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## Susanne Langer and the American development of analytic philosophy

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### Abstract

Susanne K. Langer is best known as a philosopher of culture and student of Ernst Cassirer. In this paper, however, I argue that this standard picture ignores her contributions to the development of analytic philosophy in the 1920s and 1930s. I reconstruct the reception of Langer's first book *The Practice of Philosophy*—arguably the first sustained defense of analytic philosophy by an American philosopher—and describe how prominent European philosophers of science such as Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, and Herbert Feigl viewed her as one of the most important allies in the United States. In the second half of this paper, I turn to Langer's best-selling *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) and reconstruct her attempts to broaden the scope of the, by then, rapidly growing U.S. analytic movement. I argue that her book anticipated various developments in analytic philosophy but was largely ignored by her former colleagues. I end the chapter by offering some clues as to why *New Key* did not incite the same laudatory responses from analytic philosophers as her earlier work.

### A. Introduction

Analytic philosophy was born in Europe but raised in the United States. Although the movement has its origins in late-nineteenth century German and British philosophy, it only became a dominant force when it started to dictate philosophy curricula in North America. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a new generation of U.S. philosophers became greatly influenced by the views and methods developed in England and Central Europe. They described this new approach as “analytic philosophy” (Nagel 1936ab)—a term that very quickly became popular when several key European philosophers sought refuge in the United States in the years before the Second World War. In the early 1950s, this mixed community of young American philosophers and European immigrants turned the United States into a bastion

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of analytic philosophy, thereby redrawing the intellectual map in a way that still affects academic philosophy today.

In reconstructions of America's analytic turn, historians predominantly focus on the contributions of young U.S. philosophers such as W. V. Quine, Ernest Nagel, and Charles Morris.<sup>2</sup> All three were students of prominent American philosophers but became interested in the analytic approach when they visited influential European centers of logic and philosophy of science. In the years before the war, they helped the refugee philosophers to find prominent positions at American universities, they marketed their approach in U.S. philosophy journals, and they helped bridging the gap between European and American intellectual traditions. Nagel promoted analytic philosophy via a large number of papers and reviews; Morris forged a coalition via the Unity of Science movement; and Quine synthesized the schools by developing a naturalistic variant of analytic philosophy.

In this paper, I will argue that this picture is incomplete. Although it is true that Quine, Nagel, and Morris did much to stimulate the American reception of analytic philosophy, the standard account neglects the contributions of Susanne K. Langer, probably the first American philosopher to use the term 'analytic philosophy' in print (Langer 1930a, 17).<sup>3</sup> Today, Langer is best known for her work on art and aesthetics (e.g. Langer 1953) but in fact she played an important role in the American reception of analytic philosophy in the first stages of her career. She wrote dozens of books, papers, and reviews that helped to promote the method of analysis and, conversely, she convinced European philosophers that the United States could be a fertile ground for their approach. Several members of the Vienna Circle read and discussed Langer's book *The Practice of Philosophy* (1930a)—arguably the first systematic exposition of the analytic approach by a U.S. philosopher—and many of them rightly viewed her as one of the chief proponents of the movement across the Atlantic. Still, her contributions are rarely mentioned, let alone discussed, by historians of analytic philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

This paper makes amends by reconstructing Langer's influence on the American development of analytic philosophy. Building on her earliest publications and a range of archival material,<sup>5</sup> I argue that Langer played a significant role in America's analytic turn. After

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Giere (1996), Limbeck-Lilienau (2010), Wolters (2018), and Tuboly (2021).

<sup>3</sup> See Frost-Arnold (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Exceptions are Felappi (2017) and McDaniel (2017), which discuss Langer's early work on logic and ontology. Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin is one of the only Langer scholars to have written about the latter's contributions to the development of analytic philosophy. The present paper owes much to her monograph (2020) about Langer's philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to material from the Susanne K. Langer Papers at Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter, SKLP), this reconstruction is based on a host of material from external archives, such as the Rudolf Carnap Papers at the Archives of Scientific Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh (hereafter, RCP), the W. V. Quine Papers at Houghton Library (WVQP), the Moritz Schlick Papers at the *Wiener Kreis Archiv* in Haarlem (MSP), the P. W. Bridgman Papers at the Harvard University Archives (PWBP), the Herbert Feigl Papers at the University of Minnesota Archives (HFP), and the Sidney Hook Papers at the Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford University (SHP). Transcriptions are mine unless indicated otherwise.

a brief exposition of the received view about the development of U.S. philosophy (section B), I analyze Langer's input and argue that she helped to bridge the gap between European and American logicians and philosophers of science. Focusing especially on Langer's encounters with Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, and Moritz Schlick, I argue that she was a noteworthy player in the Euro-American network that paved the way for the analytic turn in America (sections C-D).

In reconstructing Langer's role in the American development of analytic philosophy, my aim is not merely to add a new name to the historical record. I will also argue that the responses to Langer's work illuminate the evolution of the nowadays pervasive *category* of analytic philosophy. Today, it seems natural to carve up the philosophical landscape into an analytic and a continental tradition. Yet, much of what we now consider to be central to analytic philosophy was still up for discussion in the 1930s and 1940s. In the second part of this paper, I unearth some of these debates and argue that Langer's contributions (sections E-F) shed new light on the forces that helped shape a tradition that still dominates academic philosophy today (sections G-H).

## **B. Analytic philosophy in the United States**

The history of America's analytic turn is more complicated than is often suggested. Although historians rightly emphasize the impact of refugee philosophers from Europe, the American philosophical landscape had already started to change in the years before the intellectual migration. Especially at Harvard, philosophers began to recognize the power of the formal tools developed in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Bertrand Russell had spent a semester at Harvard just after completing his *Principia Mathematica*, and he had convinced the philosophy department that they should invest more in logic.<sup>6</sup> When the Harvardians failed to persuade Russell to accept a position at 'the other Cambridge' himself, they hired H. M. Sheffer (1916), C. I. Lewis (1920), and A. N. Whitehead (1924)—all well-known for their contributions to the development of mathematical logic. By the late 1920s, Harvard graduates were producing a steady flow of dissertations on logic (Dreben 1990, 83); and their teachers, both inside and outside the philosophy department, published work that was gradually pushing U.S. philosophy into new directions (Bridgman 1927; Lewis 1929; Whitehead 1929).<sup>7</sup>

A second force behind the shifting intellectual climate was the rise of the Vienna Circle. After the publication of *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: der Wiener Kreis*, the Circle's seminal manifesto (Hahn et al. 1929/1973), several American philosophers became greatly interested in the views that were expressed in Central Europe. Especially Herbert Feigl played a prominent role in promoting the Circle's views in the United States. The Viennese

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<sup>6</sup> At the time, the idealist Josiah Royce was Harvard's main logician. Russell, however, thought that Royce was a "garrulous old bore" devoted to the hopeless defense of a discredited philosophical system" (Willis 1989, 15).

<sup>7</sup> This is not to deny that the most important discoveries in mathematical logic were still made in Europe. See, e.g., Quine (1986, 9).

philosopher spent a year at Harvard on a Rockefeller Fellowship in 1930-31 and co-authored an English variant of the manifesto in the U.S.-based *Journal of Philosophy*. This paper, titled “Logical Positivism: A New Movement in European Philosophy” (Blumberg and Feigl 1931), presented the new approach as nothing short of a revolution, describing its combination of the positivistic-empiricist tradition with the new logic as “comparable in importance with the Kantian synthesis of rationalism and empiricism”.<sup>8</sup>

Despite Feigl’s efforts to promote the work of the Vienna Circle in the United States, the first American responses were somewhat mixed. Especially prominent pragmatists dismissed several central elements of logical positivism (e.g. Lewis 1934; Dewey 1934). The general mood changed, however, when young American philosophers such as Nagel, Quine, and Morris started to travel to Europe to visit its centers of logic and philosophy of science. They quickly discovered that some members of the Circle (most notably Carnap and Otto Neurath) had developed new and subtler variants of positivism (now called ‘logical empiricism’) and concluded that these theories were serious alternatives to the pragmatisms of their teachers. After spending a few weeks with Carnap in Prague, for example, Nagel concluded that his former mentor John Dewey simply failed “to come to grips with the detailed structure of scientific theories” and that Carnap had shown him “that a man can have a larger vision” without being “as in the case of Dewey ... very muddy”. Likewise, Quine concluded that Carnap’s work significantly improved on the conceptual pragmatism of his teacher C. I. Lewis, arguing that “Carnap has developed into a science that which Lewis advance[d] in the form of a philosophical intuition”.<sup>9</sup> Morris, finally, was particularly impressed by Neurath’s plans for an international Unity of Science movement and was convinced that the project could breathe new air into the once glorious Chicago school of pragmatism.

Back in the United States, these young philosophers did much to market the new, European approach. Nagel published his two-part paper “Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe” (1936ab) and wrote a large number of reviews about continental work in logic and philosophy of science (e.g. Nagel 1935, 1936c, 1938ab); Quine held his seminal lectures about Carnap’s syntax program (Quine 1934) and helped institutionalizing the new logic by co-founding the Association of Symbolic Logic; and Morris turned the Unity of Science Movement into a largely Chicago-based operation. Most importantly, Nagel, Quine, and Morris helped their European allies to find positions in the United States. Especially Carnap and Hans Reichenbach had been desperate to move to the United States since the early 1930s, but it was only when the three young Americans intervened that they were able to find academic postings in a country plagued by the effects of the Great Depression.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Schlick had a similar impact on the West Coast through his visiting professorships at Stanford University (1929) and Berkeley (1931-32). For a reconstruction of Feigl’s and Schlick’s contributions to the promotion of the views of the Vienna Circle, see Verhaegh (2020a).

<sup>9</sup> Nagel to Sidney Hook (December 3, 1934, SHP); Quine to Cooley (April 4, 1933, WVQP, Item 260). See Verhaegh (2021; forthcoming) for analyses of Nagel’s and Quine’s years in Europe.

<sup>10</sup> See Verhaegh (2020bc) for reconstructions of Carnap’s and Reichenbach’s attempts to find positions in the United States.

### C. *The Practice of Philosophy*

Morris, Nagel, and Quine were not the only young Americans to contribute to the U.S. development of analytic philosophy. Langer, as well shall see, played a prominent role as well. She, too, was involved in the Association of Symbolic Logic; she, too, contributed to the Unity of Science movement; and she, too, helped promote analytic philosophy via an impressive number of reviews of European work in logic and philosophy of science.<sup>11</sup> First and foremost, Langer promoted analytic philosophy through her *own* work, most notably her early publications in *Mind* and the *Journal of Philosophy* (Langer 1926ab; 1927; 1929; 1933), her textbook *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic* (1937a) and, most importantly, her book *The Practice of Philosophy* (Langer 1930a), which offers a lucid exposition of the analytic approach.

It is not surprising that Langer became a committed analytic philosopher. During her undergraduate studies at Radcliffe College—Harvard’s all-female sister institution—she was a dedicated apprentice of Sheffer, the logician who had been hired after Russell had declined Harvard’s offer. Sheffer was already impressed by Langer when she was still a B.A. student, writing that she had “a firmer grasp of philosophy problems than many a Harvard Ph.D.” (Dryden 2003, 191). After obtaining her B.A. and a two-year break, in which she spent a period in Vienna with her husband,<sup>12</sup> she started pursuing an M.A. and later a Ph.D. at Radcliffe. In this period, Langer was already well known for her staunch support of the analytic method. Unpublished lecture notes of Sheffer’s 1924 seminar on ‘philosophic methods’ make mention of “Mrs. Langer’s dictum that the analytic is the only method in philosophy” (Lecture notes, unidentified author, February 19, 1924, SKLP, Box 29).<sup>13</sup> Naturally, Sheffer himself also favored the analytic approach. His seminar discussed ‘dialectic’, ‘intuitional’, ‘pragmatic’, and ‘phenomenological’ methods but it was clear that Sheffer was committed to the method of analysis. Indeed, in reflecting on the period, Langer would later describe Sheffer as the “intellectual guide of a small group of perceptive, serious students ... who looked forward to a new philosophical era, that was to grow from logic and semantics” (1964, 306).

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Langer’s reviews of Reichenbach’s *Philosophie der Raum-Zeit-Lehre*; Gottlob Frege’s *Nachlass*; and the second edition of Russell’s *The Principles of Mathematics* (Langer 1930b; 1937b; 1938). In the late-1930s, Langer was a member of the organizing committee of the Fifth International Congress for the Unity of Science (WVQP, Box 20, Item 547). Langer’s contributions to the Association of Symbolic Logic are mentioned in Ducasse and Curry (1962).

<sup>12</sup> Langer stayed in Vienna in the 1921-22 academic year, just before Schlick assumed the chair of ‘Naturphilosophie’. She used her year in Vienna to attend lectures of, among others, Karl Bühler (Dengerink Chaplin 2020, 14), who would later come to be a regular attendant of meetings of the *Wiener Kreis* (Stadler 2015).

<sup>13</sup> See also McDaniel (2017, fn. 3).

Langer offers a detailed exposition of her analytic approach in *The Practice of Philosophy*, published a few years after she completed her dissertation.<sup>14</sup> In the opening chapter of the book, Langer defines philosophy as “the pursuit of meaning” (1930a, 21). The philosophers’ main job, Langer argues, is to analyze conceptual frameworks. Different frameworks allow us to ask different questions and the logical structure of a framework determines “the logical universe of its possible answers”. The analytic philosopher should not develop and criticize philosophical systems but construct and analyze the conceptual frameworks *underlying* these systems:

The real interest of a philosophical system is not centred in its actual assertions, in the beliefs of its author; its importance lies rather in the *logical language*, the conceptual framework, the *terms*, in which these beliefs are asserted... Herein lies its power or weakness—in concepts, not propositions. Logically ... the limits of formulation are prior to any proposition ... which may be formulated within it.... That is why the simplest way to analyze the conceptual language of a system is not to consider all its propositions, ... but to inquire what questions can be legitimately asked in the confines of the system. (1930a, 170-1, original emphases)

One particularly important task of the analytic philosopher is to investigate the logical structure of *scientific* theories. For the sciences not only advance through the development of novel hypotheses, experiments, and methods; much of their progress is also due to *conceptual* innovations. The nature of space and time was a major source of paradoxes until early twentieth-century physicists developed a “logical structure” in which “space-phenomena and time-phenomena are describable in a single formula” (ibid., 60); and the notion of infinity puzzled mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers for ages until Cantor constructed a new way of conceptualizing the infinite (ibid., 186-7). If we are to understand and improve a scientific theory, Langer argues, we have to analyze and advance the logical structure of its conceptual framework:

[E]very science is built upon definite *basic concepts*... Now, the definition and systematization of general fundamental notions belongs to philosophy, and the precise determination of them is the philosophical labor which scientists must either do, or accept from others, before their science can stand on its feet... physics becomes meaningless if we have no coherent notions of ‘number,’

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<sup>14</sup> Her thesis “A Logical Analysis of Meaning” (1926c) was supervised by Whitehead, who had then recently arrived at Harvard. The dissertation is generally viewed as one of the best Harvard theses in logic from that period. Juliet Floyd, who studied all Harvard dissertations on logic up through 1932, describes Langer’s dissertation as “the finest thesis I saw” (2009, 199).

‘space,’ ‘time,’ etc. These concepts are its philosophical roots.<sup>15</sup> (ibid., 40-1, original emphasis)

One of the most interesting features of Langer’s view is that it promotes a pluralistic stance toward logical structures. Early analytic philosophers—e.g. Frege and Russell—mostly defended universalist conceptions of logic, culminating in Wittgenstein’s thesis that propositions are pictures of facts and that facts and their corresponding propositions have the same “logical form” (*Tractatus*, 2.2). For Langer, however, there is no such thing as *the* logical form of reality. The world can be symbolized by different logical systems and the only selection criterion we have is that we should choose the structure that best suits our purposes:

There is no such [thing] as *the form* of a real thing, or of an event... there are many patterns possible within the same reality... This means, in the end, that *all understanding is selective*, and that the great work of science is to find out those ways of conceiving an object which shall be most appropriate to certain purposes. This is a point which is rarely appreciated by people who talk about ‘scientific truth’. Originality and genius in science consist mainly in the ability to recognize the configurations which are important for a given purpose. (Ibid., 135-6, 141-2, original emphases)

Langer’s pluralism and pragmatic attitude reveal her Harvard background, as they are reminiscent of both Sheffer’s notational relativity (Urquhart 2012) and Lewis’ conceptual pragmatism (Lewis 1929). Indeed, in a co-authored paper on the development of American philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century, Langer credits both Sheffer and Lewis for the innovation and dates the idea back to Royce, who despite his commitment to idealism, first conceived of logic as the study of abstract *forms* (plural).<sup>16</sup> Still, her attitude also foreshadows

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<sup>15</sup> Despite her focus on scientific theories, Langer preferred the label ‘analytic philosophy’ over Reichenbach’s term ‘scientific philosophy’. Langer wrote a very positive review of Reichenbach’s *Philosophie der Raum-Zeit Lehre* (1928) for the *Journal of Philosophy* (1930b)—applauding the latter’s emphasis upon “*primitive notions* rather than *primitive propositions*” in the analysis of relativity theory (p. 610-1, original emphases)—but she disagreed with Reichenbach’s proposal to call this type of analysis ‘scientific philosophy’: “[Analytic philosophy] is sometimes called by the misleading name, ‘scientific philosophy’. There is a little play on the word ‘scientific’ in that phrase; for this road to knowledge does not run through the laboratory ... but proceeds *from the first statements of science*, to logical foundations” (1930a, 17, original emphases).

<sup>16</sup> See Langer and Gadol (1950, 126): “Most of Royce’s philosophy belongs to the barren tradition rooted in obsolete Cartesian concepts ... But Royce’s logic belongs to the fertile new inquiry. His conception of logic *as the study of abstract forms* is exemplified in the analysis of formal systems developed by H. M. Sheffer, demonstrating the relativity of abstract structures themselves to the notation by which they are rendered.... The technical development of Royce’s logic ... led to the free construction of “logics” by C. I. Lewis—systems of inference all

some of the more subtle variants of logical empiricism that were about to be developed in *Europe* (see section B). Langer's idea that it is the philosopher's job to construct better concepts and frameworks, for example, resembles Carnap's emphasis on language construction and concept explication. Whenever we discover that a framework or a concept is *not* suitable for a particular purpose, Langer argued, we should try and develop a more fruitful one: "The greater part of philosophy ... is the construction of concepts which shall fulfill all the uses of those which were logically untenable, and avoid all their abuses". If a concept does not work, "it behooves us to design a more coherent notion, equally if not more powerful" (Langer 1930a, 67).<sup>17</sup>

#### D. Reception

In publishing a defense of the analytic approach, Langer made an important contribution to the American reception of analytic philosophy. Her book was reviewed and regularly cited in U.S. philosophy journals (e.g. Baylis 1931; Abraham 1933; Akeley 1934; Fisch 1934); and when the New York philosopher Leo Abraham, a few years after its publication, made a list of the philosophers who had given "considerable impetus to the development of a distinct science of symbolism and signification", he included Langer on his list, along with Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap (Abraham 1936, 229n5). Similarly, when Morris and Nagel were asked about the development of logic and scientific philosophy in the *United States* on their trips to Europe, they both mentioned Langer as one of the main representatives.<sup>18</sup> Langer's early publications made her one of the few American experts in a field that became more and more popular in the late 1920s and early 1930s (when Quine and Nagel were still graduate students), so it is not surprising that she came to play a role in institutions like the Association of Symbolic Logic and the Unity of Science movement.

Langer's book also had quite an impact *outside* the United States. When Quine, on his formative trip to Vienna, Prague, and Warsaw (see section B), was finally able to attend meetings of the by-then famous *Wiener Kreis*, for example, he was surprised to discover that

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somehow related to the classical pattern, but "queer" in their assumptions and ... formal appearance" (original emphasis).

<sup>17</sup> See also McDaniel (2017, fn10). This is not to deny that there are important differences between Langer's and Carnap's programs. For one thing, Langer, unlike Carnap, has a realist conception of logic. According to her, it is reality itself that has "a multiplicity of possible [logical] forms" (1930a, 136). See Felappi (2017, section 3) for a critical discussion of Langer's notion of reality.

<sup>18</sup> See Nagel's "list of recent publications in America which stand at somewhat the same place as the logical-positivists" (Nagel to Neurath, October 14, 1934, MSP, 275) and Morris' paper "Some Aspects of Recent American Scientific Philosophy" (1935). Moore (1938, 81) even describes Langer as a "logical positivist".



they were reading *The Practice of Philosophy*.<sup>19</sup> And it was definitely not the first time that members of the Circle were studying Langer's book. Schlick, the group's leader, had already written about it two years before, when he had first received a copy from its publisher Henry Holt and Company. In his reply to the publisher, Schlick had praised the book in exceptionally strong terms:

I wish to express my gratitude both to you and the author of the book, for I have thoroughly enjoyed reading it. There have been very few philosophical books indeed during the last years that have given me a similar pleasure. The book is certainly excellently written. The author's exquisite style, lucid, fluent and brilliant, has been a source of real joy for me, and must be, I am sure, for every reader. But what is more important: the philosophy expounded in the book is the true kind of philosophy: its method, the method of logical analysis, will be the only method of future philosophizing, and its result (some of which the author explains in a very able and clever manner) will remain after most of the old traditional metaphysics has crumbled away. (March 22, 1931, MSP, 103/Holt-1)

Schlick's excitement about the book was also evinced by his paper "The Future of Philosophy", first delivered a few months later. There, he refers to *The Practice of Philosophy* as a "very excellent book" (1932, 58) and adopts Langer's definition of philosophy as "the pursuit of meaning".<sup>20</sup>

Carnap, too, appears to have been impressed by Langer's work. Although he did not attend the 1933 meetings of the Vienna Circle (he had moved to Prague a few years before), he listed Langer as one of the people he would like to work with if he were to obtain a Rockefeller Fellowship to move to the United States (Carnap to Kaufmann, September 27, 1933, RCP, 024-22-07).<sup>21</sup> And when Carnap finally did arrive in the United States

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<sup>19</sup> In a letter to Sheffer (February 16, 1933, WVQP, Item 981), Quine describes his experiences in some detail, explaining that the last two meetings of the Circle were devoted to Langer's *The Practice of Philosophy* and Bridgman's *The Logic of Modern Physics*.

<sup>20</sup> Since Schlick introduces the phrase 'pursuit of meaning' several pages *before* he discusses her book, one might doubt whether he was explicitly influenced by Langer on this score. An unpublished early draft of the paper (MSP, A.163) reveals that Langer's book was the main source of inspiration, however. In the draft, Schlick explicitly refers to *The Practice of Philosophy* immediately after introducing his definition.

It should be noted that, as well as praise, Schlick also finds fault with Langer's book. In the second half of his paper, Schlick criticizes Langer for arguing that philosophy should be viewed as a *science* of meaning. This is a misinterpretation, however, since Langer rejected the idea that philosophy should be viewed as a science. See footnote 15 and Dengerink Chaplin (2020, 27-8). The mistake is understandable though since Langer confusingly dubs philosophy, logic, and mathematics the "rational sciences" in the second chapter of her book (1930a, 31).

<sup>21</sup> See also Limbeck-Lilienau (2010, 130). Carnap's correspondence with Feigl suggests that Carnap promised to write a review of *The Practice of Philosophy*. See Feigl to Carnap (April

approximately two years later, Langer was one of the first people he met. Carnap's diary reveals that he, Langer, and a few Harvard academics had tea at Quine's place on December 26, 1935, about a week after he arrived in the United States. In his diary, Carnap notes that Langer used her first meeting with the by-then famous German philosopher to ask him about Frege (RCP, 025-82-01).<sup>22</sup>

It was Feigl, however, who was most influenced by Langer in the early 1930s. During his crucial year at Harvard (see section B), Langer appears to have been one of his most frequent contacts. In letters to Schlick, Feigl regularly mentions meetings of a discussion group on logic and philosophy organized by the Radcliffe philosopher. Feigl called it the "*Langer Zirkel*" and told Schlick that it reminded him of the *Wiener Kreis*:

I was delighted to meet Susanne Langer, who is a professor here at Radcliffe College ... She is an excellent woman and her versatility is admirable... She ... speaks German as well as English.... We (i.e. a group of young people who are interested in logic and philosophy...) meet at her place every Monday evening for discussions on the Viennese model. (December 6, 1930, MSP, 99/Fei-17, my translation)

And, a few months later:

In the Langer Circle we almost always discuss logic ... it is almost like in Vienna! Mrs. Langer is always very interesting; amusingly, she reminds me a bit of Wittgenstein in her demeanor, in her intuitive determination, and in the biblical conciseness of her statements. (April 5, 1931, MSP, 99/Fei-19, my translation)

Feigl's letters reveal that Langer, despite her junior position, played an important role in Cambridge's philosophical circles. Not only did she host meetings for young people 'interested in logic and philosophy', she also invited senior professors to her circle. When Russell spent another period at Harvard in 1929, for example, he also visited Langer's "cozy attic studio" to discuss philosophy.<sup>23</sup> And when her group started to discuss work in the philosophy of physics, the meetings were attended by the later Nobel laureate P. W. Bridgman, who had recently published his influential book on operational analysis (Bridgman 1927). Indeed, Bridgman, too, appears to have been impressed by the young Radcliffe tutor. In a letter to a colleague, written a few years later, he described Langer as "an unusually competent person".<sup>24</sup>

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29, 1934): "I would like to take this opportunity to remind you once again of the review you promised of the book by S. Langer" (HFP, 02-69-03). It is unclear whether Carnap ever worked on a review of Langer's book.

<sup>22</sup> Langer was very interested in Frege's work at the time. See Felappi (2017, 45). Carnap had taken several courses with Frege at Jena in the 1910s.

<sup>23</sup> Feigl to Schlick (December 6, 1930, MSP, 99/Fei-17).

<sup>24</sup> Bridgman to Trueblood (December 13, 1936, PWBP, HUG 4234.10, Folder 5, Item 19).

Considering Feigl's high opinion of Langer, it is hardly a surprise that his American manifesto "Logical Positivism: A New Movement in European Philosophy" (see section B) prominently mentions her book as one of the three "American publications" that exhibit tendencies related to the 'revolutionary approach' that had been developed in Cambridge, Berlin, Vienna, and Prague (Blumberg and Feigl 1931, 281), the other two being Lewis' *Mind and the World-Order* and Bridgman's *The Logic of Modern Physics*. At the time, however, this would have been a remarkable list: Bridgman and Lewis were both established professors and were viewed as some of the most influential academics of the country; Langer was a 35-year-old philosophy instructor who had only recently received her Ph.D.

### **E. Analytic philosophy in the United States – continued**

Today, the analytic tradition is deeply engrained in academic philosophy. A very substantial portion of professional philosophers identifies as 'analytic'; there are hundreds of analytic journals, societies, and conferences; and its history is being written by an active and rapidly growing community of historians. Although there is little agreement about what precisely constitutes analytic philosophy,<sup>25</sup> few people will deny that we can discern a continuous tradition from Frege to Russell to Wittgenstein; from Carnap to Quine to Putnam; and from Moore to Stebbing to Austin.

In the 1930s, however, there was no widespread consensus about how to carve up the philosophical landscape. The label 'analytic philosophy' (as we use it today) was only employed by a very small number of scholars (e.g. Langer 1930a; Nagel 1936ab) and its contrast class 'continental philosophy' had not yet been invented, nor would it have made much sense considering that some of the most influential analytic philosophers (Schlick, Carnap, Reichenbach) came from the continent.<sup>26</sup> If anything, philosophers drew a distinction between speculative and critical philosophy (Katzav and Vaesen 2017) or simply used school labels (the Vienna Circle, the Chicago pragmatists, the Columbia naturalists, the Frankfurt School, etc.) in their descriptions.

After the emigration of dozens of prominent European philosophers, however, the map needed to be drawn anew and American philosophers quickly settled on the term 'analytic philosophy', likely due to the influence of textbooks such as Arthur Pap's *Elements of Analytic Philosophy* (1949) and Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars' *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (1949).<sup>27</sup> An advantage of the label 'analytic philosophy' was that it was relatively broad, such that it incorporated both the technical work of the logical empiricists and the common-sense approach to analysis (later: ordinary language philosophy) propagated by British philosophers like

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<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Glock (2008) for an overview.

<sup>26</sup> Frost-Arnold (2017, section 6) dates the term to 1954, when the philosopher Max Rieser, in a report about the Eleventh International Congress of Philosophy, spoke about a "deep cleavage between Anglo-American philosophy on the one side and Continental philosophy on the other" (p. 100).

<sup>27</sup> In addition, Feigl and Sellars' journal *Philosophical Studies*, founded in 1950, had the subtitle "An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition".

Moore and Stebbing and American philosophers such as Norman Malcolm and Alice Ambrose.<sup>28</sup>

Another reason why the U.S. community settled on the term ‘analytic philosophy’ instead of a narrower label like ‘scientific philosophy’,<sup>29</sup> was the rising scepticism about logical empiricism, even by some of the American philosophers who had been forcefully promoting it in the 1930s. The tale about Quine’s attempts to get rid of the ‘dogmas’ of logical empiricism is well known, but one can tell very similar stories about prominent American philosophers such as Nagel and Sellars, who gradually began to object to especially Carnap’s views about normativity (Sellars 1953), probability, and induction (Nagel 1955/1963) in the early 1950s. Whether or not they fairly represented Carnap’s project, all three criticized some of its central elements and all three would eventually attempt to push analytic philosophy into a more naturalistic direction (Quine 1954; Nagel 1954; Sellars 1956), thereby paving the way for the naturalistic turn in analytic philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>30</sup>

### **F. *Philosophy in a New Key***

Quine, Nagel, and Sellars were not the first American philosophers who attempted to carve out a new path for analytic philosophy. Again, it was Langer who helped to clear the ground for the next step in the development of the analytic tradition. Especially Langer’s best-selling book *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942)—published about a decade before Quine, Nagel, and Sellars developed their alternative programs—can be read as an early plea for a broader and a more naturalistic variant of analytic philosophy. In fact, it might be argued that Langer was too far ahead of her time. For her second major book, as we shall see, was *not* widely appreciated by the rapidly growing community of analytic philosophers.

Present-day scholars often read *Philosophy in a New Key* as a precursor to Langer’s later work on art and aesthetics—publications in which she does not explicitly position herself as an analytic philosopher any longer.<sup>31</sup> When one keeps in mind Langer’s affiliations in the 1920s and 1930s, however, it becomes clear that *Philosophy in a New Key* should be read as a work in analytic philosophy—as a book which attempts to apply the method of analysis to a

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<sup>28</sup> See Richardson (2017) for a more fully developed account along these lines.

<sup>29</sup> Reichenbach’s *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (1951) can be read as an attempt to push an alternative label.

<sup>30</sup> See Mormann (2021), Verhaegh (2018a), Olen (2016) for reconstructions of Nagel’s, Quine’s, and Sellars’ developments respectively. Unlike Quine and Nagel, Morris never broke with the general outlines of Carnap’s program. Morris, however, played only a marginal role in the development of analytic philosophy after the Second World War. See Reisch (2005, ch. 16).

<sup>31</sup> In later work, Langer mostly presents herself as a student of Ernst Cassirer, likely as a result of their close collaboration between 1942 and 1945, when they were both living in New York. While Cassirer’s influence is already visible in *Philosophy in a New Key*, Langer completed the book before she moved to New York.

broader range of phenomena. Indeed, the book's central argument is presented in dialogue with Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap; the philosophers who Langer still viewed as the main representatives of the European movement that had advanced American philosophy.<sup>32</sup>

The central thesis of Langer's book is that the method of logical analysis has only been used to study *discursive* logical forms but can be equally useful in analyzing what she calls non-discursive or "presentational" forms. Whereas Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap made great progress investigating the boundaries of discursive language, they wrongly relegated all other types of expressions to the realm of emotion or the "unspeakable" (*Tractatus* 4.115). A very substantial proportion of human expressions, whether linguistic (e.g. poetry, chants, and spells) or non-linguistic (e.g. rituals, dreams, and abstract art), simply does not fit the confines of discursive language as studied by these early analytic philosophers:

[In] Carnap's admirable book, *The Logical Syntax of Language* ... an actual, detailed technique is developed for determining the *capacity for expression* of any given linguistic system, a technique which ... exhibits the conventions to which any thought or experience must submit in order to become conveyable by the symbolism in question... Since an inordinate amount of our talk ... defies the canons of literal meaning, our philosophers of language—Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, and others of similar persuasions—are faced with the new question: What is the true function of those verbal combinations and other pseudo-symbolic structures that have no real significance, but are freely used as though they meant something? According to our logicians, those structures are to be treated as "expressions" in a different sense, namely as "expressions" of emotions, feelings, desires. ... And here is the point of my radical divergence from them... Why should we cry our feelings at such high levels that anyone would think we were *talking*? Clearly, poetry means more than a cry; it has reason for being articulate ... We are dealing with symbolisms here, and what they express is often highly intellectual. Only, the form and function of such symbolisms are not those investigated by logicians. (1942, 66-7, 70, original emphases)

According to Langer, the method of analysis should be used to study discursive *and* non-discursive symbolisms. For non-discursive forms, too, involve the manipulation of symbols.

In order to get a better grip on Langer's distinction between discursive and presentational symbolisms, one should understand her analysis of *symbols*. Langer defines the 'symbol-function' as a four-place relation between (i) a subject, (ii), an object, (iii) a conception, and (iv) a symbol. When a history professor utters the word 'Napoleon' in

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<sup>32</sup> In her overview article "The Deepening Mind: A Half-Century of American Philosophy", published a few years after *Philosophy in a New Key*, Langer identifies "the development of mathematical logic by Frege, Peano, Russell, Whitehead", the "codification of scientific method, carried on by the 'Vienna Circle'", and "the semantical study of language ... developed by Wittgenstein, and even more elaborately and technically by Carnap" as having been essential for "the advance of American philosophy" (Langer and Gadol 1950, 128).

explaining the aftermath of the French revolution, he (the *subject*) has a *conception* of an *object* (the man Napoleon) and he uses the syllables ‘Na-po-le-on’ as a *symbol* for this conception. Whereas early-twentieth century philosophers often tried to explicate the symbol-function as a *dyadic* relation between a symbol and an object, Langer notes that both the ‘subject’ and the ‘conception’ are crucial to the logical analysis of symbol-functions. The *subject* is vital because an utterance or a mark on a piece of paper can only function as a symbol when it is “employed” as such (ibid., 42). The combination of sounds ‘Na-po-le-on’ is meaningless unless we adopt the convention that it denotes the French general. The *conception*, on the other hand, is crucial because we need to distinguish symbols from signs. In Langer’s framework, signs are direct proxies for objects: smoke is a sign of fire and a flash is a sign of a forthcoming thunder. Words can be employed as signs but only when they are used in a restricted way—e.g. to indicate the presence of the object it denotes. Indeed, this is the way in which animals understand words:

If you say “James” to a dog whose master bears that name, the dog will interpret the sound as a sign, and look for James. Say it to a person who knows someone called thus, and he will ask: “What about James?” ... In a human being ... the name evokes the *conception* of a man so called. (ibid., 50)

Whereas the sign-function is a triadic relation between a subject, a sign, and an object, in other words, the symbol-function adds the conception as an intermediary. The professor’s ‘Na-po-le-on’ does not announce the emperor but causes the students to conceive him.

Although Langer’s analysis of symbols can be employed to study both discursive and presentational symbolisms, the two differ in the way in which symbols can be assembled and decomposed. Discursive symbolisms are compositional, meaning that one can tie symbols together to build composite symbols (e.g. propositions).<sup>33</sup> Presentational symbolisms, on the other hand, *cannot* be decomposed into elements with fixed meanings. The logical form of a painting or a sculpture can only be grasped in entirety:

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 photograph for instance, have no significance by themselves. In isolation we would consider them simply blotches... 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 vocabulary*... There is no standard key for translating sculpture into painting ... because their equivalence rests on their common *total reference*, not on bit-for-bit equivalents of parts. (ibid., 76-8)

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<sup>33</sup> See Langer (1942, 76): “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”.

Works of art can *represent* events and states of affairs—Jacques-Louis David’s famous painting depicts the coronation of Napoleon—but they do this in a non-composite way.<sup>34</sup>

Still, paintings, sonnets, and symphonies *are* symbols and, as such, their content can be subjected to logical analysis. Once we realize this, Langer argues, we can see that a work of art is more than a mere expression of emotion:

if [a work of art] has an emotional content, it ‘has’ it in the same sense that language ‘has’ its conceptual content—*symbolically* ... From the purely logical standpoint ... it would have ... formal characteristics which are analogous to whatever it purported to symbolize; that is to say, if it represented anything, e.g. an event, a passion, a dramatic action, it would have to exhibit a *logical* form which that object could also take. (ibid., 176, 183)

Presentational symbolisms, in sum, are non-discursive but should not be viewed as *signs*. Just as we can analyze the way in which propositions represent the world, we can investigate the way in which works of art and what they depict share a logical form.

A second striking feature of Langer’s book is its strongly naturalistic approach. Langer’s analyses of different domains of human expression—e.g. language, myth, and art—are deeply rooted in the scientific theories of her time. Her chapters on myth and ritual are based on a wealth of evidence from linguistics and anthropology, her analysis of signs is based on behaviorist ideas about conditioned learning, and her chapter on music builds on work from Gestalt psychologists suggesting that “musical structures logically resemble certain dynamic patterns of human experience” (p. 183). In fact, even Langer’s distinction between discursive and presentational symbolisms itself is embedded in the scientific literature of the 1940s. Building on work from developmental psychologists, evolutionary biologists, and primatologists, Langer offers a theory about the ontogeny and phylogeny of discursivity, explaining (1) how these ‘higher’ types of symbolisms could have arisen out of ‘lower’ ones and (2) why all human cultures appear to have well-developed languages, whereas linguistic behavior is almost absent among primates. Although scholars tend to focus exclusively on *linguistic* behavior in solving these puzzles, Langer suggests that her account might offer a better solution:

What we should look for is the first indication of *symbolic* behavior, which is not likely to be anything as specialized, conscious, or rational as the use of semantic. Language is a very high form of symbolism; presentational forms are much lower than discursive, and the appreciation of meaning probably earlier

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<sup>34</sup> Note that the distinction between discursive and presentational symbolisms does not map neatly onto the distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic expressions. The map of the London Underground, for instance, is also discursive: it can be decomposed into concrete units of meaning (stations, lines, zones) and different maps can represent the same structure in different ways. Poetry, conversely, is linguistic but non-discursive: “its import is not the literal assertion made in the words, but *the way the assertion is made*” (ibid., 212, original emphasis).

than its expression. The earliest manifestation of any symbol-making tendency, therefore, is likely to be a mere sense of significance attached to certain objects, ... forms or sounds.<sup>35</sup> (ibid., 89, my emphasis)

Although it is Langer's main goal to apply the method of analysis to a broader range of phenomena, in other words, her book also anticipates the naturalistic turn in analytic philosophy more than ten years before Quine would start to argue that we can view "epistemology as an empirical science" (Quine 1952, 23). In breaking down the often strict distinction between philosophical and scientific methodology, she bridged the methodological gap between analytic philosophy and the sciences, thereby exploring a new path for the analytic tradition.

### G. A bridge too far

By many measures, *Philosophy in a New Key* was one of the most successful philosophy books of the twentieth century. With over eight thousand citations and more than half a million copies sold, it is both one of Harvard University Press' all-time best sellers and one of the most-cited philosophy books of the last hundred years.<sup>36</sup> The book has promoted Langer's analytic approach to thousands of philosophy students and it has paved the way for a new perspective on art and aesthetics. Reviewers described it as a work of "exceptional interest and merit" (Reid 1945, 73) and applauded both Langer's "impressively documented analysis of literary, psychological, and anthropological sources" (Garvin 1944, 565) as well as her ability to combine "bold speculation with factual evidence" (Vivas 1943, 302).

Among *analytic* philosophers, however, the book was virtually ignored. Whereas *The Practice of Philosophy* was both widely read and well received, there is hardly any discussion of *Philosophy in a New Key* in the analytic literature. The book was reviewed in all major philosophy journals (e.g. *Mind*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, *The Philosophical Review*, and *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*) but, except for a review by Nagel (which will be discussed in more detail below), most of its reviewers (e.g. Louis Arnaud Reid, DeWitt H. Parker, and Lucius Garvin) were not analytic philosophers. Despite Langer's explicit engagement with the arguments of Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap, in other words, very few of her analytic colleagues mentioned, let alone discussed her contributions.

This silence about *Philosophy in a New Key* is particularly surprising because archival evidence reveals that the book *did* influence some of the most prominent analytic philosophers

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<sup>35</sup> Langer cites work of Robert Yerkes, Winthrop Kellogg, and Wolfgang Köhler to support her hypothesis. Case studies of the chimpanzee Gua, who was so attached to Kellogg that she would drag around his coveralls "as a fetish of protection" whenever he had to leave; and of the chimpanzee Tschego, who would treasure a perfectly rounded and polished stone, even though the object was completely useless to her (ibid., 89-93), suggest that the evolution of symbolic behavior was a gradual one and that "preparations for language ... can be found below the evolutionary level of any communication by sounds" (ibid., 96).

<sup>36</sup> See Hall (1986, 80) and Leiter (2017).



of the next generation. Quine, for example, explicitly built on Langer's approach in early drafts of his magnum opus *Word and Object*. In the early 1950s, Quine had just adopted the naturalistic view that epistemology should be seen as an empirical science, which quickly led him to the genetic question how we can explain the development of science considering the very meager physical stimuli to which "our end organs are exposed" (Quine, October 7, 1952, WVQP, Item 3011).<sup>37</sup> In the opening chapter of his 454-page draft, Quine turns to Langer for the first steps toward an answer. Focusing especially on her aforementioned thesis that "what we should look for is the first indication of *symbolic* behavior" (Langer 1942, 89), Quine writes:

The original symbolism was of the private, subjective, unconscious kind ... *Philosophy in a New Key* ... stresses the moral: the forerunner of language is to be sought not in primitive noises, but in early symbolic behavior... The earliest phase of symbolism, for the individual and for the race, would seem to be emotive. (Quine, January 29, 1953, WVQP, Item 3158)

Even more surprising is that Quine's draft suggests that he also agreed with Langer's ideas about the role symbols play in myths and in works of art. Quine argues that "similar unconscious symbolism is what packs the wallop in poetry and art, and what gives vigor to myths" and he briefly mentions Langer's evidence that "speech and song began as one" (*ibid.*). In his published work, on the other hand, Langer's influence remains virtually undetected. Except for a brief reference to the latter's theory of babbling in the published version of *Word and Object* (1960), Quine never explicitly mentions Langer's work.

I do not want to suggest that Quine was disingenuous in removing the references to Langer in the published version of *Word and Object*. For there are some important theoretical shifts in Quine's views between 1953 and 1960.<sup>38</sup> Still, it is regrettable that Quine never publicly reflected on his stance vis-à-vis Langer's work. Considering that they were both students of Whitehead and Sheffer, that they were simultaneously based in Cambridge for almost fifteen years, and that they both played a role in the Association for Symbolic Logic and the organization committee of Harvard's Unity of Science Conference, it is at the very least surprising that Langer is not at all mentioned in Quine's autobiography (1985).

Quine's silence about Langer's work is especially unfortunate because the only *explicit* discussion of *Philosophy in a New Key* by a major analytic philosopher—viz. Nagel's review in *The Journal of Philosophy*—was largely negative. Although Nagel acknowledged Langer's "solid grounding in modern logical and philosophical analysis", he criticized her attempt to expand the method of analysis to presentational symbolisms. Since symbols are supposed to symbolize *objects*, Nagel maintained, it is unclear why we should view "presentational symbols" as symbols in the first place:

what is not clear from Mrs. Langer's account is the precise sense in which 'presentational symbols' *are* symbols... Mrs. Langer is quite definite on the

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<sup>37</sup> See Verhaegh (2019) for a reconstruction.

<sup>38</sup> See Verhaegh (2018b) for a reconstruction.

point that in any situation of symbol-meaning there must be a subject, a symbol, a conception, and an *object*. What *object* is symbolized when, in ordering sense experience, sense forms are apprehended? ... the perplexed reader ... must conclude either that sensory forms are not symbols at all, or that they are ‘symbols’ in a radically new and hitherto unspecified sense. (Nagel 1943, 325-6)

Nagel raised a valid worry but not one that is fatal to Langer’s project. Indeed, as Langer herself later pointed out, the debate is mostly verbal. Whereas Nagel narrowly defines a symbol as “any occurrence ... which is taken to signify something else by way of tacit or explicit conventions” (Nagel 1954), Langer maintained that works of art are symbols in a broader sense: “neither do they point beyond themselves to something thereafter known *apart* from the symbol, nor are they established by convention”. They *are* related to the world but not in the way *words* “denote their objects” (Langer 1956, 64, my emphasis).

Nagel’s review likely did some damage to the popularity of Langer’s book among analytic philosophers. Still, one review cannot explain why Langer, a significant figure in the Euro-American network in the mid-1930s, started to become an outsider from the early 1940s onwards. It is likely that gender might have played at least some role. For it is undeniable that Langer’s career was negatively impacted by the fact that she was a woman.<sup>39</sup> Whereas Quine, Nagel, and Morris had long become tenured professors, Langer was still an hourly paid tutor when she published *Philosophy in a New Key*. In fact, Langer would not even find a permanent position until 1954, despite her excellent record and the tremendous success of her book.<sup>40</sup> Not only did this affect her ability to travel and to attend conferences, events where she could have introduced and promoted her ideas to the analytic community more directly,<sup>41</sup> it likely also impacted the way her colleagues saw her. Langer was a woman in a community dominated by men and not everyone was open-minded enough to accept that women could be excellent philosophers too.<sup>42</sup> In addition, it likely limited her opportunities to develop a

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<sup>39</sup> See Dengerink Chaplin (2020, ch. 3)

<sup>40</sup> A letter to L. Beck reveals that Langer was still scraping together part-time gigs as late as 1951: “I don’t know what one does to get a job, besides bothering you. A part-time job in New York would tide me over, as I’m offered one at the New School if I can manage to be in N.Y. —which I cannot, on that one alone. But one other course might hold me. The trouble is that I should get a permanent place soon, before I get too old to step in” (May 18, 1951, SKLP, Box 1).

<sup>41</sup> Langer’s correspondence shows that she often had to ask for an honorarium when she was invited for a lecture, which was somewhat unusual at the time. See, e.g., Langer to Ruth Whirl (June 23, 1949, SKLP, Box 3).

<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., Joe Margolis’ recollections about the period in which Langer was affiliated with Columbia University: “I don’t think she was at all at ease at Columbia. For one thing, the men really weren’t hospitable to women as philosophers. ... She was definitely not a member of the Department and her own lectures (for courses) were definitely assigned to some general educational program” (cited in Dengerink Chaplin 2020, 55).

correspondence with her male colleagues. It is remarkable, for example, that one regularly encounters Langer's name in correspondence from major analytic philosophers throughout the 1930s (see section D) but that they are mostly talking *about* Langer and her work. There is virtually no correspondence *between* Langer, on the one hand, and Feigl, Schlick, Carnap, Nagel, Quine, and Morris on the other; whereas there is an abundance of letters between each of the latter six philosophers.<sup>43</sup>

While gender clearly played a role, I do not believe that it fully explains the lack of attention for Langer's project, however. Most plausibly, her proposal and approach were simply a bridge too far for analytic philosophers in the early 1940s. Langer published her book in a period that was (still) characterized by an ever-increasing rigor, not by attempts to broaden the scope of analytic philosophy. Carnap's main project was to develop an inductive logic, Reichenbach was writing a book about quantum mechanics, and Goodman and Quine were trying to construct a nominalistic interpretation of mathematics.<sup>44</sup> It is not very surprising, therefore, that there was somewhat of a mismatch between the highly technical projects developed by the analytic mainstream and Langer's more informal appeal to logical analysis.

The first signs of this impending rift can already be detected in the responses to Langer's *Introduction to Symbolic Logic* (1937a), published a few years before *Philosophy in a New Key*. For although the book was generally well received, even by the analytic community (e.g. Feigl 1938; Stebbing 1938), Carnap mentioned that he was "a little bit disappointed" by the book, while Quine noted that he had heard that it contained "too much metaphorical talk about logic" and "too little" actual logic (quoted in Creath 1990, 247-9). Most likely, the responses to *New Key* were very similar; its approach was simply too far out of step with the analytic mainstream. Even though analytic philosophy would eventually come to incorporate both technical and more informal methods of analysis (see section E), Langer's book in a sense came too early: it was published in a period in which analytic philosophy seemed to be developing into a different direction.

Finally, there appears to have been a mismatch in the sense that Langer discussed topics—art, myth, and ritual—that were highly unusual at the time. Langer published her book in a period in which philosophy of art was still associated with romanticism and *Lebensphilosophie*, the movements most members of the Vienna Circle had opposed when they were still based in Europe. Indeed, in his above-discussed, laudatory letter about *The Practice of Philosophy*, Schlick's only negative remark is about a chapter in which Langer argues that a theory of meaning which fails to incorporate the significance of art, "commits exactly the sins of narrowness which logical philosophy is supposed to avert" (Langer 1930a, 152). According to Schlick, this chapter is misguided because it falls "into a more traditional attitude

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<sup>43</sup> Sadly, this historical inequality still has ramifications for historians today. One reason why much of this paper examines the development of Langer's philosophy through the eyes of her male colleagues is that their academic archives contain much more material from the 1930s and 1940s. The Susanne Langer Papers predominantly contain material from after 1954, when Langer acquired a permanent job and did not have to move every other year. Much of her early notes, drafts, and correspondence appears to have been lost.

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., Reichenbach (1944), Carnap (1945), and Goodman and Quine (1947).

which appears to be incompatible with the sound and powerful position” taken by Langer in the first part of her book (March 22, 1931, MSP, 103/Holt-1). Whereas aesthetics and philosophy of art would become respected subdisciplines of analytic philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>45</sup> in other words, it appears that it was simply a bridge too far for the analytic community in the early 1940s.

## H. Conclusion

In this paper, I have reconstructed the gradually diverging paths of Susanne Langer and the American analytic community. I have argued that Langer played an important role in the early development of U.S. analytic philosophy—as is evinced by the reception of *The Practice of Philosophy*—but that she and her colleagues slowly drifted apart in the years before and after the publication of *Philosophy in a New Key*. Although Langer, in the latter book, presented her main argument in dialogue with Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap as well as anticipated several developments in analytic philosophy (e.g. the naturalistic turn, the move away from Carnap-style logical empiricism, and analytic aesthetics), it fell flat within the analytic community. I have offered several explanations for this development: Nagel’s book review, Langer’s status as a female philosopher, and the mismatch between Langer’s project and the then-current analytic mainstream.

Whatever the exact reason for the neglect of Langer’s work from the 1940s onwards, the immediate and regrettable result is that her work was not incorporated into the canon of analytic philosophy. Not one of above-discussed textbooks and anthologies that proved crucial to cementing analytic philosophy’s self-conception—e.g. Pap’s *Elements of Analytic Philosophy* (1949), Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars’ *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (1949), and Black’s *Philosophical Analysis* (1950)—mentions, let alone discusses, Langer’s work. And since the history of a discipline is often written by its victors, Langer’s contributions to the early development of the tradition were soon forgotten, too. Conversely, Langer also quickly stopped identifying as an analytic philosopher herself, likely because her colleagues did not recognize her contributions as ‘analytic’ philosophy any longer. By 1951, Langer would write that philosophy of art had become her “chief interest” and that she did not view herself as a logician anymore: she simply had “not kept up with the subject, which has advanced very far since [her] day” (Langer to Lewis Beck, May 18, 1951, SKLP, Box 1).

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<sup>45</sup> Historians of philosophy usually date the birth of analytic aesthetics to the late 1950s. See, for example, Lamarque and Olsen (2019, xiv). The field became more mainstream after Goodman published *Languages of Art* (1968).

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