On Human Feeling, the Philosophy of Art, and the Evolution of Mind

Kirby Record

Synopsis

This essay treats the work of Suzanne K. Langer on the evolution of mind and the philosophy of art, first by explaining her complex and original thought processes and then by placing them in the later context of research performed by psychoneurologist, Richard Cytowic, whose studies of cognition provide clinical support for her bold hypothesis. Her thesis, in the fewest possible words, is that the human mind, including the powers of language and rational thought, originated from the evolution of feeling in early animal species to Homo sapiens, the "symbol-making animal." Langer's magnum opus, Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling, emerged out of her lifelong study of the arts, which she calls the "creation of forms symbolic of human feeling," and much of the foundation for her theory of mind is based on her earlier ground-breaking achievements in the philosophy of art.

This short essay will serve as a long footnote to one of the great philosophical works of the twentieth century, Suzanne K. Langer's three-volume, 1200 page treatise: Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling. Although Langer was respected as one of the most original thinkers in her field, this work does not seem to have received the attention it deserved, and it seems little known outside the domain of the philosophy of art and closely-related subject matter. However, support for some of her most controversial ideas can now be found in widely-ranging disciplines, from traditional philosophical research to the most recent work in biological and cognitive studies.

Langer devoted her career to the philosophy of art, broke new ground in solving problems in the theory of art that had befuddled great thinkers for several millennia. It is her conviction that everything we generally call "art" shares the common characteristic of serving as an objectification of feeling, through what she called a "semblance" or a virtual image of some or another "primary illusion." In other words, the nature of the semblance depended on the nature of the artistic genre: a painting creates a semblance of spatial relations; a dance, a semblance of virtual kinesthetic powers; music is a semblance of virtual time, and so forth with all the arts.

In Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling, however, Langer turned to the study of mind, which she believed could be explained only by a closer examination of the evolution of human feeling and what art can tell us about human mentality in general. A work of art, be it a dance or musical composition, presents a reification of an abstract emotional concept, which symbolizes a feeling or a complex of feelings. It is, as such, a semblance of life itself, and for this reason,
works of art in various genre are commonly described and discussed in metaphors also used in discourse about living organisms. For example, art works, such as paintings, have “movement,” they can be “full of life,” they can have “dead spots,” and they can “speak” to us or “move” us. But we must begin with the nature of symbolism as it applies to art. In Langer’s words:

What the many researchers on symbolism published in the English-speaking world today all tend to skip is the nature of the symbolic projection itself. They are generally occupied with its effects; that is why they stand so ruggedly apart, with no clue to the reason why the most diverse sorts of elements may be called “symbols” (for instance, “symbols” in chemistry and in psychoanalysis). But the differences in the ultimate appearances of symbolic projections lie in their many ways and means; and the sphere where diverse means and very subtle ways of projecting ideas force themselves on one’s attention is [sic] [in] the sphere of art. The reason is not hard to find: for art has no ready-made symbols or rules of their combination, it is not a symbolism, but forever problematical, every work being a new and, normally, entire expressive form.

A work of art is a single symbol, not a system of significant elements which may be variously compounded. Its elements have no symbolic values in isolation....Art has a logic of its own (and by “a logic” I mean a relational structure), which is very complex; it is largely by virtue of its complexity that it can present us with images of our even more complex subjective activity. (Mind, 39–40)

Greatly reduced, Langer’s reasoning is as follows: Since art is the symbolic expression of emotional ideas, or feelings, the richest source for grasping the nature of feeling must be found in the study of the artistic process itself. But this process can only be understood by understanding what art truly is, of which her most abbreviated definition is: “Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling.” (Feeling and Form, 40) While such ideas may have seemed radical in the light of the ancient Western dichotomy between thought and emotion (as expressed by Plato but maintained in weaker form by Aristotle), they anticipated more recent studies that regard feeling as central to consciousness, as well as being both the element of continuity and the point of divergence between animal awareness and human consciousness. In fact, Langer’s view was that the development of human feeling was the necessary and fundamental evolutionary basis for later, and so-called higher, species-specific cognitive abilities, such as language, and other advanced cognitive and symbolic powers of the human mind.

Langer’s work is far too complex to summarize and analyze here in any detail. For greater simplicity, this essay will refer to the abridged one-volume, four hundred page version of her magnum opus, Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling, which was mentioned in the opening paragraph. All quotations from Langer are taken from this volume, unless specifically indicated otherwise. What I hope to achieve in this essay is a reasonably clear outline of her main thesis, accompanied by some supporting evidence that has come to light after Langer’s death in 1985.
Of course, any theory is just that and no amount of evidence can eliminate elements of speculation that permeate not merely philosophy but all fields engaged in matters of such great antiquity as those concerned with the evolution and development of human cognition in its broadest sense. Yet many issues once the target of mere speculation are now open to scientifically-sound exploration, particularly the biological aspects of the nervous system as a whole and the functions of the brain in particular. An important aspect of Langer’s theory rests in a reassessment of the limbic system, often indicated by the term “paleomammalian brain,” which Langer believed to be of greater significance in the evolution of the human mind than the cerebral cortex, which houses the centers for language and logic.

At the center of this discussion, as in the center of Langer’s thought, is the matter of feeling. Feeling is something that everyone assumes one understands, since all human beings are, sui generis, creatures who feel. Even the most heartless of humanity would not be truly conscious beings without a capacity for feeling in the broader sense. Langer reverses the Cartesian doctrine of “I think, therefore I am,” which places primacy on thought and considers emotions to be merely confused varieties of thinking. On the contrary, Langer proposed that rational thought is actually an especially clarified and rarified variety of feeling. As she put it:

What does distinguish the “higher” animals is a great increase in emotionality, which entails a corresponding increase of perceptive functions, not necessarily by virtue of better receptor organs, but of increasing values imposed on what anciently developed senses convey. Without a true appreciation of the richness and completeness of life built on instinctive action, and of the heights to which discriminate sensibility and emotional reaction can rise on that foundation, one cannot recognize the critical point where an overcharged system of mental operations breaks over into imagery and symbolic conception, and the great shift from animal mentality to mind begins. (213)

In a nutshell, this passage presents Langer’s main line of thinking regarding the development of mind, a term which she would apply exclusively to human mentality. One of the cornerstones of her conception of what feeling really is and how it developed from animal to human species is her concept of “acts,” which are of primary importance in her argument. To Langer an act is defined as the energizing or the starting in motion of a cycle or arc, which the nervous system of an organism must complete. It is energy that, once activated, must be spent in some way, just as an electrical charge must be completed in the form of electrical energy. All living forms participate in some level of acts, but in the species Homo sapiens, acts led to the development of symbolic cognitive powers, which include language, logic and all forms of artistic creation. Langer explains as follows:

The act concept is a fecund and elastic concept. It applies to natural events, of a form characteristic of living things, though not absolutely peculiar to them....They
normally show a phase of acceleration, or intensification of a distinguishable dynamic pattern, then reach a point at which the pattern changes, whereupon the movement subsides. That point of general change is the consummation of the act. The subsequent phase, the conclusion or cadence, is the most variable aspect of the total process. (104–105)

Langer then makes the critical link from the act concept to that of "feeling" in both the tactile and psychical senses. As she continues,

These and many other relations among acts form the intricate dynamism of life which becomes more and more articulated, more and more concentrated and intense, until some of its elements attain the phase of being felt, which I have termed "psychical," and the domain of psychology develops within the wider realm of biology, especially zoology. (105)

Then, a few paragraphs later, Langer adds:

What gives every act its indivisible wholeness is that its initial phase is the building up of a tension, a store of energy which has to be spent; (106)

Thus, acts are not only seen as the linkage between the mechanisms of organic and non-organic life (for it can be said that some chemical reactions also exhibit the properties of acts, as Langer defines them) but also between purely physiological functions of life forms (and the discrete processes and functions that constitute them) and the psychical realization of bodily sensation and processes. In other words, physical sensations or feelings, when they reached a certain point of intensity, became as well psychical events, which in time could be self-generated and sustained independently from immediate physical sensation. Thus, in the view of some psychologists, consciousness itself is feeling and one of the important precursors to the eventual specialization of the cerebral cortex in humans and its relationship to the rest of central nervous system, especially the limbic system and the mammalian brain. As Langer sees it, the ever-increasing stimulation of the central nervous system in primates was eventually to evolve, exclusively in the case of Homo sapiens, into a unique capacity for symbolic thought. In order to make her case, therefore, she devotes a great deal of time presenting the case that animal behavior, even among the advanced apes, falls far short of the motivated, purposeful behavior of humankind. The technical and scientific details of her argument cannot be reported here, due to lack of available space, but the most relevant gist of it can be reduced to the following quote:

The cerebral activity [of humans] threatens to overgrow the basic functional patterns of animal life and cause the species to break up on the insuperable heights of its own specialization. This brings us back to Gehlen, for the most notable theme of his book is the difference between man’s mentality and that of any beast, however highly —( 4 )—
developed along animalian lines: the production and use of symbols and their paramount value in all our further mental functions, their distinction from the alleged "signals" of animal communication and from symptoms or other indicators, and the subjective-objective dialectic pattern that builds up "experience" of the human sort. Gehlen proposed that this unique character (which he would not admit to be a specialization) arose from the extreme receptiveness of the human brain, which consequently is overwhelmed with stimuli and overloaded with perceptions, so its possessor has had to lighten his burden by finishing many impulses not physically as direct responses, but in the brain, in mental acts. This is a defense against unbearable overstimulation. (253)

Langer goes from here to posit that the overstimulation of the human nervous system led at first to image formation, not merely as acts of visual perception and recognition, but as independent, creative acts, which occur in human consciousness as dreams and as keys to memory. As she writes:

But some persons tend to produce purely fictive original percepts, either involuntarily (as in a dream) or by volition, which are followed by after-images, just as externally induced object visions are. This fact points to a cerebrally started neural activity involving the visual system and actually producing a retinal image, a real percept, though not of an external thing or scene. Such evidence certainly indicates a neural mechanism of visual imagination, and suggests its derivation from the common optic structures of primate brains.

The underlying unity of the central nervous organ, the brain, could be expected to carry the function of imagination into other sensory systems, too, and finally establish it apart from any special sense as a cortical faculty in its own right. Here it becomes the groundwork of symbolization, conception, and all other peculiarly human forms of cerebration; the evolution of mind is on its way. (255)

What Langer is suggesting should be rather apparent by now, although it is obviously not possible here to do much more than summarize her general line of reasoning. She traces the evolution of human consciousness from the development of acts in living things to the supreme expression of artistic feeling, and at the same time, to the eventual evolution of feeling into those specialized modes of conceptualizing we call "logic" and "reasoning."

The key to all forms of conceptual ability is the ability of mental representation, which is the capacity to hold images in the broadest sense (not merely visual images), not only in memory but also independently from immediate external stimuli—that is to say, the prerequisite for all forms of cognitive faculties is based on the ability to imagine. This uniquely human ability is prerequisite to language, logic, and all forms of artistic creation. It underlies both scientific and mathematical reasoning as well as artistic creativity. But, artistic works preceded not merely

—( 5 )—
the scientific symbolic systems whose roots were planted in human civilization in fifth century Greece, and came to fruition in the Renaissance of Western Europe. Langer suggests that artistic creativity even preceded language itself. We are not talking here only about scientific achievements, but of a systematic, self-conscious methodology for the study of phenomena and the formulation of explanatory theories. This has not yet been achieved in the arts for reasons Langer goes to great lengths to explain. Critical to her thesis is the premise that the capacities for symbolic thought lay in the evolution of feeling, from primitive physiological sensation to psychical, and therefore emotional, consciousness.

Her first scenario for how this could have happened is drawn from the example of the dance, which scholars believe to be very ancient, arising first from the involuntary, biological rhythms of the body into forms of highly intricate and powerful modes of emotional representation. Concurrent with dance is music, also undoubtedly very ancient in its most basic form. Another important element in the formation of representational ability is that of the dream, and its corresponding imagery that can be held, often precariously and incompletely, in memory. Dreams hold a very important intermediate stage in Langer’s model. On the one hand, dreams may include fragments of real-life events and images that can be identified. On the other hand, dreams are also a source of wild, spontaneous, creative acts, often providing source materials for various modes of creative work from traditional arts to the mysterious solutions to scientific problems that are occasionally “revealed” during the dream state. I am not referring here to mysticism but to actual reports, not so rare, of scientists waking from sleep with a solution to a problem suddenly in hand. It is also interesting that almost all mammalian and some non-mammalian species are believed to dream, but it is virtually certain that animal dreams and human dreams are not precisely the same, as in the obvious case that language frequently occupies human dreams. It is quite possible that animals “see” imagery, but it is much less clear that this imagery holds meaning in the way it does with human dreams. As Langer writes:

...For we are overburdened not only with excessive sensibility, but also too many emotive impulses, certainly more than can be freely, overtly spent, especially in the social context of human life. So, while animal hallucinations (if there be any) probably pass in kaleidoscopic fashion without any interest except change (emergence, fading, succession), ours tend to pick up emotional values;... (262)

After some more details concerning the “dream work,” in Freud’s coinage, she continues:

Dream images, are, in fact, symbolic forms; they have no practical value, for they were only figments, of purely organic origin, and their emotional charge is not appropriate to the dreamer’s known experience and behavior. But it is highly appropriate to primitive impulses, wishes and fantasies which cannot be allowed to enter

—( 6 )—
into waking life and consequently are relegated to the covert activity of dreaming. (263)

And finally:

Imagination, I think, begins in this fashion; its lowest form is this organic process of finishing frustrated perceptions as dream figments. In primitive stages of hominid specialization dream may not have occurred exclusively or even mainly in sleep. For eons of human (or proto-human) existence imagination probably was entirely involuntary, as dreaming generally is today.... But what finally emerged was the power of image-making. (265)

From this point Langer then connects this primitive dream-like image-making to its further evolution in the domain of form perception, particularly that of physiologically-related forms, such as faces and body shapes, and gravitating to other forms. This ability is found not only in humans but in some other species of primates, such as infant chimpanzees. Yet image-formation is intimately connected to emotional import as well, since in Langer's theory, all such perceptual and cognitive processes emerge from the necessity of discharging unspent stimuli in the nervous system, and these sources of energy are essentially realized as sensation/feeling/emotion. Then comes the critical link to the function of speech and other symbolic powers, and the all-important connection to the conceptualization of feeling in artistic creation:

One other intuitive perception which underlies the great human departure and shows at least a beginning in captive animals is physiognomic seeing, the immediate reception of expressive value in visual forms....Finding the semblance of gesture or power in the sheer configuration of objects,...is an intuition of expressive form that goes beyond the function of form perception as such. In human life it has played a major part, I think, in the evolution of symbolic seeing and thinking, and has been, in fact, a preparatory step toward the emergence of speech. (270)

At this point we must hasten to conclude this somewhat dense and greatly compressed outline of Langer's theory. In her formulation, human mentality began to diverge from other hominid species in precisely the domain characterized by physiognomic visualization and its corresponding emotive and conceptual byproducts. In Langer's view this function is what accelerated the emergence of human mental abilities, and the corresponding cultural institutions of ritual, ceremony, a wide array of symbolic belief systems and social behaviors. As Langer puts it:

Here, at last, we reach the great divide where these terms become legitimate; and at this point we can see how the biological principles of repetition and formalization, which sometimes have spectacular effects in animal behavior, really enter into the etiology of the acts of human beings performing holy rites. (271)
And now finally, we come to speech:

Some authors think of speech as something purposely invented, and adopted by agreement; most scholars today, however, realize that such high intellectual acts would be beyond the reach of man-apes not already equipped with powers of language....

What may have led to the formation of linguistic utterance and understanding was a prior sort of symbolic action, the vociferous accompaniment of the earliest communal expression of formalized feeling, ritual dance. Its motivation was not communication, but communion...what found expression in the dance was the sense of a power residing in the horde as a single agent, pervading the holy place... (273)

Langer is recapitulating here a theory first proposed by J. Donovan, in 1891, which places primary significance on the connection between emotional development of hominids and its likely subsequent spawning of symbolic powers, and the coalescence of these factors in the final, inexpressibly complex evolution of language itself. As she makes clear, her reliance on such an old and essentially discarded speculation is that it is the only theory she could find that takes into account the known facts of primate phylogeny and the psychological aspects of language development and language use that should not be divorced from the powerful element of emotion and broader symbolic features of human cognition. Langer, in fact, laments the preoccupation with language as coded communication, not only in the proliferation of computer analogies for human speech, but even Chomsky’s deliberately non-psychological treatment of language as a series of rules and transformations, which as he himself would certainly acknowledge, have no bearing on the origins and development of speech itself. To cite her one more time:

Perhaps the greatest stumbling block to original thought in that domain [the origins of language] is our present preoccupation with communicating devices and the analysis of factors “coded” in communicated information. This present fashion has led to a completely unpsychological and unbiological treatment of language in other connections than “computer” technology, translation schemes... But surely the catalyst which precipitated the new and unique power of speech was symbolic conception, the intuition of meaning. (277)

Langer makes it clear that speculation about the origins of speech will probably never be more than speculation in matters of detail and that there many other feasible scenarios for how speech actually emerged. What is critical to her is that the theory must have grounding in what is known or reasonably surmised in the biological, psychological and cultural nature of animal, primate and hominid evolution. Within her framework a host of cognitive abilities and cultural achievements can be placed and evaluated as aspects of the all-encompassing symbolic capacity of the human mind. The central pillar of her theory is the unifying, and at the same time,
differentiating nature of animal and human emotions, as they evolved over eons from the simple biological act we have described earlier. Although I must apologize for my extreme reduction of Langer's brilliant and intricately elaborated fabric of thought, I hope that some glimmer of her bold thesis can be seen here. I would like to finish this essay by referring, however sporadically, to some recent thinking in the fields of brain function and cognition that may reflect on Langer's much earlier pioneering work in this complex field.

Richard E. Cytowic, a psychoneurologist, explains how earlier scholars were unwittingly misled by earlier views of the brain, which placed primary significance on the cerebral cortex at the top of a kind of hierarchy of brain structures. In what Cytowic calls the "standard view" the human brain was seen as containing three somewhat separate brains in one. From the base of the brain stem to the top of the skull, we have the reptilian brain, the paleomammalian brain, and the neomammalian brain. The reptilian brain is responsible for self-preservation; the paleomammalian brain, which houses the limbic system, also contributes to self-preservation, modulates sexuality and reproduction, but in addition is concerned with maternal and paternal care of the young, audiovocal communication and play. The neomammalian brain, in the standard view, contains the biological centers for all higher cognitive powers and dominates the other components. (Cytowic, 19–21)

Cytowic and many other cognitive scientists no longer accept the standard view as an accurate picture of what really happens with the human brain and its functions. This has led to a revision that places far more significance on the role of emotion in human thinking, and on the limbic system as at least an equal partner with the cerebral cortex in the overall cognitive functions of the human mind, especially that illusive entity we call "consciousness." Cytowic summarizes this view and its significance in the following passage:

...the assumptions in the old view of how the human brain works are that it is linear and therefore something like a machine...The concept of hierarchy makes the cortex the brain's most important part. This part of the standard view says that the cortex is where consciousness, mind, reason, and reality are all located, and that everything below it is literally subservient. An important corollary says that language is the supreme cortical function; therefore, introspection, which is our self-conscious internal talking to ourselves, is a valid way to understand everything that goes on in our minds. Introspection has a long history in the philosophy of mind, but I will show its severe limitations and that we actually have several concurrent streams-of-consciousness running every moment. That not all of them are accessible to language has important implications for what we can "know" in the conventional sense. (24)

The relevance of the above comment to Langer's position should be clear at least in a general sense, based on what we have already covered of her theory. Langer, like Cytowic in the above passage, stresses the vast amount of knowledge the human brain "knows" before

—(9)—
(indeed, if ever) it reaches consciousness. This point is no longer a matter of serious speculation among many cognitive scientists and brain specialists. Langer cites, in particular, the work of artists who must "know" far more than they are able to explain in words. A brief reference to other research makes this clear from a very different perspective. Cytowic cites one such example from the work of H.H. Kornhuber, who demonstrated unequivocally that we often make decisions well before we are consciously aware of them. In an experiment to explore what has been called "the readiness potential," a subject is asked to move a finger whenever he or she "decides" to do so. The subject records both when his/her mind is aware of moving the finger and its actual movement. As well, a device that can clock the brain's electrical preparation for moving the finger is in place. Repeatedly, the experiment showed that the buildup in the brain for moving the finger preceded the awareness of it by a full second, which is a relatively long time in such experiments. What this proves is that we make some decisions well before our conscious minds are aware of them. There must be some other mechanism at work, which is actually prior to the realization of the conscious mind. Cytowic notes that split brain research—in which the conscious, speaking hemisphere of split-brain patients are confounded at the knowledge and actions of the other hemisphere of their own brain—confirms the point that what our conscious brains "know" at a given time is but a fraction of the whole. Cytowic concludes:

These kinds of mind probes show that we do know more than we think we know. And yet isn't it interesting how we are always surprised to discover that we know it? In everyday life are we not surprised at our own intuition, creativity, artistic inspiration, insights, and other manifestations of our knowledge? (171)

The above information from Cytowic conforms perfectly to Langer's views on how the artist "knows" what he or she knows when making a work of art, but cannot explain in words what that knowledge is. The knowledge is presented directly from the intuitive side of the artistic brain and makes possible the creation of the art object—what Langer called a conceptual symbol of feeling. Furthermore, the relevance of artistic work to the exploration of mind and consciousness is also supported and elucidated by Cytowic and his co-researchers, publishing from the 1980s to the present. Cytowic comments on the new view of the brain that is now emerging and replacing the standard version we have just visited. I will summarize his five revisions: 1) The flow of neural impulses is not linear but parallel and multiple, hence there is no hierarchy of brain structures, 2) Brain mapping does not reveal a one-to-one relationship between cerebral structures and their functions, but one to many or many to one, 3) While the cortex does represent to us the external world, the limbic system determines the salience and significance of the information, 4) Because of #3, the final phase that informs and guides our behavior is emotional rather than reasoned, and 5) Analogies of human brain processes to machine models are inadequate because "it is emotion, much more than reason, that makes us human." (156)
We are now ready to return once more to the salient feature of Langer’s argument, which posited the theory that the evolution of human emotions is what led primarily to the advancement of *Homo sapiens* over other mammals and primates, that were once in competition with our ancestors, and that furthermore, this emotional development prepared the way for the later evolution of the cognitive faculties of language and logic.

Again, we can cite Cytowic for a relevant commentary on the primacy of emotion:

The common assumption that the developed cortex makes humans unique implies that human limbic structures are no different from those of other mammals. If true, then human emotions are comparatively primitive. But exhaustive anatomic studies such as those I mentioned above show that the limbic system was not left behind by evolution. Limbic and cortical circuits co-evolved, and so reason and emotion burgeoned together in tandem. (159–160)

Cytowic then goes on to cite the example of the anteater, whose cortex is far larger, relative to its body, than that of humans. As he puts it we would have to carry our heads around in a wheelbarrow in front of us if our frontal lobes were proportionately as large as that of the anteater. Yet a massive cortex alone does not make the anteater smart, presumably because its undeveloped limbic system renders its cortex virtually useless as an instrument of thought.

Cytowic goes on to state that the limbic system may actually be even more influential in human consciousness than the cortex. Since this essay must soon be brought to a close, I will simply jump to his final conclusion, and although I cannot recapitulate his entire thesis, I will quote what I find to be a persuasive part of a section titled “Consciousness Is a Type of Emotion.”

Consciousness is firmly tied to emotional drive and goal-directed behavior. We are interested not just in whether a wakeful state or self-awareness is present (typical definitions of consciousness), but in whether a creature is capable of purposeful action. Studies of natural and deliberate brain lesions clearly indicate that the cortex is not necessary for propulsive, teleological behavior. In fact, monkeys who have had their cortex surgically removed can barely be distinguished from their normal cage mates, a profoundly counter-intuitive observation, surely. Animals who have had their cortex and even important motor structures below the cortex removed still show purposeful behavior as long as their limbic system remains intact. (194)

Although much more could be added to support the basic premise here, I must proceed to the conclusion. I began the essay by outlining Suzanne Langer’s theory of mind, which placed its primary emphasis on the role of emotion in human evolution and the nature of mind. Her belief that human mentality evolved from the growth of “feeling” in the central nervous system, which
then led to more abstract capacities for representation and imagination, due to a need to convert unspent physical and psychical energy into mechanisms permitting their dissipation. According to Langer’s hypothesis, these mechanisms became increasingly mental, and included dream imagery, ever-more sophisticated artistic conceptualization, and eventually the faculties that made mathematical and scientific logic possible, and of course, the mother of all symbolic systems, language.

The gist of this, at the very least, seems quite compatible with research in cognitive science and neurology, such as Cytowic’s, that suggests that the evolutionary advancement of the limbic system, which controls emotion, is the primary driving force of human consciousness. And if emotion is the *sine qua non* of consciousness, and combines with logic and language to make *Homo sapiens* the symbol-making animal, it stands to reason that art, which is the result of a conceptualization of feeling, played a central role in the mind’s evolution. For artists are, as Langer puts it, among those select people who have an intimate and expert knowledge of feeling. So she poses the question and answers it:

Who knows what feeling is like? Above all, probably, the people who make its image—artists, whose entire work is the making of forms which express the nature of feeling. Feeling is *like* the dynamic and rhythmic structures created by artists; artistic form is always the form of felt life, whether of impression, emotion, overt action, thought, dream or even obscure organic process rising to a high level and going into psychical phase, perhaps acutely, perhaps barely and vaguely. It is the way acts and impacts feel that makes them important in art. (28)

As Langer’s work was the rigorous analysis of art and the evolution of mind—in essence, what it means to be human—it is, as we read it today, also a celebration of life, as it has emerged from its biological realm and in the human species alone extended into realms of deep feeling and deep thought, and as both of these amazing faculties have been brought to bear on the creation of great art, the conceptualization of feeling itself.

**Bibliography**


(カービー・レコード (英語コミュニケーション学科))