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Vital Rhythm and Temporal Form in Langer and Dewey

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I. Langer's Dismissal of Dewey

Early in *Feeling and Form* Susanne Langer disparages what she calls “the pragmatic outlook” in philosophy for its purported reduction of human experience, including aesthetic experience, to “‘drives’ motivated by animal needs” (1953, 35). She claims that this assumption “limits the class of admitted human interests to such as can, by one device or another, be interpreted in terms of animal psychology” (53). As Langer sees it, this “pragmatic outlook” necessitates a theory of art in which “aesthetic values must be treated either as direct satisfactions, i.e. pleasures, or as instrumental values, that is to say, means to fulfillment of biological needs” (36).

John Dewey is among the theorists Langer finds culpable in this regard. In support of her claim that Dewey is guilty of conflating aesthetic and “practical” experience, she cites a passage from *Art as Experience*:

The forces that create the gulf between producer and consumer in modern society operate to create also a chasm between ordinary and esthetic experience. Finally we locate it in a region inhabited by no other creature, and that emphasize beyond all reason the merely contemplative character of the esthetic.¹

Langer interprets Dewey as meaning that there is no essential difference between “artistic experience” and “ordinary physical, practical, and social experience,” and therefore that there is none between the emotions generated in aesthetic experience and those that emerge in mundane experience (36). This position is inimical to her own, according to which “to treat great art as a source of experiences not essentially different from the experiences of daily life . . . is to miss the very essence of it.” Aesthetic experience is:

different from any other, the attitude toward works of art is a highly special one, the characteristic response is an entirely separate emotion, something more than common enjoyment—not related to the pleasures or displeasures furnished by

one's actual surroundings, and therefore disturbed by them rather than integrated with the contemporary scene. (36, my italics)

Furthermore, Langer admonishes,

This conviction does not spring from a sentimental concern for the glamour and dignity of the arts, as Mr. Dewey suggests; it arises from the fact that when people in whom appreciation for some art . . . is spontaneous and pronounced, are induced by a psychological fashion to reflect on their attitude toward the works they appreciate, they find it not at all comparable with the attitude they have toward a new automobile, a beloved creature, or a glorious morning. They feel a different emotion, and in a different way. (36–37)

Langer's overt contempt for Dewey's aesthetics can be explained at least partially by her antipragmatist bias. She mistakenly assumes that Dewey, like other "pragmatist" aestheticians, reduces aesthetic experience (and all "human interests") to "direct or oblique manifestations of 'drives' motivated by animal needs" (35).² She is understandably concerned to protect the arts and aesthetic experience from theories that would trivialize their power to "define and develop human feelings" and their meaningfulness in human life—a power so great that she likens it to that of religion (402). There is something peculiar, though, about Langer's criticisms of Dewey in *Feeling and Form*. In making them, she seems inclined to misrepresent precisely those aspects of his aesthetic theory which are in fact most consistent with her own. In Chapter 3 of *Art as Experience*, for instance, Dewey critiques the tendency to treat the distinction between the "artistic," constructive process of creation and the "aesthetic," receptive process of perception as if it were a dichotomy according to which only the artist actively creates and the audience-perceiver merely "takes in" work for contemplation. In an extended discussion, he examines how the activities of both artist and perceiver are simultaneously constructive and receptive (*LW* 10:53–61). Late in *Feeling and Form*, however, Langer attributes to Dewey the very dichotomy that he rejects. What she thinks to be a rejoinder to Dewey is in fact consistent with her own view: "Actually, of course, we move freely from one attitude to the other; every responsive person has some creative imagination, and certainly every artist must perceive and enjoy art, if only to be his own first public" (1953, 397n.4).

In what follows, I wish to examine a noteworthy consistency between Langer's and Dewey's aesthetics. Equally central to both philosophers' theories of aesthetic form is the concept of "vital rhythm." In both theories, vital rhythm is that which shapes and constitutes aesthetic forms, so that these forms (including art "objects") are not static entities, but are by their very nature temporal. Langer departs from Dewey, though, in her commitment to a doctrine of semblance developed from Friedrich Schiller's notion of *Schein*. According to Langer, works of fine art are pure appearances, or "illusions," whose function is to create "a new dimension, apart from the familiar world," in which forms are "set free from their normal

embodiment in real things so that they might be recognized in their own right” (50). I want to suggest that Langer’s commitment to the doctrine of semblance probably accounts largely for her inability to acknowledge the correspondences between Dewey’s account of rhythm in aesthetic form and her own.

II. Vital Rhythm as Formative

Since *Art as Experience* appeared nineteen years before *Feeling and Form*, let us turn first to Dewey’s account of rhythm in that work. To understand this account it is important to recall one of the central tenets of his aesthetics. What aesthetics studies is not the art “object,” a thing construed to be ontologically independent of the experiences and activities of creator and perceiver. “In common conception,” Dewey observes, “the work of art is often identified with the building, book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience” (*LW* 10:9). But to think of art in this way is to distort the true nature of art and the artwork, for “the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience” (10:9). It is a “work” in the sense of being constituted by a process of its creator’s (or creators’) *working with* the material of his or her art. In so doing the artist works *through* the initial impulsion that gave rise to his desire to create this work and transforms the impulsion’s energy consciously and qualitatively “into thoughtful action, through the assimilation of meanings from the background of past experiences” (10:66). Thus “the real work of art” is a process, not simply an object; it is “the building up of an integral experience out of the interaction of organic and environmental conditions and energies” (10:70). This is true of the role of the perceiver as well, including the artist as perceiver of his own work. It is also true of how communities “perceive” and incorporate works important to their traditions, such as the Bible or the Ramayana. The act of perception, which is not to be confused with mere recognition, is at once active and receptive—“an act of reconstructive doing” in which the perceiver engages in “a series of responsive acts that accumulate toward objective fulfillment” (10:58–59). The interactive process of creative/reconstructive doing and receptive undergoing is perhaps most easily exemplified in the performing arts, as when a soloist creates a performance of Bach’s unaccompanied Cello Suite No. 1 in G major. The performance is an interpretation of the Bach suite, but it is at the same time an actualization—a bringing into being—of the music itself.³ But analogous processes are involved in the creation and perception of artworks in any genre. “The real work of an artist,” Dewey maintains, “is to build up an experience that is coherent in perception while moving with constant change in its development” (10:57).

The dynamic nature of the artwork is rooted in the temporal quality of all aesthetic experiencing. A distinctly aesthetic experience consists in “conversion of

resistances and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close”—a consummation (10:62). This is not only true of experiences of artworks: one may experience aesthetically the textures of an aspen tree, a virtuously lived life, or—Dewey’s own example—the activity of selecting and arranging the furnishings of a room (10:141). In each case, “even at first glance there is the sense of qualitative unity. There is form” (10:141).⁴ Form is present in every experience that has aesthetic quality—to use Dewey’s term, in *an* experience. Form is not a static quality or entity, but is by its very nature temporal. Dewey defines form as “*the operation of forces that carry the experience of an event, object, scene and situation to its own integral fulfillment*” (10:142; Dewey’s italics). Aesthetic form is not an ideal that is given antecedently to the creation of an artwork, nor, as we have seen, is it a static structure given as complete once a work is created.

The “first characteristic of the environing world that makes possible the existence of artistic form” is rhythm (10:152). By “rhythm,” Dewey does not mean meter, or uniformly ordered sequence, but rather “ordered variation of changes.” “Where there is a uniformly even flow, with no variations of intensity or speed,” he insists, “there is no rhythm. There is stagnation even though it be the stagnation of unvarying motion” (10:158). Dewey offers an extensive account of how the inescapable involvement of the human organism in the rhythms of nature—day and night, the cycles of the seasons, sleeping and waking, the cycles of reproduction, growth, decay, and renewal—provide the originary conditions for the emergence of artistic forms. He remarks, “sooner or later [in human prehistory], the participation of man in nature’s rhythms . . . induced him to impose rhythm on changes where they did not appear” (10:153). The experienced rhythms of nature and of human life,

[experiences] of war, of hunt, of sowing and reaping, of the death and resurrection of vegetation, of stars circling over watchful shepherds, of constant return of the incessant moon, were undergone to be reproduced in pantomime and generated the sense of life as drama. The mysterious movements of serpent, elk, boar, fell into rhythms of voice and the self-contained movements of the body, and out of the union technical arts gained the quality of fine art. Then the apprehended rhythms of nature were employed to introduce evident order into some phase of the confused observations and images of mankind. Man no longer conformed his activities of necessity to the rhythmic changes of nature’s cycles, but used those which necessity forced upon him to celebrate his relations to nature as if she had conferred upon him the freedom of her realm. (10:153)

Rhythm, Dewey maintains, is a “universal scheme of existence, underlying all realizations of order in change.” Hence “it pervades all the arts, literary, musical, plastic and architectural, as well as the dance” (10:154). The delight that we take in “rhythmic portrayals and presentations” in both the plastic and performative

arts originates in our recognition that these aesthetic forms “are instances of the relationships that determine the course of life, natural and achieved” (10:155).

Langer’s account of vital rhythm is strikingly similar to Dewey’s. Her analysis of the rhythmic principle in art begins with the consideration of music.⁵ “The tonal structures we call ‘music,’” she maintains,

bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling—forms of growth and attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm, or subtle activation and dreamy lapses . . . the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt. Such is the pattern, or logical form, of sentence; and the pattern of music is that same form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. Music is a tonal analogue of emotive life. (Langer 1953, 27)

Music is not identical with emotive life, because “sound is a negotiable medium, capable of voluntary composition and repetition, whereas feeling is not” (27). Rather, a musical work—indeed, any artwork—is a complex symbol, a “significant form” (or “symbolic form”). The meaning of a significant form, its “vital import,” is first “felt as a quality rather than recognized as a function” (32).⁶ However, the aim of musical and other significant forms is not to stimulate affect (106), but to convey *understanding* of emotion through nondiscursive but nevertheless conceptual means.

Music, of all the arts, provides the most evident illustration of the relation between the life of feeling and significant form because both music and emotive life are ineluctably temporal. Langer approvingly quotes Eduard Hanslick’s definition of the content of music as “*tönend bewegte Formen*,” which she translates as “sounding forms in motion” (107).⁷ These tonal forms move in “a realm of pure duration,” which is “an image of what might be termed ‘lived’ or ‘experienced’ time” (109). The essence of music, then, is to create “an order of virtual time, in which its sonorous forms move in relation to each other—always and only to each other” (109), a passage of time entirely determined “by the movement of audible forms” (114). The purpose of music, Langer maintains, is “to organize our conception of feeling [so as] to give us an insight into what may truly be called the ‘life of feeling,’ or subjective unity of experience.” It does so “by the same principle that organizes physical existence into a biological design—rhythm” (116).

Like Dewey, Langer argues that rhythm is an organizing principle not only in music, but in all art forms (1953, *passim*). She insists, as does Dewey, that rhythm is not identical with or reducible to musical meter or the ticking of a clock (126). Its essence is “the setting up of new tensions by the resolution of former ones.” The essence of rhythm is what might be called anticipative passage, “the preparation of a new event by the ending of a previous one.” In language that could easily have come from Dewey, she states that the presence of rhythm enables us to “sense a beginning, intent, and consummation, and see in the last stage of one the condition and indeed the rise of another” (127). Once rhythm

is understood as a relation between tensions, we can see that rhythm in music does not consist merely in meter, but that “harmonic progressions, resolutions of dissonances, directions of ‘running’ passages, and ‘tendency tones’ [leading tones] in melody all serve as rhythmic agents.” Whatever “prepares a future” through bringing about or intensifying expectation creates rhythm, and whatever fulfills this anticipation, “in ways foreseen or unforeseen, articulates the symbol of feeling.” Along with the principles of repetition and variation, rhythm “gives musical composition the appearance of vital growth” (129).⁸

Thus, like Dewey, Langer insists that the rhythms that constitute aesthetic forms are organic, as they emerge from and are reflective of the vital rhythms that underlie human life and experience in general. “Vital organization is the frame of all feeling,” she maintains (126), “because feeling exists only in living organisms; and the logic of all symbols that can express feeling is the logic of organic processes. The most characteristic principle of vital activity is rhythm.” Vitality is found even in the most basic physiological rhythms, such as those of breathing and the heartbeat, and “the exhaustion of a vital process [such as physical exertion] always stimulates a corrective action [such as breathing more oxygen into the body].” Likewise, Dewey states, “life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it,” a recovery that always constitutes growth, because it is “enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed” (*LW* 10:19). According to Langer, these examples illustrate “the principle of rhythmic continuity,” which “is the basis of that organic unity which gives permanence to living bodies”—a “permanence” which is actually “a pattern of changes” (1953, 127). The mind “even in its highest operations”, and indeed the whole of our human inner life (thought, emotion, imagination, and sense), “follows the organic rhythm which is the source of vital unity” (127–28).⁹

A musical composition, according to Langer, is an organic form. “The essence of all composition—tonal or atonal, vocal or instrumental, even purely percussive, as you will—is the semblance of *organic* movement. . . . The rhythmic character of organism permeates music, because music is a symbolic presentation of the highest organic response, the emotional life of human beings” (126). “[A] piece of music exists in embryo” (note the metaphor indicating organic growth) as soon as its composer comes to recognize its *Gestalt*, the general “commanding form” it will take. Once this happens, the skilled and attentive composer makes his or her creative choices according to the “fundamental movement of the piece,” which shapes it “by a sort of implicit logic that all conscious activity serves to make explicit” (121–22). “Like a living organism [the musical work] maintains its identity,” Langer claims.

In light of Langer’s account of the rhythmic principle in music, Dewey’s description of the conditions for the development of aesthetic form itself sounds strikingly musical. The following passage is notably evokes the principles governing the composition of the symphony.

There can be no movement toward a consummating close unless there is a progressive massing of values, a cumulative effect. This result cannot exist without conservation of the import that has gone before. Moreover, to secure the needed continuity, the accumulated experience must be such as to create suspense and anticipation of resolution. Accumulation is at the same time preparation, *as with each phase of the growth of a living embryo*. Only that is carried on which is led up to; otherwise there is arrest and a break. For this reason consummation is relative; instead of occurring once for all at a given point, it is recurrent. The final end is anticipated by rhythmic pauses, while that end is final only in an external way. For as we turn from reading a poem or novel or seeing a picture the effect presses forward in further experiences, even if only subconsciously. (*LW* 10:142; my italics)

III. The Germanic Divide

The remarkable similarity between the roles of the concept of rhythm in Langer's and Dewey's thought renders Langer's harsh criticism of Dewey puzzling. From her cavalier dismissal in *Feeling and Form*, it would appear that Langer had never read *Art as Experience* closely, or even that she had read beyond the first three chapters. Yet the language she uses in her own discussion of the organic nature of rhythm appears to suggest an unacknowledged debt to Dewey's aesthetics.

One key to understanding this antinomy surely lies in her commitment to a Kantian idea of art as a rational construct to be evaluated disinterestedly. According to Langer, every "real" work of art "has a tendency to appear *dissociated* from its mundane environment" (1953, 45). Its most immediate impression is that of "otherness" from directly lived reality; and "this detachment from actuality" (i.e., from the world of practical lived experience) is "indicative of the very nature of art" (46). Insofar as it exists only for perception, the artist's creation is an image; i.e., it "presents itself as a sheer visual [or audible] form *instead of a locally and practically related object*" (47; my italics). Langer appropriates the term "semblance" (*Schein*) from Friedrich Schiller to designate the illusory nature of art.¹⁰ Works of fine art are pure semblances, or appearances; the entirety of their being consists in "how they appear." The function of semblance is to create "a new dimension, apart from the familiar world," in which forms are "set free from their normal embodiment in real things so that they may be recognized in their own right" (50). Musical "motion," for example, is not actual motion, but rather a semblance of physical displacement (108), and the "primary illusion" of music, its essence, is the semblance of vital growth and movement, not such growth and movement itself. The function of artistic illusion is "disengagement from belief," such that "the knowledge that what is before us has no practical

significance in the world is what enables us to give attention to its appearance as such" (49).

The illusory nature of art is what permits it to be symbolic of the life of feeling rather than to embody it. Symbols, including the symbols that compose artistic significative forms, are abstractions; they compose *virtual* time and *virtual* space. The virtual time constituted by music, for instance, is entirely self-contained and independent of time as we experience it in ordinary life. "The purpose of all musical labor, in thought or in physical activity," Langer maintains, "is to create and develop the illusion of flowing time in its passage, an audible passage filled with motion that is just as illusory as the time it is measuring" (120). The realm of pure duration in which "sounding forms" move is essentially and radically distinct from "practically" lived or experienced time because it abstracts from time as it influences and is felt within the practical concerns of ordinary experience. Genuine musical listening, too, requires an act of cognitive abstraction, namely, "the perception of feeling through a purely apparent flow of life existing only in time" (148).

The doctrine of semblance allows Langer to defend her claim that aesthetic emotions differ entirely from "ordinary" emotions. An aesthetic emotion, in her view, is one that stems from and accompanies the intellectual acts of understanding the life of feeling as it is symbolized in a significant form. The purpose of music, for example, is "not the symptomatic expression of feelings that beset the composer but a symbolic expression of the forms of sentience as he understands them. It speaks his imagination of feelings rather than his own emotional state, and expresses what he *knows* about the so-called 'inner life'" (18). Similarly, the perceiver (the listener, in this case) must maintain psychical distance from his or her own extramusical emotive concerns in order to "experience the primary illusion" of the piece, to "feel the consistent movement" and recognize the form "which makes the piece an inviolable whole" (147). This is the difference between enjoying music and "enjoying [oneself] unmusically during music" (148). Aesthetic emotions, then, are those that are proper to and stem from the appreciation of aesthetic forms, not emotive reactions stemming from one's personal life. The ideal condition of aesthetic experience, as Roger Fry maintains, is "disinterested intensity of contemplation" (1925, 29; quoted in Langer 1953, 37–38).

Langer's concept of aesthetic symbolic forms as semblances, and her claim that the semblance of a thing is its "direct aesthetic quality" (1953, 50), would of course be problematic for Dewey. In the first place, he tends to describe artworks—their creation, performance, and reception—in terms of processes of enactment rather than as appearances. In Langer's view, an artwork *appears as* a form constituted dynamically through rhythm; in Dewey's, an artwork is a nexus of relationships which *enact* vital rhythms (e.g., *LW* 10:30, 10:33, 10:60, 10:66–71, 10:153). From Dewey's point of view, treating aesthetic forms as pure appearances or illusions risks divorcing art from lived experience, regardless of how closely the form of the illusion may be metaphorically linked with the forms of "actual"

experience. Langer, on the other hand, would be inclined to find in Dewey's enactment model the same crude utilitarianism that she imagines to be characteristic of pragmatist theories in general. At the very least she would find a failure to account for the uniqueness of the most important aesthetic experiences.

Despite Langer's misunderstandings of Dewey, her account of rhythm in aesthetic experience provides a complement to his. In particular, her analysis of rhythmic form in Western art music, informed by her own considerable musical training, is invaluable. Although Dewey's discussion of rhythm is compelling, the arts he analyzes in terms of it are mainly the literary and the visual. Langer is correct in her claim that the import of music is "the pattern of sentience—the pattern of life itself, as it is felt and directly known" (1953, 31). As such, its place in a theory of art and aesthetic experience must be central.

Notes

1. The passage, which I cite above as Langer renders it (1953, 36n.13), is in fact misquoted. The correct text, restoring the opening clause that she chooses to omit, is: "Put the action of all such forces together, and the conditions that create the gulf which exists generally between producer and consumer in modern society operate to create also a chasm between ordinary and esthetic experience. Finally we have, as a record of this chasm, accepted as if it were normal, the philosophies of art that locate it in a region inhabited by no other creature, and that emphasize beyond all reason the merely contemplative character of the aesthetic" (Dewey 1934, 10; also *LW* 10:15–16).

The context of this quotation is Dewey's critique of the "museum conception of art," a term he uses to signify dualistic aesthetic theories that treat the fine arts and their aims as inhabiting a rarefied domain that is essentially separate from the rest of lived experience. The "forces" he has in mind are the cultural and historical conditions that contributed to the emergence of such theories and served to reinforce them in practice. Among them, Dewey identifies the establishment around the turn of the nineteenth century of the museum as a repository of objects of nationalistic pride (both those significant for the nation's mythos and those from cultures the nation had conquered militarily); the emergence of a *nouveau riche* capitalist class who collected costly artworks to establish themselves as cultured; and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon of communities building institutions of fine art, which Dewey claims were intended to "reflect and establish superior cultural status," so that "objects that were in the past valid and significant because of their place in the life of a community now function in isolation from the conditions of their origin" (*LW* 10:14–15). Furthermore, in response to these conditions, "[a] peculiar esthetic individualism results" among artists; "in order not to cater to the trend of economic forces, they often feel obliged to exaggerate their separateness to the point of eccentricity" (10:15).

2. Dewey makes it clear very early in *Art as Experience* that his own theory rejects such reductionism, which he traces to the same practical conditions that have resulted in aesthetic dualism. "My purpose . . . is to indicate that *theories* which isolate art and its appreciation by placing [the arts] in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes of experiencing, are not inherent in the subject-matter [of the arts] but arise because of specifiable extraneous conditions. Embedded as they are in institutions and in habits of life, these conditions operate effectively because they work so unconsciously. Then the theorist assumes they are embedded in the nature of things. Nevertheless, the influence of these conditions is not confined to theory. As I have already indicated, it deeply affects the practice of living, driving away esthetic perceptions that are necessary ingredients of happiness, *or reducing them to the level of compensating transient pleasurable excitations*" (*LW* 10:16; my italics).

In response to Langer's charge of sensual reductionism, it is also important to recall Dewey's distinction between impulsion and expression. Impulsion is "a movement outward and forward of the whole organism," as in the example of an animal's craving for food, "to which special impulses," such

as the mechanics of swallowing, “are auxiliary.” Impulsion is the starting point of every experience because impulsions “proceed from need” and “demand completion,” and such need “is a dynamic acknowledgment of this dependence of the self for wholeness upon its surroundings” (10:64–65). Impulsion, however, is not a sufficient condition for expression, whether or not the expression be fully artistic or aesthetic. For impulsions to be transformed into expressions, they must be subjected to a conscious, qualitative “transformation of [the impulsion’s] energy into thoughtful action, through the assimilation of meanings from the background of past experiences” (10:66). Dewey is careful to point out that the result of this process is not an amalgam of new impulsions and past interpretations, “but is a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the ‘stored,’ material is literally revived, given new life and soul through having to meet a new situation” (10.66).

3. We can turn to Langer’s discussion of musical performance to elucidate this relation. “Performance is the completion of a musical work, a logical continuation of the composition, carrying the creation through from thought to physical expression. . . . Composition and performance are not neatly separable at the stage marked by the finishing of the score; for both spring from the commanding form and are governed throughout by its demands and enticements” (Langer 1953, 138). “Real performance is as creative an act as composition, just as the composer’s own working out of the idea, after he has conceived the greatest movement and therewith the whole commanding form, is still creative work. The performer simply carries it on. He may be the composer himself; in that case what he carries to completion may be a composition he has previously thought out, perhaps even written out . . . or he may be inventing it then and there (‘improvising’). If he is not the composer, then the commanding form is given to him; a variable but usually considerable amount of detail in the development of the form is given; but the final decision of *what every tone sounds like* rests with him” (139). For Langer’s concept of “commanding form,” see below.

4. This is why Dewey would disagree with Langer that an experience of “a new automobile, a beloved creature, or a glorious morning” cannot be aesthetic. What determines an experience to be distinctively aesthetic is neither the nature of the object that is perceived nor a special “detached” or “distanced” attitude. Rather, a distinctively aesthetic experience is one that consists in “conversion of resistances and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close” (*LW* 10:62). This sense of consummation is not to be thought of as the “outcome” of an aesthetic experience, and that is what distinguishes dominantly aesthetic experiences from those primarily concerned mainly with practical problem-solving or the satisfaction of utilitarian needs. Thus, even my appreciation of a new automobile would be distinctly aesthetic if it consists in attention to its unifying contours as they unfold in perception—not only to its structural appearance, necessarily, but also, perhaps, to its responsiveness, handling, and so forth while being driven. If my concern is largely with the car as means—of transportation, of impressing my social circle, of saving fuel by choosing it rather than a sports-utility vehicle—my experience is dominantly practical rather than aesthetic, although it is unlikely to be entirely devoid of aesthetic quality (see *LW* 10:42–50 and 61–63). Aesthetic experience, then, is an intensification of experiences as such rather than an essentially different kind of experience. “An object is peculiarly and dominantly esthetic, yielding the enjoyment characteristic of esthetic perception, when the factors that determine anything which can be called *an* experience are lifted high above the threshold of perception and are made manifest for their own sake” (10:63).

5. It should be noted that Langer consistently treats Western art music, especially instrumental music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as paradigmatic of all music. This assumption derives from the German Enlightenment insistence upon the autonomy of each particular art form and from the subsequent Romantic hope that instrumental music could provide a transcendent “universal language of art” (see Goehr 1992, 153–54). Although I do not think Langer’s predisposition compromises or vitiates her account of vital rhythm, it does contribute to certain weaknesses in her theory, including an inability to account for improvisational music and considerable difficulty in dealing with vocal music. She asks, for instance, whether vocal music can be justified as properly musical, and she goes to great length to account for how two otherwise autonomous art forms (the literary and the musical) can be transformed into one essentially musical form. Langer’s concern is reasonable once one accepts the principle of the autonomy of each art form, but her question would be inconceivable to the

Greeks, who always recited poetry as song because it was considered to be intrinsically verbal and intrinsically musical.

6. In deference to the way the term “meaning” was understood in the Anglo-American philosophy of language of her time, as implying “conventional reference,” Langer finds its use inappropriate in speaking about significant form, “the articulate but non-discursive form having import without conventional reference” (Langer 1953, 32). In this essay, I use “meaning” in its more generic, commonly used sense.

7. Geoffrey Payzant supplements his translation of *Vom musikalisch-schönen* with an essay, “Toward a Revised Reading of Hanslick,” in which he discusses his translation of “*tönend bewegte Formen*” as “tonally moving forms” (Hanslick 1891, 29; Payzant 1986).

8. Langer’s point is clearly illustrated through Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 in C minor. Beethoven’s development of the famous four-note motif throughout the symphony, especially its harmonic and rhythmic transformation in the transition between the third and fourth movements, is a masterful example of the building and fulfillment of musical anticipations.

9. Contrary to Langer’s misreading of Dewey as a biological reductionist, he cautions, “The supposition that the interest in rhythm which dominates the fine arts can be explained simply on the basis of rhythmic processes in the living body is but another case of separation of organism from environment” (*LW* 10:155). In other words, Dewey, like Langer, is well aware that the vital rhythms expressed through art are not reducible to the physiological.

10. According to Schiller in his twenty-sixth *Aesthetic Letter* (1795, 190–99), to perceive a phenomenon as semblance and to delight in it (*die Freude am Schein*) is to perceive its beauty independently of any concern with or judgment pertaining to its actuality or reality—i.e., to perceive it under its aesthetic aspect. Langer comments: “Schiller was the first thinker who saw what really makes ‘Schein,’ or semblance, important for art: the fact that it liberates perception—and with it, the power of conception—from all practical purposes, and lets the mind dwell on the sheer appearance of things” (1953, 49).

Although Langer explicitly translates *Schein* as “semblance,” the term “illusion” in her aesthetics expresses the same concept and is not to be taken pejoratively, as if it suggested “deception” or “delusion.” This is consistent with Schiller’s conception of *Schein* (1795, 192–93): “To attach value to [aesthetic] semblance . . . can never be prejudicial to truth, because one is never in danger of substituting it for truth, which is after all the only way in which truth can ever be impaired.” Later, he argues, “Only inasmuch as it is honest (expressly renounces claims to reality), and only inasmuch as it is autonomous (dispenses with all support from reality), is semblance aesthetic. From the moment it is dishonest, and simulates reality, or from the moment it is impure, and has need of reality to make its effect, it is nothing but a base instrument for material ends, and affords no evidence whatsoever of any freedom of the spirit” (196–97; emphasis deleted).

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