

Abstract

Susanne K. Langer is often remembered primarily as a philosopher of art, symbolism, and feeling. This characterization is not wrong, but it obscures the broader philosophical role her early work played within the intellectual landscape of mid-twentieth-century Harvard. This paper situates Langer within what I call the Harvard Hub: a dense problem-space in which symbolic logic, pragmatism, Cassirerian philosophy of culture, Gestalt psychology, sociology of knowledge, and historical approaches to science converged (Langer 1930, 1937, 1942; Verhaegh 2024; Basafa 2025).

I argue that Langer's significance lies in her mediation of Cassirerian symbolic form into an American philosophical environment shaped by logic, analytic clarity, psychology, and questions concerning the structure of meaning. Her engagement with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is one crucial instance of this mediation. In *The Practice of Philosophy* (1930), Langer takes over the Tractarian problem of symbolic representation, but transforms it by showing that logical form cannot exhaust the domain of symbolic understanding. Insight, Gestalt recognition, image, ritual, myth, art, and feeling disclose forms of meaning that are structured and cognitively significant without being reducible to propositions (Wittgenstein 1922; Langer 1930, 1942; Cassirer 1944).

This transformation brought Langer into close proximity with Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms. Yet her importance was not simply that she adopted Cassirerian themes, but that she rendered them intelligible within the Harvard Hub. By moving from logical symbolism to symbolic form, Langer helped prepare a Harvard reception of Cassirer in which meaning could be understood as symbolic, plural, culturally mediated, and open to historical transformation (Cassirer 1923–1929, 1944; Langer 1942; Verhaegh 2024).

The final part of the paper places Langer alongside Mannheim, Sutton, Fleck, and Kuhn. Mannheim's sociology of knowledge historicized meaning as perspective; Fleck's theory of thought styles and thought collectives showed how scientific facts are stabilized within communities; Sutton helped locate sociological concerns about knowledge within the Harvard milieu; and Kuhn later transformed this broader problem-space into a historical epistemology of scientific change. Langer's role in this constellation was not to provide a theory of scientific revolutions, but to make symbolic form available as a rigorous category for thinking about cognition, culture, and historically situated rationality (Mannheim 1936, 1952; Fleck 1935, 1979; Sutton et al. 1956; Kuhn 1962, 1970).

The paper therefore repositions Langer within twentieth-century philosophy. Her early work belongs not only to the history of aesthetics or analytic philosophy, but also to the prehistory of later debates about scientific meaning, symbolic mediation, and the historicity of rational frameworks (Langer 1930, 1942; Kuhn 1962; Basafa 2025).

Introduction

Susanne K. Langer is most commonly remembered as a philosopher of art, symbolism, and feeling. This characterization is not wrong, but it is too narrow. It risks obscuring the broader philosophical role her early work played in the intellectual landscape of mid-twentieth-century American philosophy. Langer did not simply turn from analytic philosophy to aesthetics. Rather, she occupied a strategic position within a wider transformation of the problem of meaning, one in which symbolic

¹ A shorter version of this paper was presented at *Artistic Angles, Philosophical Circles, Poetic Dots, and Technical Lines*, Langer Conference 2026, 26-29 May, Vienna, Austria.

logic, pragmatism, Cassirerian philosophy of culture, psychology, sociology of knowledge, and historical approaches to science came into contact (Langer 1942, 1953; Verhaegh 2024; Basafa 2025).

This paper argues that Langer's early work should be understood within what I call the Harvard Hub: an intellectual environment in which several otherwise distinct traditions converged. The Harvard Hub was not a unified school or doctrine. It was a dense problem-space in which symbolic logic, American pragmatism, European historicism, logical empiricism, Gestalt psychology, and Cassirerian symbolic philosophy could be brought into relation. Within this setting, Langer's significance lies in the way she helped translate the problem of symbolic form into an American philosophical idiom shaped by analytic clarity, logical symbolism, psychology, and questions concerning the structure of meaning (Langer 1937; Verhaegh 2024; Basafa 2025).

Langer's importance, then, is not exhausted by her later philosophy of art. Her early work helped prepare a distinctively Harvard reception of Cassirer. By treating symbolism as a general condition of human understanding rather than as a merely linguistic or aesthetic phenomenon, she made Cassirerian symbolic form available within a philosophical environment still deeply marked by logic and analysis. In this respect, Langer functioned as a mediator between early analytic philosophy and a broader theory of symbolic form. Her work shows how questions about representation, form, insight, and meaning could move beyond the limits of propositional analysis without abandoning the demand for philosophical rigor (Langer 1930, 1942; Cassirer 1944; Verhaegh 2024).

One crucial instance of this mediating role is Langer's engagement with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In *The Practice of Philosophy*, Langer takes over the Tractarian problem of symbolic representation as an analytic point of departure. Yet she does not remain within the boundaries of the Tractarian framework. The distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown becomes, in her hands, not a final delimitation of sense, but the opening toward a broader theory of symbolic understanding. Forms of insight, Gestalt recognition, and non-discursive articulation reveal that meaning cannot be confined to propositional structure alone. Langer's treatment of Wittgenstein therefore shows how she challenged early analytic philosophy from within: she accepted its concern with symbolic form while expanding symbolism beyond logical representation (Wittgenstein 1922; Langer 1930).

This transformation brings Langer into proximity with Cassirer. Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms offered a way of understanding language, myth, art, science, and culture as distinct but interrelated symbolic structures. Langer's contribution was to render such a conception intelligible within the Harvard Hub, where analytic philosophy, psychology, and historical reflection intersected. Her work thus marks an important moment in the movement from logical symbolism to symbolic form, and from symbolic form toward historically situated structures of intelligibility (Cassirer 1923–1929, 1944; Langer 1942).

The broader significance of this movement becomes clearer when Langer is placed alongside Mannheim, Sutton, Fleck, and Kuhn. Mannheim's sociology of knowledge raised the problem of perspective and ideology; Sutton's psychological and pedagogical concerns helped connect symbolic form to learning and cognition; Fleck's account of thought collectives showed how scientific facts are stabilized within historically situated communities; and Kuhn later transformed such concerns into a historical epistemology of scientific change. The point is not to construct a simple line of influence from Langer to Kuhn, but to reconstruct a shared Harvard problem-space in which Cassirerian symbolic form could be reinterpreted in relation to psychology, social situatedness, and historical transformation (Mannheim 1936, 1952; Fleck 1935, 1979; Sutton et al. 1956; Kuhn 1962, 1970; Basafa 2025).

Langer therefore occupies a pivotal but underrecognized position in twentieth-century philosophy. Her engagement with Wittgenstein shows how she absorbed and transformed early analytic philosophy; her relation to Cassirer shows how symbolic form entered the Harvard Hub; and her

broader intellectual setting reveals why questions of meaning, form, cognition, and history became increasingly inseparable. By situating Langer within this constellation, the paper argues that her early work helped prepare the conceptual ground on which symbolic form could become a problem not only for aesthetics, but also for the philosophy and history of science (Wittgenstein 1922; Cassirer 1944; Langer 1930, 1942).

1. A Challenge from Within Early Analytic Philosophy

Langer's engagement with Wittgenstein should be understood as one crucial instance of her broader mediating role within the Harvard Hub. She does not merely cite the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* as an external influence. Rather, she uses Wittgenstein's theory of symbolic representation as an analytic entry point into the problem of meaning. The importance of this move lies in the fact that Wittgenstein gives Langer a rigorous model of symbolism, representation, and form, while also revealing the limits of a purely propositional account of meaning (Wittgenstein 1922; Langer 1930).

At the center of Wittgenstein's early philosophy is the claim that meaningful representation depends on form. A proposition can represent a possible state of affairs because it shares a logical structure with what it depicts. Meaning is therefore not reducible to the association of words with things; it depends on structural relations. This is why the *Tractatus* was so important for Langer. It allowed her to treat symbolism not as a secondary feature of language, but as the condition under which meaning becomes possible (Wittgenstein 1922; Langer 1930).

Yet Langer's appropriation of Wittgenstein is not merely exegetical. She takes over the Tractarian problem of symbolic representation in order to ask whether logical form exhausts the domain of meaningful symbolism. The answer, for Langer, is negative. Propositional language is one form of symbolic articulation, but it is not the only one. Images, gestures, rituals, artistic forms, myths, and affective expressions may not function as assertions about states of affairs, yet they organize experience and disclose intelligible form. They therefore belong to the domain of meaning, even where they are not reducible to propositions (Langer 1930, 1942).

This is where Langer transforms Wittgenstein's distinction between saying and showing. In the *Tractatus*, the distinction marks a boundary: what cannot be said propositionally can only be shown. For Langer, however, the domain of what is shown becomes philosophically productive. It is not simply the point at which philosophy must fall silent. It is the point at which a broader theory of symbolic understanding becomes necessary. What is shown may still possess form, structure, and cognitive significance, even when it is not discursively stated (Wittgenstein 1922; Langer 1930).

This transformation is central to Langer's challenge to early analytic philosophy. She does not reject analytic philosophy from the outside. She begins within its concern for symbolic clarity and formal structure, but then expands the problem of meaning beyond the propositional field. In this respect, her engagement with Wittgenstein is best understood as an internal transformation of analytic symbolism. Logical form remains important, but it becomes one instance of a wider phenomenon: symbolic form (Langer 1930; Verhaegh 2024).

The importance of this move for the present argument is historical as well as philosophical. By beginning from Wittgenstein, Langer made the problem of symbolic form intelligible within an environment shaped by logic, analysis, and the philosophy of language. By moving beyond Wittgenstein, she opened that environment toward Cassirer. Her early work thus helped prepare a Harvard reception of Cassirer in which symbolic form could be understood not simply as a doctrine within neo-Kantian philosophy, but as a general problem concerning meaning, form, and cultural intelligibility (Wittgenstein 1922; Langer 1930; Cassirer 1944).

This is why Langer's engagement with Wittgenstein matters for the Harvard Hub. It shows the mechanism of her mediation. Wittgenstein supplies the analytic vocabulary of symbolic

representation; Langer exposes the insufficiency of that vocabulary when confronted with non-discursive meaning; and Cassirer provides the broader horizon in which symbolic forms can be understood as plural, cultural, and world-forming. Langer's originality lies in moving between these registers without abandoning philosophical rigor. She makes it possible to move from symbolic logic to symbolic form (Wittgenstein 1922; Langer 1930; Cassirer 1944).

2. Insight and Non-Discursive Symbolic Form

Langer's challenge to early analytic philosophy does not consist merely in identifying the limits of propositional analysis. Her more important contribution lies in the positive account of meaning she develops beyond those limits. Once symbolism is no longer confined to logical propositions, the central philosophical question changes. The problem is no longer only how language represents facts, but how symbolic forms organize experience, disclose structure, and make meaning available before it is fully discursively articulated (Langer 1930, 1942).

This is why the concept of insight becomes central to Langer's early philosophy. Insight is not, for her, a vague intuition opposed to reason. It is the apprehension of form. To understand something symbolically is not always to formulate a proposition about it; it may be to grasp a pattern, relation, configuration, or expressive structure. Such understanding can be cognitively significant even when it does not take the form of explicit discursive knowledge. In this sense, Langer expands the domain of rational meaning without reducing all meaning to statement (Langer 1930, 1942).

Her engagement with Gestalt psychology is important here. Gestalt theory allowed Langer to describe meaning as arising through organized wholes rather than through the mere aggregation of discrete elements. A form is not built up from atomistic sensations or isolated signs; it is apprehended as a structured unity. This gave Langer a way to explain how images, gestures, rituals, artworks, myths, and affective expressions can possess meaning without functioning as propositions. They are intelligible because they exhibit form (Langer 1930, 1942).

This account transforms the Tractarian distinction between saying and showing. In Wittgenstein, what can only be shown marks the boundary of meaningful discourse. Langer accepts that some forms of meaning cannot be discursively stated, but she refuses to identify the non-discursive with the meaningless. What is shown can still be symbolically organized. It may articulate relations, tensions, orientations, and forms of experience that propositional language cannot adequately capture. The non-discursive is therefore not a residue outside philosophy; it is a central domain of symbolic meaning (Wittgenstein 1922; Langer 1930, 1942).

The significance of this move is that Langer gives philosophical legitimacy to forms of meaning that early analytic philosophy tended either to exclude or to leave theoretically underdeveloped. Music, myth, ritual, image, gesture, and feeling are not treated as irrational supplements to thought. They are symbolic forms through which human beings organize and interpret experience. Their meaning is not necessarily translatable into propositions, but neither is it arbitrary or merely subjective. It is structured, formal, and communicable in ways proper to its medium (Langer 1942, 1953).

This is also where Langer's proximity to Cassirer becomes increasingly visible. Cassirer had argued that human beings inhabit worlds shaped by symbolic forms rather than merely encounter a pregiven world through neutral representation. Langer's theory of insight moves in the same direction. Symbolic meaning is not simply a linguistic mirror of reality; it is an active form of world-disclosure. Human understanding proceeds through forms that select, organize, and stabilize experience. These forms may be logical, linguistic, mythical, artistic, ritual, or scientific (Cassirer 1944; Langer 1942).

The crucial point for the present argument is that Langer's account of non-discursive form prepares the transition from analytic symbolism to a broader philosophy of culture. She preserves the analytic concern with form, structure, and symbolic mediation, but she detaches that concern from the

exclusive model of propositional representation. In doing so, she makes it possible to understand meaning as symbolically organized across a plurality of practices (Langer 1930, 1942; Cassirer 1944).

This move has consequences beyond aesthetics. If non-discursive forms can organize experience, then meaning is not exhausted by explicit doctrine, formal assertion, or scientific statement. It includes orientation, perception, affective patterning, and symbolic configuration. This broader conception of meaning is what allows Langer's work to enter the Harvard Hub as more than a contribution to art theory. It helps establish a philosophical vocabulary in which symbolic form can be connected to cognition, culture, and eventually historical transformation (Langer 1942; Cassirer 1944).

Langer's account of insight therefore marks a decisive stage in the movement from logical symbolism to symbolic form. It shows that the limits of propositional language are not the limits of meaningful experience. Rather, they indicate the need for a more expansive theory of symbolism — one capable of accounting for the forms through which human beings perceive, feel, imagine, classify, and inhabit worlds of meaning (Langer 1930, 1942).

3. Mediating Cassirer: From Symbolic Logic to Symbolic Forms

The expansion of symbolic understanding that emerges from Langer's account of insight leads directly beyond the limits of a purely logical conception of meaning. If meaning cannot be fully accounted for in terms of propositional structure, then the central problem is no longer only how symbols represent states of affairs. It is how different forms of symbolism organize experience and make worlds intelligible. This is where Cassirer becomes decisive for Langer, and where Langer becomes decisive for the Harvard reception of Cassirer (Langer 1930, 1942; Cassirer 1944).

Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms provides a framework in which meaning is no longer confined to logical representation. Human beings do not encounter a neutral world of facts that is subsequently named by language. Rather, they inhabit worlds shaped by symbolic forms. Language, myth, art, religion, science, and history are not merely different subject matters; they are different ways in which experience is formed, organized, and made intelligible. Cassirer therefore broadens the problem of knowledge into a philosophy of culture (Cassirer 1923–1929, 1944).

Langer's significance lies in the way she translates this Cassirerian problem into an American philosophical idiom. Her starting point remains the analytic problem of symbolic representation, but she refuses to make logical propositions the model for all meaning. Instead, she develops a theory of symbolic understanding in which myth, art, ritual, image, gesture, and feeling possess their own forms of articulation. In this sense, Langer does not abandon analytic philosophy. She carries its concern with symbolism, form, and clarity into a broader Cassirerian field (Langer 1930, 1942; Cassirer 1944).

This mediating function is central to her importance within the Harvard Hub. Cassirer's symbolic philosophy did not simply enter Harvard as a finished European doctrine. It had to become intelligible within a setting shaped by symbolic logic, pragmatism, psychology, and the analytic concern with representation. Langer helped make this possible. She showed that symbolic form could be analyzed rigorously without being reduced to logical syntax or propositional content. This gave Cassirerian symbolic theory a philosophical foothold within an American environment that might otherwise have treated it as too cultural, too speculative, or too distant from analytic method (Verhaegh 2024; Basafa 2025).

The point is especially clear in Langer's treatment of myth and non-discursive meaning. Myth is not, for her, merely failed science or primitive explanation. It is a symbolic form with its own internal organization. It structures experience through image, narrative, ritual, and affective orientation. Its meaning cannot be adequately captured if it is reduced to mistaken propositions about the world. It must be understood as a mode of symbolic articulation. Here Langer's transformation of Wittgenstein

and her proximity to Cassirer converge: what cannot be stated propositionally may still articulate a world of meaning (Cassirer 1946; Langer 1942).

This is why Langer's early work cannot be placed neatly within either analytic philosophy or aesthetics. Her concerns overlap with logic, language, symbolic representation, psychology, art, myth, and culture. She crosses boundaries that later disciplinary classifications would harden. This marginality is not a weakness of her project. It is precisely what makes her significant. She occupies the point at which analytic symbolism begins to open toward a philosophy of symbolic forms (Langer 1930, 1937, 1942; Verhaegh 2024).

Whitehead's presence in the Harvard milieu further deepens this point. His influence on Langer's later conception of living form helped reinforce her resistance to static or merely syntactical accounts of meaning. Form, for Langer, is not only logical structure. It is also organic, expressive, perceptual, and dynamic. This makes her reception of Cassirer distinctively Harvardian: symbolic form is filtered not only through analytic concerns about representation, but also through psychology, process, organism, and culture (Whitehead 1929, 1933; Dryden 1997; Langer 1953).

The consequences extend beyond aesthetics. Once symbolic form is understood as a general condition of meaning, science itself can no longer be interpreted only as a system of propositions connected to observations by logical rules. Science also depends on symbolic forms: mathematical structures, models, diagrams, instruments, classifications, analogies, images, and exemplary problem-solutions. These do not replace propositions, but they help organize the perceptual and conceptual field in which propositions become meaningful (Cassirer 1944; Langer 1942; Kuhn 1962, 1970).

Langer's role, therefore, is not simply to apply Cassirer to art. It is to show how symbolic form can function as a general philosophical category within an American analytic and psychological environment. She makes possible a broader conception of meaning in which logic, art, myth, science, and culture are not collapsed into one another, but understood as distinct modes of symbolic articulation. Each has its own form, its own medium, and its own way of organizing intelligibility (Langer 1942; Cassirer 1944).

This is the conceptual hinge of the paper. Wittgenstein gives Langer the problem of logical form and the limit of propositional language. Cassirer gives her the broader framework of symbolic forms. Langer's originality lies in mediating between these registers. She shows that meaning can be structured without being propositional, symbolic without being merely linguistic, and intelligible without being reducible to explicit statement. In doing so, she helped prepare a Harvard reception of Cassirer in which symbolic form could become relevant not only to aesthetics, but also to cognition, culture, and the historical understanding of science (Wittgenstein 1922; Cassirer 1944; Langer 1930, 1942).

4. From Symbolic Form to Historically Situated Meaning

The preceding sections have shown how Langer moves from the analytic problem of symbolic representation to a broader Cassirerian account of symbolic form. This final section asks what becomes possible once that move has been made. If meaning is not exhausted by propositional representation, but is organized through symbolic forms, then meaning can also be socially situated, collectively stabilized, and historically transformed. It is at this point that Langer's symbolic theory enters a wider constellation involving Mannheim, Sutton, Fleck, and Kuhn (Langer 1942; Cassirer 1944).

This constellation should not be understood as a simple chain of influence. Its importance lies instead in the formation of a shared problem-space. Langer helps make meaning thinkable as symbolic form rather than merely as logical proposition. Mannheim historicizes symbolic form as perspective. Fleck collectivizes scientific meaning through thought styles and thought collectives. Sutton helps locate

sociological approaches to knowledge within the Harvard milieu. Kuhn later transforms this constellation into a historical epistemology of scientific communities, crisis, and change (Mannheim 1936, 1952; Fleck 1935, 1979; Sutton et al. 1956; Kuhn 1962, 1970; Basafa 2025).

Mannheim's sociology of knowledge marks one important step in the historicization of meaning. For Mannheim, thought is not produced by an isolated logical subject confronting neutral facts. It is organized by historically situated perspectives. Social groups do not simply hold different opinions about the same world; their positions and historical situations shape what they can see, emphasize, ignore, and conceptualize. If Langer generalizes meaning symbolically, Mannheim historicizes it. Symbolic forms are not timeless structures detached from social life; they operate within concrete historical situations (Mannheim 1936, 1952).

This connection must be drawn carefully. Langer's symbolic forms and Mannheim's perspectives are not identical. Langer is concerned primarily with symbolic articulation; Mannheim with the social conditioning of thought. But together they define a wider problem-field in which meaning is structured, mediated, and historically conditioned. Langer shows that meaning exceeds propositional form. Mannheim shows that structured meaning is not socially innocent (Langer 1942; Mannheim 1936, 1952).

Fleck brings this problem-field directly into science. His theory of thought styles and thought collectives shows how scientific knowledge is stabilized within communities of practice. Scientific facts are not merely given to isolated observers. They become facts within historically formed styles of thought, sustained by training, shared concepts, instruments, habits of perception, and collective standards. Fleck therefore provides a specifically scientific version of the broader movement from logical representation to historically situated meaning. If Langer emphasizes symbolic form, and Mannheim emphasizes social perspective, Fleck shows how scientific communities inhabit shared forms of seeing and judging (Fleck 1935, 1979).

Sutton's importance lies in locating this constellation within the Harvard milieu. His role is not that of a system-builder comparable to Cassirer, Mannheim, or Fleck. Rather, he helps show that sociological approaches to knowledge, ideology, and social structure were part of the intellectual environment in which questions of scientific rationality could be reconsidered. Kuhn's interactions with Sutton during his time at the Harvard Society of Fellows indicate that such sociological concerns were not merely external background themes. They belonged to the institutional and intellectual atmosphere in which Kuhn's thought developed (Sutton et al. 1956; Basafa 2025).

Kuhn's later philosophy of science can then be understood as a transformation of this wider problem-space. The familiar account presents Kuhn primarily as a critic of logical empiricism. That account remains important, but it is incomplete. Kuhn's historical epistemology also emerged within a constellation in which symbolic form, social perspective, historical consciousness, and scientific practice were already in circulation. His early language of "professional ideology," "ideological crisis," and the emergence of a "new ideology" shows that scientific communities were being conceived not merely as groups holding theories, but as communities inhabiting historically structured forms of meaning (Kuhn 1962, 1970, 2022; Basafa 2025).

This is where Langer's contribution becomes visible without being overstated. Her role is not to provide Kuhn with a sociology of science or a theory of scientific revolutions. Her contribution is earlier and more basic: she helps explain how the philosophical analysis of meaning could move from logical representation to symbolic form without abandoning structure. Kuhn's paradigms are not merely sets of propositions. They involve exemplars, trained perception, models, instruments, standards, patterns of similarity, and tacit modes of judgment. Such features become more intelligible once meaning is understood as structured symbolic form rather than as propositional content alone (Langer 1930, 1942; Kuhn 1962, 1970).

The point can be put sharply: Langer helps explain how meaning could move from logic to culture without becoming formless. Mannheim shows how such forms are historically situated. Fleck shows how they are stabilized within scientific collectives. Sutton places sociological questions about knowledge within the Harvard environment. Kuhn shows how historically situated forms of meaning can govern scientific communities and be transformed through crisis. The movement from Langer to Kuhn is therefore not a direct line of influence, but a transformation of a problem: how forms of meaning organize experience, become socially and professionally stabilized, and change historically (Langer 1942; Mannheim 1936; Fleck 1935, 1979; Sutton et al. 1956; Kuhn 1962, 1970).

This revised constellation also clarifies why Langer belongs in the broader history of philosophy of science. Scientific rationality, on the Kuhnian view, is not exhausted by explicit rules, propositions, or observational reports. It depends on forms of seeing, modeling, exemplifying, and judging that are acquired through training and sustained within communities. Langer's theory of symbolic form helps make these non-propositional dimensions of rationality philosophically available. She shows that non-discursive meaning is not formless, irrational, or merely subjective. It has structure. It can be analyzed. It can orient understanding (Kuhn 1962, 1970; Langer 1942; Basafa 2025).

In the final analysis, the significance of Langer's contribution lies in making the historicity of meaning thinkable. If meaning were only propositional representation, then historical variation would appear merely as a change in beliefs or theories. But if meaning is symbolic form, then historical variation can affect perception, orientation, expression, and the structure of intelligibility itself. This is the deeper path from Langer to Kuhn: a transformation in the philosophical understanding of meaning that makes Kuhn's historical epistemology of science more intelligible (Langer 1942; Cassirer 1944; Kuhn 1962, 1970).

Langer therefore occupies a pivotal place in this constellation. Cassirer provides the philosophy of symbolic forms; Langer translates that problem into an American analytic and psychological idiom; Mannheim historicizes perspective; Fleck collectivizes scientific cognition; Sutton helps locate sociological approaches to knowledge within the Harvard milieu; and Kuhn transforms these concerns into an account of scientific change. Langer's role is to mediate between logical symbolism and symbolic form. That is why she belongs not only in the history of aesthetics, but in the broader history of twentieth-century attempts to understand rationality as mediated by symbolic and historical forms (Cassirer 1944; Langer 1930, 1942; Mannheim 1936; Fleck 1935, 1979; Sutton et al. 1956; Kuhn 1962, 1970).

Conclusion

Susanne K. Langer's early work should not be understood merely as a prelude to her later philosophy of art. Nor should it be treated only as an episode in the American reception of Wittgenstein. Its broader significance lies in the mediating role Langer played within the Harvard Hub, where symbolic logic, analytic philosophy, pragmatism, psychology, Cassirerian symbolic form, sociology of knowledge, and historical approaches to science came into contact (Langer 1930, 1942; Verhaegh 2024; Basafa 2025).

Langer's engagement with Wittgenstein reveals the philosophical mechanism of this mediation. By beginning from the Tractarian problem of symbolic representation, she accepted the analytic demand for clarity, structure, and rigor. Yet she also showed that logical symbolism could not exhaust the domain of meaning. Insight, Gestalt recognition, image, ritual, myth, art, and feeling all involve forms of symbolic articulation that cannot be reduced to propositions. In this respect, Langer's challenge to early analytic philosophy was a challenge from within: she preserved the concern with form while expanding the field of meaning beyond propositional representation (Wittgenstein 1922; Langer 1930, 1942).

This expansion brought Langer into decisive proximity with Cassirer. Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms provided the broader framework in which language, myth, art, religion, science, and culture could be understood as distinct modes of world-formation. Langer's contribution was to make this conception philosophically available within the Harvard environment. She translated Cassirerian symbolic form into an idiom shaped by symbolic logic, analytic method, psychology, and American philosophical concerns. In doing so, she helped prepare a Harvard reception of Cassirer that extended beyond aesthetics and entered questions of cognition, culture, and scientific meaning (Cassirer 1923–1929, 1944; Langer 1942; Verhaegh 2024).

The importance of this mediation becomes clearer when Langer is placed alongside Mannheim, Sutton, Fleck, and Kuhn. Mannheim historicized knowledge as perspective; Fleck showed how scientific facts are stabilized within thought collectives; Sutton helped locate sociological approaches to knowledge within the Harvard milieu; and Kuhn later transformed problems of symbolic organization, professional formation, and historical change into a powerful account of scientific development. These figures should not be arranged as a simple causal sequence. They belong instead to a shared problem-space in which meaning is no longer understood merely as logical representation, but as symbolically structured, socially situated, and historically transformable (Mannheim 1936, 1952; Fleck 1935, 1979; Sutton et al. 1956; Kuhn 1962, 1970).

Langer's role in this constellation is therefore specific and indispensable. She stands at the point where logical symbolism opens toward symbolic form, and where symbolic form becomes available for historical interpretation. Her work helps explain how meaning could move from logic to culture without becoming formless, irrational, or merely subjective. This is why her early philosophy belongs not only to the history of aesthetics or the history of analytic philosophy, but also to the broader history of twentieth-century attempts to understand rationality as mediated by symbolic forms (Langer 1930, 1942; Cassirer 1944).

Seen from this perspective, Langer emerges as a pivotal figure in the Harvard Hub. She did not simply transmit Cassirer, nor did she merely depart from Wittgenstein. She transformed the analytic problem of symbolism into a broader theory of symbolic form and thereby helped prepare the conceptual ground on which questions of meaning, cognition, culture, and scientific change could be brought together. Her philosophical significance lies precisely in this mediating achievement: she made symbolic form available as a rigorous, plural, and historically fertile category for understanding human worlds (Wittgenstein 1922; Cassirer 1944; Langer 1930, 1942; Kuhn 1962; Basafa 2025).

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