Between Peirce and Langer: Dividing the Semiotic Continuum

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I.

Semiotics, like philosophy, with which Peirce inextricably linked it by multiple strands, is by its very nature a 'big tent' matrix of themes, methodologies, and ultimate commitments. The goal of a philosophically oriented semiotics, as not only Peirce projected it but also others whose projects I have explored elsewhere, is the construction of a general theory of signs. The aim of such a general theory is an exploration of the semiotic 'logic' of the experienced or objectified forms of the 'semiosphere' (Yuri Lotman) and of the open spiral of signifying processes that generate them.¹

Peirce's fundamental contribution was to supply (a) central, indeed essential, guidelines for drawing the fundamental groundlines in and through this multistrand continuum of sign-functions and meanings and (b) to draw out some important implications and consequences of such a 'division of signs.' It is precisely its putative comprehensiveness, systematicity, and avoidance of logocentrism that makes the Peircean semiotic framework, with its triadic schemas and philosophical and historical underpinnings, so heuristically fertile. Different semiotic traditions have utilized different conceptual tools and models from more than one source. Substantial insights can come from quite different frameworks that 'rotate' semiosis in different ways that in spite of terminological differences may nevertheless overlap to significant degrees. An especially rich and powerful semiotic framework, with deep philosophical and empirical grounding and implications, was developed by the American philosopher Susanne Langer with only a nod of minimal recognition of Peirce.² It merits by reason of its scope and analytical acumen being brought into dialogue with the Peircean framework.

Looking at some pivotal features of Langer's philosophico-semiotic model against the background of some central aspects of the Peircean allows us to ask not whether it can or should function as an alternative to the Peircean model of dividing and analyzing the semiotic continuum but rather as a complement to it in a common undertaking. Is not this way of proceeding fully consonant with Peirce's admonition to not block the road of inquiry?
II.

I will focus in light of Langer's semiotic schema on the status and implications of three central interconnected Peircean triadic divisions of the semiotic continuum: between (a) between firstness, secondness, and thirdness, (b) between feeling, reaction, and thought, and (c) between iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity. Peirce's first triad is categorial or ontological, the second triad is psychological, and the third triad is clearly and explicitly semiotic. The ideas of first, second, and third are, Peirce says, "constant ingredients of our knowledge" and are due to "congenital tendencies of the mind" (CP 1.374). Indeed, they can be considered as "three parts or faculties of the soul or modes of consciousness" (CP 1.374).

So, the ontological or categorial is immediately wedded to the psychological, something not present in any significant degree in Peirce. Thus, Peirce affirms in the phenomenological mode, or phaneroscopically, three categories of consciousness:

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\text{\ldots} \text{first, feeling, the consciousness that can be included with an instant of time, passive consciousness of quality, without recognition or analysis; second, consciousness of an interruption into the field of consciousness, sense of resistance, of an external fact, of another something; third, synthetic consciousness, binding time together, sense of learning, thought. (CP 1.377)}
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Cognitional structure, Peirce importantly claims, is complex in as much as "every kind of consciousness enters into cognition." While feelings, in Peirce's words, "form the warp and woof of cognition," the polar sense introduces the sense of otherness into it. Nevertheless, cognition on Peirce's conception is "neither feeling or the polar sense." It is "consciousness of process, and this in the form of the sense of learning, of acquiring, of mental growth." This is the consciousness of synthesis, or rather synthetic or synthesizing consciousness, a process that, as Peirce says, cannot be "contracted into an instant." It is the consciousness that "binds our life together" (CP 1.381). Symbolic consciousness, or the symbolic dimension of consciousness, in the strict and fully developed sense involves a specific kind or level of binding.\(^3\)

For Peirce these three categories are not only "three radically different elements of consciousness" but they are also comprehensive and exclusive, "these and no more" (CP 1.382). Immediate feeling, the polar sense, and synthetical consciousness are 'ultimate' factors or dimensions of consciousness, but not necessarily phases or stages except in the anthropological sense (Deacon). Now, inasmuch as on the Peircean position "all thought ...
must necessarily be in signs” (CP 5.251) these factors or dimensions must be seen as semiotic. Peirce never relinquished his central insight that "whenever we think we have present to consciousness some feeling, image, conception, or other representation, which serves as a sign" (CP 5.283). Peirce's path breaking proposal is that we thematize or access the world cognized or meant in terms of three fundamental sign-dimensions: (a) perceived or felt qualities that ground and are signs of resemblances, (b) resistant features that function as indexical vectors forcing or constraining consciousness to attend to what is other and that ‘de-fine’ or ‘de-limit’ it, and (c) more or less stable symbolic cores that bind as well as articulate qualities and particulars into an intelligible unity. The tout ensemble, whether natural or constructed, that not only confronts consciousness but mirrors consciousness itself is a matrix of sign-functions with iconic, indexical, and symbolic dimensions.

Now, the central Peircean theorem that all thinking takes place in signs entails the consequence that it makes no difference whether the 'signs' are external or internal, that is, immanent in consciousness itself or circulating in a space common to all, the public semiosphere. Peirce's remarkable notion that his inkstand was as indispensible for thinking as his brain bears witness to this. Consciousness, characterized by Peirce as a bottomless lake, is a sign matrix 'all the way down' and 'all the way up.' The triad of feeling, polar sense, and synthesis as constitutive modes of access to experience is operative both at the lower threshold and at the higher threshold of semiosis. Semiosis, for a Peirce, has no 'outside.' Indeed, the 'inner world,' the world of signifying processes, is itself to be modeled in terms of the fundamental triad of sign functions. This gives us a formal frame for phaneroscopic investigations. The types of signs we use tell us not just about the world they 'point to,' but they manifest in what Langer calls their 'morphology' and Peirce their 'material qualities' the subjective matrices out of which they arise.

Human semiosis does not just recognize signs and use signs that are rooted in the lived body as a vital matrix of endosomatic powers, as is the case with other animals. It constructs, as biosemiotics teaches us, complex sets of exosomatic organs that go far beyond our natural bodies and make up our panoply of cultural tools. And just as our natural bodies furnish us at the 'lower threshold' both enabling and constraining access structures to the world, so do our exosomatic bodies furnish us 'upper threshold' access structures to both the inner and the outer world. They refer 'up' to and articulate the continuum of consciousness as a matrix of signifying powers and 'down' to the object world they also articulate or divide and compound and to which they bind us. Langer develops the implications of the position that the 'inner
world' is mirrored in the 'outer world' of signs and sign-configurations, especially in the artistic image, which has a special 'import' for her semiotic theory of minding, as I will show. Langer joins Peirce in "the long way through signs," a way that leads us to a grasp not just of the world but of our sense-making powers.

Every sign-configuration has not just a felt material quality but a distinctive mode of appearing. Langer offers a distinctive way of thematizing and modeling these signifying powers, first by her 'division of signs' and second by developing, as a consequence, the implications of a reflection on the heuristic fertility of the artistic image as itself an icon of minding. Examining with phenomenological acuity and empirical scope the morphology of sign-configurations, Langer leads us to see, just as Peirce does, that they are in fact indices and icons of our sense-making powers. And reflecting upon them as such gives us access to the world of minding. But Langer proceeds in her own way and with a novel set of resources that complement the well-known Peircean theses.

III.

Langer makes in her early works, and presupposes in her later works, two divisions in the semiotic continuum that at first sight may seem to be quite different from Peirce's, whose proliferation of sign types Langer rather peremptorily called an "obstreperous flock." Her thematic division is not triadic, not does it imply an ontological or categorial scheme.

The first division is between 'indication' and 'symbolization.' Indication encompasses the whole realm of semiosis that is prior, both temporally and structurally, to distinctively human semiosis, which is, on Peircean terms, 'symbolic.' Symbolization encompasses what is distinctively, but if we hold to the doctrine of synechism, not perhaps totally exclusively, human semiosis. Indication and symbolization have different 'logics.' By 'logic' Langer means 'relational structure. Signs are sign-functions, not types of things independent of context or frame. Meaning, for Langer, arises in patterned contexts.

With regard to the first division, that of indication, Langer foregrounded both the primitive grasp of a felt significance and the steering of behavior and perception in stable, ultimately finite, cycles. These are clearly the domains of Peirce's feeling and reaction, of iconicity and indexicality. These domains for Langer, as for Peirce, both precede and are incorporated into the symbolic domain. In her early formulation, this was the realm of 'signals,' a term she used to foreground, in accord with pragmatism's, and Peirce's, deepest
insight, the actional, not merely contemplative, matrix of the organism-world interface, something Dewey established in his classic 'Unit of Behavior' paper and von Uexküll foregrounded in his notion of a 'functional circle.' On the non-human level, the realm of indication is a fundamentally closed cycle defined by, and oriented to, pragmatically appropriate perception and pragmatically appropriate action. The domain of indication is the domain of finite context-dependency. For Langer, each type of organism has its own 'ambient,' to use a later term from the *Mind* trilogy. Their ambient is tied to their types of bodies and their respective powers which are displayed in their species-specific functional circles and the sign-systems they rely on and produce. Peirce's and Langer's differences here are purely terminological, although I think Langer's division is leaner and free from metaphysical premises while being supported by a wealth of empirical research, especially drawing out the consequences of the great Gestalt revolution in psychology.

Langer divides the symbolic continuum into two essentially different sign systems, a discursive and a presentational, both of which belong to the 'symbolic order,' but in a rather different, though related, sense than Peirce. Her schematization here is simpler than Peirce's and, in my opinion, more transparent. The discursive system or order for Langer is exemplified or embodied in language, mathematics, graphs and diagrams whose contents are able to be articulated in alternative formulations or notational systems. The presentational system or order is exemplified or embodied in the image-based and image-constituted sign-configurations of art, ritual, sacrament, and myth, whose contents belong to a distinctive symbolic order not reducible to the discursive, but still ideational and in that sense representational. The symbolic order, as Langer construes it, engenders and structures an 'open ambient,' her term for 'infinite semiosis' in Peirce's sense. A symbolic system, for Langer, is a system that rather than engaging the world directly orients us both to and through concepts and ideas and their integuments, both in the discursive and presentational realm. But in the case of presentational symbols the integuments are essential. Both symbol systems are mediations, instances of thirdness within the Peircean frame, since they both have logical interpretants, which, however, have quite different features.

Symbolicity, in Langer's framework of discursive symbolization, takes up, as I have noted, the 'prior' phases and dimensions of iconicity and indexicality into itself, without, however, leaving them and their distinctive functions behind. Language and mathematical systems exemplify this to the highest degree. Langer's domain of presentationality is a domain of iconic symbols whose diacritical features constitute its indexical dimension. Every
presentational symbol is based on the symbolic pregnancy of forms of experience itself. Of course, it could be said that Peirce’s repertoire of examples in his various inventory of signs that yield his ‘obstreperous flock’ reveals clearly these important semiotic consequences. but Langer cuts through this morass in perhaps a more elegant manner.⁸ Do we really need to determine whether and in what way presentational symbols, in Langer’s sense, are rhematic iconic qualisigns, rhematic iconic sinsigns, or rhematic iconic legisigns? Are they not, in fact, all three, but maybe in ways that depart from the letter of Peirce’s classificatory system? Are we wedded to the Peircean nomenclature, which elicits intense hermeneutical, constructive, and classificatory processes? Or should we look at the phenomenon itself and recall the old Latin axiom that sapientis est de verbis non curare. Or, even better, as the old rhetorical adage put it, rem tene et verba sequentur.

For Langer the defining marks, or what she calls the "salient characteristics," of discursive symbolism are the following rather uncontroversial features, with which Peirce would agree. Every discursive symbol system (a) has the equivalent of a vocabulary and syntax, that is, a set of distinguishable individual units of meaning and a set of conventional rules by which they are and must be combined, (b) is able to be captured or mapped in a dictionary, albeit one with no greatest upper bound, so that (c) their conceptual spheres are defined by their relations of equivalence to or translation by other units both within the same system and in other systems, but without any claim of a strict isomorphism, especially in the case of natural languages. ⁹ Discursive symbolism generates a symbol field of de-indexicalized general reference, that in order to refer still needs to be connected to the world. Langer’s analysis of discursive systems relies upon Karl Bühler’s the two-field theory of language, which differentiates an indexical or deictic field from a symbolic field. This distinction mirrors or exemplifies the general divide in the semiotic continuum between indication and symbolization, although it is not unique to Bühler.

The wedge between discursive symbol systems and presentational symbol systems is based first and foremost on how they refer to, or give us access to, their objects through their interpretants. The philosophical point of the wedge for Langer is to maintain the autonomy and distinctiveness of presentational, the task of which is to make felt meanings accessible. Felt meaning becomes objectively symbolized in the presentational symbol. This is the domain of the "genuine semantic beyond the limits of discursive language" (PNK  ), certainly one of Peirce’s own focal concerns. But Langer develops this semantic and its implications in directions that Peirce did not, without necessarily contradicting it.
Presentational symbols and systems of such symbols, according to Langer, are *specific and unique* unto themselves. They are distinctive instruments of thought, but they have a *total*, not general, reference. They fuse, in the Peircean sense, logical or intellectual, affective, and energetic interpretants in such a way as to define the *untranslatable mode*, but not uninterpreted mode, in which their object or thing-meant is to be accessed. The presentational symbol or symbol system defines a content, embodies an imaginarily supported mode of feeling, and constrains patterns of acting. Langer's notion of a unique 'vital import' encompasses all three types of interpretants. Such symbols are pregnant with a sense which can only be gestured toward in discourse, which is always derivative with respect to them. What Langer says about artistic import, with a distinction between interpretation and perception, exemplifies a general point and will lead to a further dimension of our theme:

Artistic import requires no interpretation; it requires a full and clear perception of the presented form, and the form sometimes needs to be construed before one can appreciate it. To this end, interpretations of verbal material or representational compositions may be useful, even necessary. But the vital import of a work of art need not and cannot be derived by any exegesis. Such a process, indeed, destroys one's perception of import. (Mind I, p. 84)

This notion of the import of a presentational symbol is one of Langer's most important and rich analytical notions.

IV.

Langer argues that the 'meaning,' the vital import, of an art symbol in particular and of presentational symbols in general is inextricably presented with and in the very 'morphology' of the symbol in a symbolic formation that, in becoming transparent, is exhausted in the thing-meant, as in the ideal of scientific prose or a scientific model or diagram. The presentational symbol is not a model. It is a symbolically pregnant image with a distinctive qualitative feel. The basis of Langer's analysis is the insight, or thesis, that an experience, or an affect-laden object of experience, is able to be both itself and what it symbolizes or exemplifies in the mode of resemblance. This is Goethe's *Urphänomen* or originary phenomenon, which for Langer becomes the basis of 'life symbols.' The lower threshold of semiosis not only grounds the higher, but it also 'realizes' experience by imposing a schema on the experiential flux that 'fixes' its defining features or form, a process explored by Langer with the help of rich and undervalued materials from the French tradition of philosophical
psychology. Hence Langer's aphoristic assertion that "meaning accrues essentially to forms" (PNK 90). Where there is no form there is no meaning in any sense.\(^\text{11}\)

In a way, the 'form and meaning' pairing is more primitive for Langer than the 'sign and meaning' pairing. 'Form' is clearly a condition of anything being a sign. It has to have a morphological structure. The art image, and not just the art image, what Langer calls a constructed 'semblance' in her great work, *Feeling and Form*, arises out of and transforms experience by a distinctive form of abstraction into the presentational symbols whose very *morphology* lead us to insight into what she calls the 'morphology of feeling.' Presentational abstraction generates the art image (and other presentational forms proper to ritual, sacrament, and mythic symbols) out of the flux of imaginal experience and the image-schema that supports and informs it. It turns experience itself--its objects and patterns of relation--into meaning systems by presenting or constructing material artifacts that are not, and cannot be, described or built up in terms of the salient features of discursive symbols. For Langer, what is defining in a work of art, or aesthetic artifact, is not language-like at all. Language is a complex pattern of forms. But complex patterns of forms are not languages. Nor, Langer proposes, should we try to force them into such mold. What does join them is the notion of *systems of differences* and the cognate notion of diacrisis, that is, the general grasp of pertinences or 'differences that make a difference,' as Gregory Bateson said.

For Langer the art work, even the simplest, has a very complex internal structure, but the *elements* out of which it is made are not really individual language-like signifying units nor are they to be identified with *material sensory orders*, as Langer argues against David Prall. The art symbol, Langer writes,

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\text{[...] cannot be built up like the meaning of a discourse, but must be seen in toto first; that is, the 'understanding' of a work of art begins with the intuition of the whole presented feeling. Contemplation then gradually reveals the complexities of the piece, and of its import. In discourse, meaning is synthetically construed by a succession of intuitions; but in art the complex whole is seen or anticipated first (FF 379).}
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But the complexity is felt as a kind of semiotic density as opposed to semiotic discreteness, matching the inner nature of the sign-configuration. The import is not 'immediate' in any simple sense. It is rather the felt immediacy of a mediation. We are dealing here, in the case of the art image, with what Peirce called "the emotion of the *tout ensemble*" (*CP* 1.311). Langer is foregrounding the primacy of a permeating qualitative firstness,
something that is never left behind. This is the ground level of our encounter with the world, a notion that lies at the base of Dewey's reflections on 'qualitative thought.' It is the specific power of human minding, human semiosis, to take this emotion to the thematic or reflective level, which is the symbolic. It involves what Dewey, before Langer, called "going out into symbolization."  

The following text explicates, in Langer's terms, a further central feature of this 'going out' and connects it with her theme of different types of abstraction. The comprehension of form itself, through its exemplification in formed perceptions or 'intuitions,' is spontaneous and natural *abstraction*; but the recognition of a metaphorical value of some intuitions, which springs from the perception of their forms, is spontaneous and natural *interpretation*. Both abstraction and interpretation are intuitive, and may deal with non-discursive forms. They lie at the base of all human mentality, and are the roots from which both language and art take rise. (FF 378)

Langer's point here, continuing and paralleling the work of Ernst Cassirer, is that each experienced form of experience has an expressive face, a defining quality or feeling tone that is present before a distinct 'object' in the epistemological, or thematizing, sense is grasped and that itself grasps us. Even after the object or thing-meant either referred to or exemplified is grasped in a sign-configuration, the grasping and the sign-configuration that makes it present and holds it in place has itself a qualitative determination, which Peirce called the material quality of the sign--or sign-configuration.

Artworks according to Langer bear "a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling"(FF 27). Art images embody these forms in all their pluriform variety. They express, or exhibit, forms of subjectivity objectively. Art, as Langer puts it, is the objectification of feeling and the subjectification of nature. Art images make objective the forms in which experienced realities appear and are constructed. This is the motivating impetus of Langer's 'aesthetic turn' in semiotics. This notion of a logical similarity, or formal analogy, or congruence of logical structures, is Langer's version of iconicity. Such a similarity is no conventional meaning. It is immanent in experience itself. It is the import grasped in the image, which we recognize by hermeneutical acts of explication and unfolding. But the import is presented to vision and all interpretation is in the form of gestures that specify the diacritical features of the meaning-bearing form without being in any way capable of duplicating the import. In the case of the art image, as opposed to a discursive text, Langer argues, the import is not its theme or motif, which it nevertheless may have. Rather, the
symbolic image, projected and constructed, makes it possible not just to perceive the world in objective fashion but what it feels like to feel the world in a specific way and how the world is thereby 'qualified.' This is Dewey's "undefined pervasive quality of an experience ... that which binds together all the defined elements, the objects of which we are focally aware, making them a whole" (Art as Experience, p. 198). The symbolic image of art is what Langer, herself influenced as Peirce was by Schiller, a 'semblance' that primarily presents not objects but "the forms of things" (FF 51) and the forms of the feelings in which they are presented, and thereby the "ideas of feeling" (FF 59). In the case of the projected image Langer does not value it in terms of the image's success in giving an exact rendering of its object. The image need not be a model or diagram or lifelike copy. Langer values the art image rather for its power to exhibit the morphology of feeling, indeed, not to express an actual feeling (FF 59). Art symbols have one unifying feature: in creating a "semblance" they articulate a "vital form within its scaffold" (FF 68). Every symbolic image that is the work of art is a "total form" (FF 369), a "single, indivisible symbol, although a highly articulate one" (FF 369). What it articulates is not just the 'objective' world, but ourselves and the dynamic contours of the access structures to the felt meanings of the forms of the world. This is the double role the art image plays in Langer's work and joins together her semiotics, her aesthetics, and her philosophy of mind.

The general theoretical issue, with ontological overtones, concerning minding as semiosis, as Langer approaches it, is of "recognizing vital patterns in pure art which may be keys to essential relations in the life of feeling" (1967: 69). The artistic image in her conception projects not so much an identifiable 'object,' which it certainly can and does do, as the form of feeling in which the object is accessed, but not a definite individual feeling. This projection gives an idea "enhanced perceptibility" (1967: 75), Jakobson's palpability of the poetic function, and in the process presents "the morphology of feeling" (1967: 75), that is, the "logical form" of feeling (1967: 77).

V.

The 'morphology of feeling' is marked by what Langer calls gradients. This notion is of capital importance for a phenomenologically astute semiotic reflection on minding and one of the theoretical payoffs for Langer's divisions of the semiotic continuum. She writes: "Gradients of all sorts—of relative clarity, complexity, tempo, intensity of feeling, interest, not to mention geometric gradations (the concept of 'gradient' is a generalization from
relations of height)—permeate all artistic structure” (1967: 211). Indeed, gradients of all sorts “run through every artistic structure and makes its rhythmic quality” (1967: 212). Note that Dewey thought, in pragmatistic mode, of rhythm as ‘rationality among qualities.’ Indeed, the notion of ‘phase beauty’ points toward the phenomenon that a work of art is not only a completed significant form, but the result of successive phases. It appears to have developed and to have retained the phases of its own development, thus being in a kind of ‘motion.’ The sense is one of ‘virtual’ growth, Langer claims. These characteristics of the art work, or art image, are revelatory of the phasal structures of the subjective life of feeling and of the semiotic processes out of which they emerge and which they exemplify. Langer ascribes to them an almost metaphysical import. In the artwork comes to expression “the all-inclusive ‘greatest rhythm’ of life,” a kind of universal cadential rise and fall, growth and decay, and so forth. In the artwork, she writes, life speaks to life. Langer, paralleling the work of James and Dewey, asserts a “tacit recognition of … qualitative continua, which is inherent in human perception itself” and thinks of this as being “the intuitive basis of our concepts of degree” (1967: 214). Articulation, whether visual, audial, or some other mode, deploys sensory materials by degree. “Sensations, like emotions, like living bodies, like articulated forms, have gradients of growth and development” (1967: 214). Langer continues:

The rhythm of acts which characterizes organic forms pervades even the world of color and light, sheer sound, warmth, odor and taste. The implicit existence of gradients in all sensation reinforces our appreciation of living form by giving it an echo or reiteration, in sense, which is always charged with feeling and consequently tends to subjectify the form, to make its import felt yet hold that import to the projective medium. This is probably the greatest single means artists have of ‘animating’ their work. (1967: 214)

Holding the import to the projective medium is an essential aspect of the material quality of the sign. But it not just the work that is animated. It is us. And our forms of animation are projected in and read off of the symbolic image.

VI.
In conclusion, although Langer's two-fold division of the continuum of signs--dividing indication from symbolization and discursive symbolism from presentational symbolism--might seem to be quite different from Peirce's schema, within the conceptual space of these distinctions Langer is able to reconstitute Peirce's triadic distinctions in a complementary and insightful way, leading to new emphases and new conceptual tools for modeling in a semiotic way the fundamental processes making up minding. Langer, however, sees no need for an ontological or categorial ground out of which the phases of semiosis arise or to which they correspond, although she resolutely places these phases in a dynamic view of nature in her great trilogy. And more importantly, her reflections on the heuristic fertility of the art image and of the notion of a morphology of feeling opens up a novel way of thinking about the universe of signs as a vast repertory of icons of mind. This universe emerges out of the vortices of the bottomless lake of consciousness and feeling, both source and outcome of the play of signs that constitute semiosis.

It is issues such as these sketched in the foregoing presentation that have led to me to believe that a Peircean can read Langer to great gain, but will neglect her to great loss--and vice versa.

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Notes


2 There are frequent references to important points of intersection between Langer and Peirce in my *Susanne Langer in Focus*. See also my 'Placing Langer's Philosophical Project,' *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 21:1 (2007), pp. 4-15. I have discussed Peirce in other contexts: in *Consciousness and the Play of Signs* the context is the relation between perceptual inference and the categories of consciousness; in *Pragmatism and the Forms of Sense* the context is the perceptual roots of linguistic meaning; in a wide psychological context in 'Die Überwindung der Assoziationslehre durch zeichentheoretische Analyse: James, Peirce, Husserl, and Bühler,' in *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 10.4 (1988), pp. 149-73. Langer's most important books for our purposes here are her *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1957, 3rd edition; hereafter *PNK*), *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953; hereafter *FF*), and her three volume *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967, 1972, 1982; hereafter *M* with volume and page number).
3 Terrence Deacon, relying on Peirce's conceptual tools, has made this the central thesis of his *The Symbolic Species* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

4 "I think of consciousness as a bottomless lake, whose waters seem transparent, yet into which we can clearly see but a little way. But in this water there are countless objects at different depths; and certain influences will give certain kinds of those objects an upward impulse which may be intense enough and continue long enough to bring them into the upper visible layer. After the impulse ceases they commence to sink downwards." (CP 7.547)

5 In the words of Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944): "Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium" (p. 25).


7 A concept for Langer is a form "that appears in all versions of thought or imagery that can connote the object in question, a form clothed in different intuitions of sensation for every different mind...Whenever we deal with a concept we must have some particular presentation of it, through which we grasp it," (PNK 71-72). Langer will exploit this distinction and draw out some radical implications of it for our understanding of the material quality of a sign-configuration.

8 This is clearly not the place to engage Peirce's ten classes of signs diagram or even more the sixty-six signs elaboration of Weiss and Burke.

9 Langer holds that language includes "its refinements in mathematical and scientific symbols, and its approximations by gesture, hieroglyphics, or graphs" (PNK).

10 Still, it must be noted that transparency is itself a felt quality, one of the marks, or material qualities, of discursive language that differentiate it from both the syntactic and semantic thickness or density of poetic language or mythic discourse. See on this my 'The Making of the Literary Symbol: Taking Note of Langer,' *Semiotica* 165-1/4 (2007), pp. 91-106.

11 I will treat this theme in another study, 'Langer's French Connection.' But Langer's closeness to and reliance upon the Gestalt tradition can be seen in the following pregnant passage from Wolfgang Köhler's classic *Gestalt Psychology* (New York: New American Library, 1947): "Gestalt psychology holds [that] sensory units have acquired names, have become richly symbolic, and are now known to have certain practical uses, while nevertheless they have existed as units before any of these further facts were added. Gestalt psychology claims that it is precisely the original segregation of circumscribed wholes which makes it possible for the sensory world to appear so utterly imbued with meaning to the adult; for, in the gradual entrance into the sensory field, meaning follows the lines drawn by natural organization; it usually enters into segregated wholes" (p. 82).


13 Speaking of such an experience of a defining quality, whether aesthetic or not, Dewey writes: "Even at the outset, the total and massive quality has its uniqueness; even when vague and undefined, it is just that which it is and not something else. If the perception continues, discrimination inevitably sets in. Attention must move, and, as it moves, parts, members, emerge from the background. And if attention moves in a unified direction instead of wandering, it is controlled by the pervading qualitative unity; attention is controlled by it because it operates within it," *Art as Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987; original publication 1934), p. 196.

14 A much fuller comparison of the aesthetics, whether implied or explicit, of Peirce and Langer would have to engage the role of Schiller. Ivo Ibi is right to emphasize this pivotal connection in the case of Peirce. But the affinities are even more extensive, since the non-discursive nature of art and presentational symbolism quite generally is a central theme of Kantian thought and, it must be admitted, Langer's view of minding and emergence of pregnant symbols in the great process of nature involves the sorts of considerations that are not far from those that occupied Schelling. See especially in this regard Ivo Ibi, 'Reflections on a Poetic Ground in Peirce's Philosophy,' *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 45.3 (2009), pp. 273-307 and his 'Peircean Seeds for a Philosophy of Art,' in K. Haworth, J. Hogue, L.G. Shrocci (eds), *Semiotics Today 2010 "The Semiotics of Space"* (New York: Legas Publishers, 2010), pp. 1-16, also available in Portuguese as 'Sementes Peirceanas para uma Filosofia da Arte,' *Cognitio* 12.2(2011), pp. 205-219. I have engaged other aspects of Peirce's aesthetics in my 'Dimensions of an Aesthetic Encounter: Perception, Interpretation, and the Signs of Art,' in *Semiotic Rotations: Modes of Meaning in Cultural Worlds*, ed. SunHee Geertz, Jaan Valsiner, and Jean-Paul Breaux (Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing, 2007), pp. 113-134.

15 It is pretty clear how much Langer's love of music informed her conceptual analysis of the morphology of feeling. Musical analogies permeate her work. Langer cites in *Philosophy in a New Key* (p. 226) the following
passage from Wolfgang Köhler’s *Gestalt Psychology* (pp. 248-249), which has remarkable resonance for her reflections. Köhler writes: "Quite generally the inner processes, whether emotional or intellectual, show types of development which may be given names, usually applied to musical events, such as crescendo and diminuendo, accelerando and ritardando. As these qualities occur in the world of acoustic experiences, they are found in the visual world too, and so they can express similar dynamic traits of inner life in directly observable activity.... To the increasing inner tempo and dynamical level there corresponds a crescendo and accelerando in visible movement. Of course, the same inner developments may express itself acoustically, as in the accelerando and reforzando of speech.... Hesitation and lack of inner determination become visible...as ritardando of visible or audible behavior."