houston (1971)*

Figure 19:a) South, Entrance Wall Panel, Rothko Chapel, Houston (1971); b) unfinished South entrance wall panel with artist

Nodelman draws out two interrelated "scale regimes" operating in the chapel – with correspond to

carefully calibrated uses of extrinsic and intrinsic scale. Of the extrinsic scale, what he calls the

Classical-monumental scale regime, Nodelman writes that these are large enough that they relate

primarily to the whole work, the entire chapel, and only secondarily to the panel itself.[107] The virtual

space of the chapel itself is activated – through which the viewer moves, and so the paintings

function to draw attention to the viewer's body. This operates, according to Nodelman, dually – on

the one hand the viewer is insignificant next to these pictorial units which are out of human scale,

and on the other the viewer imaginatively magnifies themselves until they measure up to the

pictorial units:

> The retrojective operation, conducted by the overscaling, in relation to the human body, of
> the parts into which the work can be divided and by the address of these parts only
> secondarily to each other and primarily to the whole, ensures that it is the whole – the
> object as defined by its external relations – that is activated. The work thus defeats
> whatever aspiration the viewer may cherish for imaginative intimacy, for absorption into the
> work's interiority, and hence for self-forgetting. On the contrary, it forcibly redirects
> attention to the viewer's situation and conduct vis-à-vis itself and whatever other presences
> may share the place of their encounter. By calling attention so imperiously to its own
> wholeness and by refusing any display of small-scaled – i.e., imaginatively manipulable –
> parts, the work further specifies the focus of the viewer's newly evoked self-awareness. This
> is a whole-body awareness, one in which the issues of how the body holds itself upright and
> maintains its balance and how it commits itself to decisive action are paramount.[108]

This is an unusual effect for paintings to achieve, the overscaled secondary virtual forms experienced

as relating primarily to the viewer's body and only secondarily to each panel as a whole – it is

difficult to achieve because such an effect will be fragile, vulnerable to distractions. Whilst I have

quoted Rothko above on how he paints big pictures in order to be intimate, which may seem to be in

contradiction with the kind of experience Nodelman draws attention to here, bear in mind that

Rothko's earlier quote is from 1951: Rothko is still not making big paintings in order to be grandiose,

and still is making them in order to put the viewer 'inside them' – it is just that now the effect is not

well described as intimate. In itself, it justifies Rothko's often fussy preoccupation with controlling

the environment of the chapel – to facilitate such an effect. On the other hand, extrinsic scale also

acts simultaneously in what Nodelman refers to as a projective manner:

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[107] Ibid.: p. 298
[108] Ibid.: p. 299

> Because both the work as a whole and its individual parts are compact, clearly bounded, and tectonically structured unities and therefore implicitly anthropomorphic, they solicit the viewer's projective identification with themselves. Since they are very large, the viewer is imaginatively aggrandized to comparable size, with the accompanying sensations of expansion, release, and heightened power.[109]

Nodelman does not link this scale regime to the sublime; however, the account corresponds powerfully to the account Doran gives of the phenomenology of the sublime – that it is marked by both a sense of being overwhelmed and elevated.

The second type of scale Nodelman describes operating in the chapel concerns intrinsic scale in the monochromes – between micro-incidents of pigment blend, brushwork, and facture and the vast size of the whole panels:

> The extreme size disparity between these small surface incidents and the vast canvases produces effects of virtual scale that are correspondingly vast. Insofar as the viewer imaginatively identifies with the surface elements, he or she experiences a corresponding sense of scale diminution and of projection into an immensely vast space, a space moreover whose precise boundaries are elusive.[110]

Nodelman links this second scale regime to the sublime, especially as developed as part of the late 18th and 19th Century Romantic movement, calling it the romantic-sublime scale regime.[111] In fact, both scale regimes can be seen as operating in relation to the sublime – the former, Classical-monumental regime is compared by Nodelman to the experience afforded by viewing Egyptian pyramids – which can certainly be viewed as both an overwhelming and elevating experience.

Nodelman brings together these extrinsic and intrinsic readings of the chapel installation in a phenomenological reading:

> The distinctive scale experience of the chapel installation results from the superimposition of these two scale regimes, the classical-monumental and the romantic-sublime, and thus from both the radical affirmation of the existential specificity of the subject and its dissolution into the universal. Neither is allowed to dominate; rather the viewer experiences

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[109] Ibid.: p. 299
[110] Ibid.: p. 300; I have simplified Nodelman's argument by omission – in the original there is greater interpenetration of the Classical-monumental and romantic-sublime scale modes
[111] Ibid.: p. 301

the imaginative transformations induced by each, with the very strong physical and emotional sensations that these entail in so rapid an alternation that they seem simultaneous. This amalgam of sensation is one of the most powerful determinants of the visitor's experience of the installation…[112]

There are many further determinants, discussion of which falls outside the scope of this study. Nodelman seems correct that Rothko uses this, and that it is also a very ancient technique – not invented by Rothko. He also stresses that these effects are particularly strong in the Rothko Chapel – again, correctly, I think. But there is a suggestion that it is possible to make painting without engaging in scale effects at all, which is mistaken. Scale gradients are especially *salient* in the Chapel, but are present in all painting (ambiguity of intrinsic scale is especially salient, when scale is approached conventionally for a genre the gradient will not usually be salient). Part of what makes the gradients salient is their elements existing outside of the normative range of values for painting. Another part is the lack of distracting incident in the panels and in the chapel as a whole – Rothko has organised the space so that the scale effects can be experienced powerfully.

The only other work I have considered in the thesis that is in any way comparable is the Forbidden City, and it is doing something quite different – presenting certainties where Rothko presents ambiguities; if the Forbidden City, in imperial times, told visitors who they were with scale, then the Rothko Chapel asks visitors to question who they are – devolving what is, ultimately, spiritual power to the individual.

This section has argued that scale provides a fine-grained toolset for discussion of Rothko's painting. Providing readings of two Rothko works in Langerean terms, this section has concentrated on identifying salient gradients as secondary virtual forms, and considering the roles these play in the construction of the primary virtual form.

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[112] Ibid.

6.5 Lavender Mist

This section considers *Number 1, 1950* by Jackson Pollock, more commonly known by the title

Greenberg suggested - *Lavender Mist* (Figure 20).[113] After introducing the work and the quality of the

work, in terms of how art historians have described its character, I then look in to how it has been

written about in terms of size and scale, looking particularly at T. J. Clark's comments on Pollock on

size and scale, to which, whilst I agree with the spirit, I propose some terminological modification. I

then connect this to a reading of *Lavender Mist* that highlights its complete ambiguity of intrinsic

scale as I have been arguing in the rest of the chapter so far, before returning to a discussion first

broached in Section 3.3 regarding whether the experience of pictures necessarily involves a tactile

component. I argue that, in abstract pictures, it does not, in contrast to other kinds of picture, and I

explain why, making use of *Lavender Mist*. I also look at claims for *Lavender Mist*'s literality, before

finishing the section with a reading of the painting in Langerean terms.

E. A. Carmean, Jr., who acquired the painting for the National Gallery in D.C., describes the character

of *Lavender Mist* as follows:

> While certain passages in *Lavender Mist* have the broad, spreading qualities of other poured
> works, many of the lines can be characterized as extremely thin and exquisite. The delicacy
> of this tracery is compounded by the sheer number of crisscrossings enrolled within the
> allover fabric of paint. The intersecting and fragmenting of the skeins of paint produces a
> molecularization of the surface as we see in the majority of densely poured works. But in
> *Lavender Mist* this fragmenting created a pulverization of the allover fabric. This powdery
> quality is further complemented by the effusive tone of the work, created out of pinks,
> blues, and silver aluminum paint and the interspersion of off-white pigment, which echoes
> the color of the canvas ground and introduces a sense of transparency. Of all of Pollock's
> works, *Lavender Mist* is the most delicate in terms of touch and coloration.[114]

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[113] Clark, 1999b: p. 340
[114] Carmean, Jr.: 1978: p. 130

Figure 20: Jackson Pollock, 'Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)', oil and enamel on canvas
(National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2,210 x 2,997 mm)

This contrast between pulverization and delicacy is echoed by Clark, who writes that "*Lavender Mist* [manages], God knows how, to be fragile and vaporous but at the same time hard as a rock."[115] Clark writes too about Pollock's use of scale in 'Pollock's Smallness':

> Pollock's art is one that aims constantly at a radical, incommensurable, truly elating scale –
> at infinite extension or intension, preposterous depths or complexity, *absolute* elevation.[116]

It will be clear that this reading accords well with what I have been proposing regarding scale. Clark, however, does not clearly keep size and scale separate, writing at one point about "real size" and, of a painting almost 90cm square, Clark writes that remembers exclaiming that it was the smallest painting he had ever seen.[117] Clark's comment on this painting makes sense in scale terms, but not

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[115] Clark, 1999a: p. 23
[116] Ibid.: p. 22
[117] Ibid.: pp. 17, 28

size terms – when Clark has earlier written that the "size of a map is a literal matter; the scale of a map it its literal size put in relation to some other signified size…"[118]

Clark has one more major claim regarding size and scale:

> Mondrian is an artist of scale, Malevich an artist of sizes. This is to pass no aesthetic judgement on either, just to suggest that making modernist art (particularly modernist abstraction) seems to involve opting for one idea of largeness and smallness over another.[119]

I disagree with Clark here – the Rothko chapel, discussed in the previous section, shows it, since both extrinsic scale and intrinsic scale are both salient gradients (in this quote Clark means what I refer to as extrinsic scale when he writes size, since it is the experience of the artwork's size that is important).

Nonetheless, I think Clark, whilst mistaken, is not completely wrong. The works of artists he lists as opting for scale, for instance, generally can be experienced in reproduction better than those he lists as opting for size – so reproductions of Picasso and Mondrian paintings can occasion experiences of those works more accurately than reproductions of Matisse and Malevich. To this list could be added Vermeer and Klee on the scale side, and Caillebotte and Newman on the size side. The reason for this discrepancy, I would argue, is that extrinsic scale is not preserved in most reproductions, whilst intrinsic scale is, so works which depend more heavily on extrinsic scale will suffer accordingly.

Clark, moreover, quotes Parker Tyler on Pollock, writing of the quality of a classic Pollock painting:

> Jackson Pollock has put the … labyrinth at an infinite and unreachable distance, a distance beyond the stars – a non-human distance.… If one felt vertigo before Pollock's differentiations of space, then truly one would be lost in the abyss of an endless definition of being. One would be enclosed, trapped by the labyrinth of the picture-space. But we are safely looking at it, seeing it steadily and seeing it whole, from a point outside. Only man, in his paradoxical role of the superman, can achieve such a feat of absolute contemplation: the sight of an image of space *in which he does not exist*.[120]

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[118] Ibid.: p. 16
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.: p. 22

Tyler here notes, in lively language, the ambiguity of scale which is found in Pollock's mature paintings. It is a "non-human distance" that can be seen in them, and, though Tyler neglects the possibility of the infinitely small as well as the infinitely large, Tyler's words effectively sum up the phenomenology of visual experience without a stable tactile referent.

This prompts a returning to the discussion from Section 3.3, about virtual kinetic volume, where Robert Hopkins took issue with Langer's argument that the experience of pictures does not involve a tactile component.

Here, first, is the gist of Langer's position, that, a) pictures are given to vision alone, and b) that "…each person's… *environment*… his body and the range of its free motion, its breathing space and the reach of its limbs, are his own kinetic volume, the point of orientation from which he plots the world of tangible reality…"[121] Hopkins responded to this as follows, arguing that these two positions are incompatible:

> If [Langer] fully embraced the thoughts offered in [the above quotation] from her book, thoughts so reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty, she would see that *all* visual experience is experience of "kinetic volume", that is, is permeated by a sense of possible movement and action. And this includes pictorial experience, the experience in which we grasp the content of pictures.[122]

Hopkins seems correct in general to assert, contra Langer, that all visual experience has a tactile component, and indeed in an earlier work Langer wrote of "The understanding of space which we owe to sight and touch…"[123] Our visual sense has been calibrated by our haptic senses.

To bring back the Greenberg and Steinberg debate from Section 6.1, however, Steinberg's claim that Greenberg ought to be able to imagine rocketing into the interstellar space of an Olitski depends on the space affording that possibility, and there is no way of disambiguating the space. Abstract paintings, therefore, seem an important class of counterexamples to Hopkins. Because the

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[121] Langer, 1953: p. 90
[122] Hopkins, 2003b: p. 281
[123] Langer, 1942: p. 93

scale of virtual space cannot be determined, the space is not recognised, and the tactile foundation

of visual experience is only utilised to the extent that the scale of the virtual space is artificially fixed.

Abstract paintings, qua abstract, are given to vision alone – they do not offer a point of orientation

from which to plot reality. This matches well, as noted, with Tyler and Clark's reading of *Lavender*

Mist – both microscopic and gigantic.

An early reading of Pollock's mature work in terms of scale came from writer and curator Frank

O'Hara in 1959:

> It is, of course, Pollock's passion as an artist that kept his works from ever being decorative,
> but this passion was expressed through scale as one of his important means. In the past, an
> artist by means of scale could create a vast panorama on a few feet of canvas or wall,
> relating this scale both to the visual reality of known images (the size of a man's body) and
> to the setting (the building it would enhance). Pollock, choosing to use no images with real
> visual equivalents and having no building in mind, struck upon a use of scale which was to
> have a revolutionary effect on contemporary painting and sculpture. The scale of the
> painting became that of the painter's body, not the image of the body, and the setting for
> the scale, which would include all referents, would be the canvas surface itself. Upon this
> field the physical energies of the artist operate in actual detail, in full-scale; the action of
> inspiration traces its marks of Apelles with no reference to exterior image or environment. It
> is scale, and no-scale. It is the physical reality of the artist and his activity of expressing it,
> united to the spiritual reality of the artist in a oneness which has no need for the mediation
> of metaphor or symbol. It is Action Painting.[124]

O'Hara's words here echo some of the rhetoric of literality that was examined in Chapter 3 when

looking at Frank Stella and Carl Andre; Andre's 'Preface to Stripe Painting' was also written in New

York in 1959. Whilst I therefore do not take O'Hara literally here, I do agree with the assertions of

the spiritual character of the work, and that it has to do with the device of scale.

To counter O'Hara's claims as to the literality of the indexical trace in the experience of *Lavender*

Mist, consider Figure 21, a detail view of the paining (taken from an area on the right-side edge not

far above centre). A light brown element in the bottom right section of this detail view consists of

what might be thought of as a body and tail, or a rock with a trail of disturbed atmosphere behind it

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[124] O'Hara, 1959: pp. 28-9

– in either case, there is an implied *direction* to the virtual form, which in this case is right to left. (There are many such elements in *Lavender Mist*, this one has been chosen mainly because of how rare this colour is in the painting, making it easy to distinguish).

For all the painting is an indexical trace of the artist's activity, this does not have much significance – in Langerean terms it concerns the materials rather than the virtual forms, and it is the latter which is of interest if the painting is considered as art. This tail, for instance, would likely have been painted *after* the main dot, the brush or stick being pulled *away* from the main dot – but the viewer experiences the trajectory of the dot's motion in the opposite direction; this is to say that the virtual form reads differently to how Pollock's construction of the work would have proceeded. An original artwork is an indexical trace of its production, including Pollock's, but apart from the partial handprints (to be discussed shortly), *Lavender Mist* is not a particularly special example of this; many paintings depend significantly for their effect on the artistic control of line. This argument is not new – Kantor writes of the "rhetoric of spontaneity," that Pollock's canvases possess – but is easy to forget given the prominence of the Hans Namuth 'action painting' photographs in Pollock studies.[125] 'All-over' painting, another frequent epithet given to Pollock's practice in the years 1947-50, is misleading too – in *Lavender Mist*, the edges are respected.

Despite its dimensions, roughly two and a bit by three metres, *Lavender Mist* does not seem like a big painting; in contrast to the Rothko chapel, the painting's inner complexity – in terms of the interrelationships of numerous secondary virtual forms – is such that this is the complexity which takes prominence, to the extent that the painting's extrinsic scale is greatly reduced in impact. Intrinsic scale dominates; the question is how these secondary virtual forms relate to each other, if at all. Contingent as they undoubtedly seem, it is unclear whether the forms are mutually contingent or whether their contingency rests on unseen forces (Clark sees Pollock's metaphors in terms of both

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[125] Kantor, 2002: p. 48
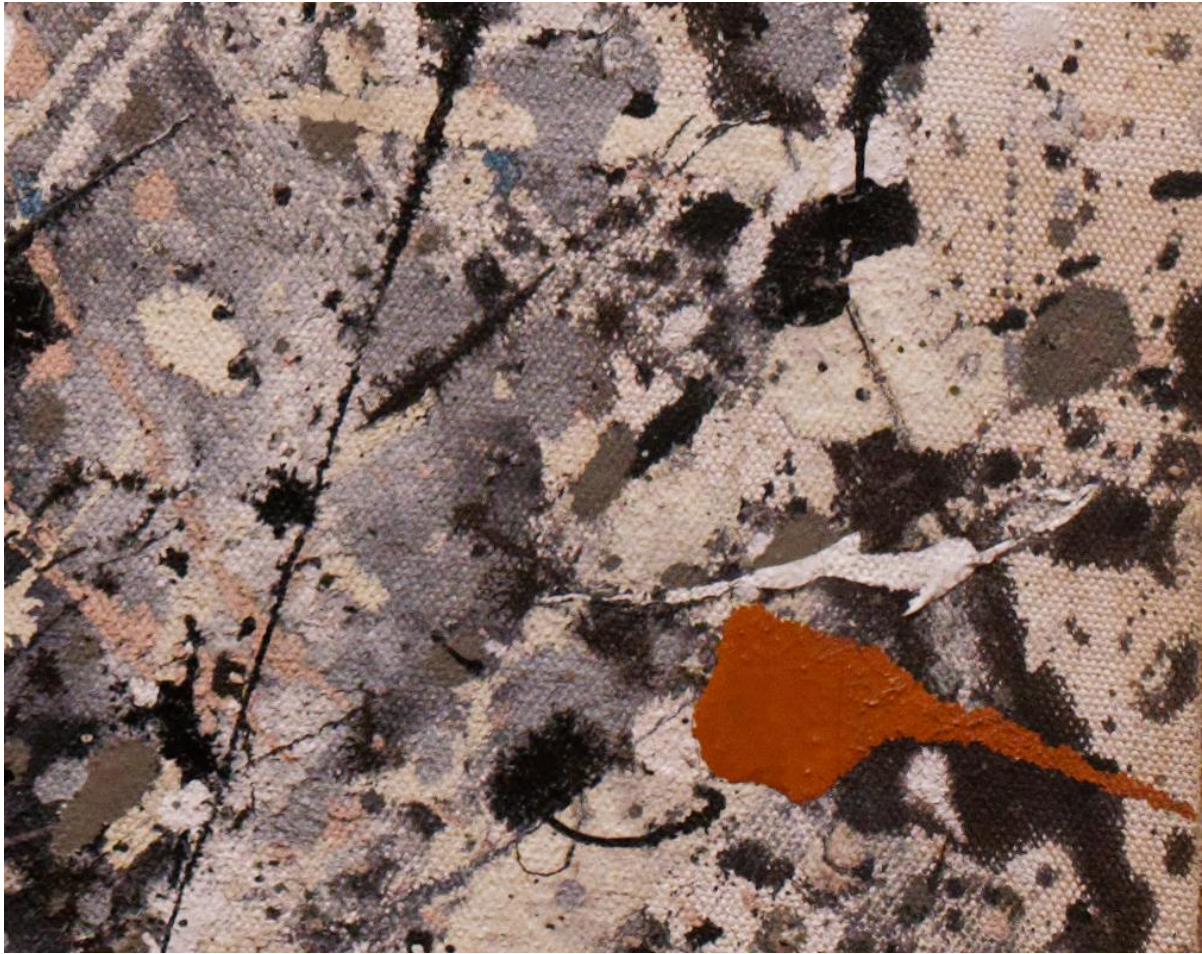
Figure 21: Jackson Pollock, 'Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)' (detail), oil and enamel on canvas (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2210 x 2997 mm)

atomic weapons and division of labour à la Adam Smith, so unseen forces would be both universal physical constraints and the constraints of Capitalist production).[126]

Art historian Jordan Kantor writes that in Pollock's canvases of 1947-50, "the minute scale of the individual mark [is] crucial to the all-over character of these paintings. The fact that any attempt to try to follow the course of a single line or drip [is] immediately frustrated (they inevitably trail off, or duck back into the fabric of the painted web, ditching you as if around a dark alley corner) preclude[s] the 'delimitation of form' that [has] for centuries been line's very function."[127]

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[126] Clark, 1999b: p. 30; note that the latter claim requires Clark to subscribe to something like Langer's idea of living form for secondary virtual forms
[127] Kantor, 2002: p. 46

Chapter 2 discussed the hierarchy of attention-drawing detail in Rembrandt; operating at the

opposite extreme is the "all-over" technique of *Lavender Mist*, as well as Lee Krasner's large painting

Another Storm, in which, whilst not homogenous, the local incidents do not preferentially draw

attention.[128] Clark writes that "The large, in Pollock, is made up of an accumulation of the small."[129]

Lavender Mist is one of only two major Pollock works to contain handprints. [130] The handprints are

not particularly prominent in Lavender Mist, compared to *Number 1, 1948*, where they contrast

much more forcibly and in greater isolation, and strangely do not assert the picture plane, or really

provide a scaling element of the kind O'Hara describes. Gloves could be bought based on assessing

the size of Pollock's hands from these handprints, in a way that suggests perhaps a similar scaling

element as the forensic footprint shown in the introduction to this thesis. But the parallel is

misleading, since in the forensic photograph the scaling function works because the elements are

placed together on a plane; intrinsic scale is the size relationship between the footprint and the

forensic ruler. In *Lavender Mist*, nothing else can be measured by the handprints, and, far from

providing the viewer with a tactile imaginative entry into the virtual space, the handprints do not

admit the viewer into the rest of the painting in any kind of tactile way.

Carmean, Jr., writes that the handprints "serve as secondary elements in the transition between the

painted web and the more spare reserve of the canvas which surrounds it."[131] This seems to be

particularly convincing for the partial and silver prints at the edges of *Lavender Mist*, part of a

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[128] In terms of this detail, there is an additional element to *Another Storm* which has not, to my knowledge, been discussed – crack patterns in the surface paint. These could be dismissed as a result of six decades of wear and tear, but this would need to be asserted in the face of condition of Krasner's other works, which is almost uniformly excellent. Krasner appears to have taken steps to make her paintings resilient to cracking, suggesting knowledge of at least some of the variables which lead to both drying and aging cracks. This being the case, Krasner may have encouraged cracks to form in *Another Storm*, an unusual practice, but one which seems to suit this painting very well
[129] Clark, 1999a: p. 23
[130] Carmean, Jr.: 1978: p. 130
[131] Ibid.

marking of a boundary, as fence posts might be (to borrow from the imagery of the American West which so preoccupied Pollock).

In this section I have used *Lavender Mist* as an opportunity to pursue various arguments in art history and aesthetics, arguing that in abstract pictures the viewer is not presented with a fixed point of view or a fixed scale and so the viewer's tactile experience does not inform their seeing of the work, as it usually would with other types of picture. If this is correct, it accounts for the distinctive phenomenology of seeing abstract paintings. I have also argued against looking at *Lavender Mist* in terms of literality, offering both reasons based on the interplay of how the work was made and how it is experienced, and a virtual reading as suggested by Langerean aesthetics.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have taken what is essentially the same aesthetic concept that was made use of in Chapter 5, the concept of scale with a special focus on how any ambiguities of scale function in the experience of the artwork. The chapter has put forward a new framework for understanding abstract painting which is that it features completely ambiguous intrinsic scale, and argued that this feature has been used by artists to create, in particular, a sense of an abyssal space – understood as indeterminately microscopic or macroscopic – which does not relate to the body but only to vision.

I have examined the claims regarding scale by Abstract Expressionist artists, and sought productive ways of understanding what they mean, arguing that the account I have given of intrinsic scale makes sense of their claims.

This chapter has also explored the role of the sublime for Abstract Expressionist artists, and argued that the reason that the sublime has so often been achieved by using the device of scale is due to the power of the device, whilst being clear that sublime effects can be achieved using other devices, and manipulation of intrinsic scale does not necessarily lead to sublime effects.

The unifying element in this analysis has been Langerean aesthetics – it is a Langerean view of images, gradients, and virtual forms and feeling that has been made us of, and which has shown its practicality in use. Whilst the first four chapters of the thesis focused very much on Langerean aesthetics, this chapter has been able to make use of it without needing to explain assumptions at every step. To the extent that any of the analysis in this chapter is valuable, it is a vindication of a Langerean approach.

Conclusion

This dissertation has been in large part a contribution to Langer studies, unpacking what her writings mean for the study of art in a way that has not been done before, as aesthetics has largely ignored her later writings and never used them to look at specific artworks. The Langerean readings of artworks contained in this thesis are one of the most important aspects of it, seeking to show that Langerean aesthetics in fact hews quite close to a common-sense approach to reading artworks, but that it supports careful looking.

A further contribution has been in rebutting criticisms of Langer's work which, by and large, have been misguided, sometimes spectacularly so. Whilst this thesis has advocated for a Langerean approach to abstract paintings, I have stopped short of advocating for a Langerean theory of art, which I would describe as promising rather than convincing in its present form. I do believe, however, that the analysis undertaken in Chapter 3 shows that it is an extremely promising expressivism, and that expressivism is not discredited as its opponents sometimes assume. The specific usefulness of Langerean aesthetics for abstract painting is to do with her treatment of both feeling and space, as discussed especially in chapters 2 and 6, but also the fact that one weakness of Langer's account of art is the way in which it copes with documentary value. From the point of view of Langerean aesthetics, when considered as art, the identification of the Ford factory is irrelevant in Charles Sheeler's paintings of the *River Rouge Plant*. This is not an approach I find completely convincing; however, it is not a problem for applying Langer's ideas to abstract painting.

Langer's great virtue as a philosopher is her great synthesis of various ideas, bringing together, for instance, the work on myth and ritual by Ernst Cassirer with logical positivism, or providing a plausible hypothesis for the intersection of art and religion. This thesis has also shown how Langer's

philosophy of mind fully supports her aesthetics and is being made use of in contemporary

neuroscience and psychology – her work holds still more tantalizing promise for further connections.

The main aim of the thesis has been to better understand abstract painting – and, whilst the new

framework does not mean to supplant the traditional view of abstract painting as non-figurative or

non-objective, which seems unnecessary, this new view is claimed to be coherent in its own terms

and to accord well with the statements of artists. Again, somewhat synthetically, it draws together

much art historical work that has been done on scale and makes an aesthetic argument, without

claiming to reduce the complexity or diversity of the artworks under discussion. Perhaps the most

surprising chapter in the thesis is that on traditional Chinese religious art, which has been included

partly on its own merits, and partly as an introduction on scale, but also in order to demonstrate

how little art history has to fear from aesthetics. Essentially the same aesthetic concept is deployed

in chapters 5 and 6, however, an attempt has been made to deploy it with sensitivity to the work

and traditions in question, resulting in quite different readings. Connecting the two chapters are not

only ideas on scale, but ideas on the religious, and how this area of life has often been imaged (in a

Langerean sense) through creating a sense of movement. This in turn leads back to the Langerean

idea of artworks needing to provide living form, which, interestingly, is the characterisation of life in

both Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle, having a body and a soul, the latter of which is understood as a

livingness, specifically an animation.[1]

Despite a few reservations here and there, it might be objected that this study has been too

sympathetic to Langer's ideas – this may well be the case. Without sympathetically looking at what

her ideas are however, and how they might be usefully applied, the history of the reception of

Langerean aesthetics has been poor. I have aimed to show the potential for her ideas and the main

weaknesses in my view, but it is certainly the case that there is potential for development and

improvement. Judged by the standards of *wuqi* and *taiji* outlined in Chapter 5, there is not really a

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[1] Feser, 2009: pp. 132-9

question of whether Langer's ideas are correct or not: they are necessarily a schematic model, but of a type that allows us to think about ourselves and about artworks (this is not a statement of extreme relativism but rather an acknowledgement of the frailty of understanding). That the formulation of the system is so open that it integrates well with so many other areas of study, whether logic, or psychology and neuroscience, or anthropology, is a great benefit.

Part of the value in a new framework for understanding abstract paintings is that abstract paintings are hard to look at, not affording the point of entry which recognisable subject matter or clear presentation of space provide. These, of course, are valuable features of abstract painting, however they make approaching abstract painting difficult for many people. A positive account of abstract painting, such as the present, which is able to give an explanation of what abstract painting can do not in terms of it being non-figurative, is therefore valuable. I have argued that abstract painting provides a view of space which is not limited to a single viewpoint, and so the viewer enjoys a certain freedom, not being placed in size or space and not having their gaze defined.

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