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‘But the Main Thing is I had the Knowledge’: Gertrude Langer, Cultural Translation and the Emerging Art Sector in Post-War Queensland (Australia)

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‘Thanks to her efforts, the Brisbane she departed in 1984 was a very different Brisbane to the one she entered in 1939.’ Betty Churcher (former president of the National Gallery of Australia)

The rise of National Socialism in Germany and the subsequent Nazi takeover in Austria caused an outflow of know-how and talent. The sophisticated academic discipline of art history in both countries was particularly affected. Nazi persecution produced large numbers of involuntary ‘cultural translators’ who fled to other countries and whose decisions and actions determined whether and how knowledge was produced, received, negotiated, transferred and translated. Coming from a milieu where art history was ‘more highly developed’, refugee-scholars passed on new standards of scholarship. Their escapes led to a relocation of knowledge, philosophies and cultural practices that triggered substantial changes in the global art world. Studies have already shown the impact of German and Austrian refugee art historians on the British art world. Refugee art historians, however, fled to many more countries, consequently leaving their footprints on a much wider geographic area. A small but important number also relocated to Australia.

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This study explores the role of one specific cultural translator for the process of cultural transmission and cultural translation during the pioneering phase of the creation of a modern art world in post-war Australia. By focusing on an important figure in this process, I analyse how culture and ideas were translated and highlight the different characteristics and phases of such processes. I describe some of the ways in which Gertrude Langer, a refugee art historian trained in Interwar Europe, made use of her cultural capital, thus transferring ideas and concepts from her old Heimat to her new homeland Australia. Being aware of the multi-directional nature of such a cultural encounter, this paper also analyses the ‘cultural hybridisation’ that took place when Langer implemented her knowledge into a new environment in the midst of a transformation process from a conservative, immature art world into a more mature one.

I draw on Bourdieu’s theoretical concept of the forms of capital, which has been a useful tool in migration studies to explore the role of capital, assets and resources. Cultural capital exists in three forms: in the embodied state (long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body), in the objectified state (cultural goods such as pictures or books) and in the institutionalised state (university education). His theory allows for a universal description of assets and values of migrants as it explores the interaction of economic, cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital. It understands cultural capital as the migrants’ ‘treasure chest’. Bourdieu suggested that migrants have to develop strategies to utilise their capital. They have to bargain with institutions and people about the value of their capital and are forced to exercise agency to press their point. Thus, they construct new forms of migration-specific cultural capital.

This paper explores oral history records and contemporary media reports and analyses them against the backdrop of the existing literature about Langer and Queensland’s post-war art world. My analysis reveals when and why particular knowledge emerged or disappeared. I further analyse how Langer’s new environment influenced changes in her cultural capital (change in knowledge) and how her ideas, in return, impacted her new environment (change through knowledge). Sociological studies show that the simple import of knowledge of new ideas is not enough to be accepted by a social group. Success or failure of a diffusion of ideas and knowledge also rest on the role of opinion leaders introducing them to the public. This study consequently explores Langer’s struggle for official recognition against the resistance of a conservative establishment and her subsequent attempts to exercise agency and influence public opinion.

**Positioning**

Langer was born Gertrude Fröschel in 1908 in Vienna into an upper-middle class family that had risen to wealth in the garment business. Langer and her younger sister enjoyed a sheltered childhood. She described her parental upbringing as ‘extremely liberated’ and ‘exceedingly international’. During her high school years, she attended the famous, liberal Schwarzwaldschule, which made a long-lasting impression on her. In 1926, she joined the Institute for Art History at the University
of Vienna and received her PhD in Art History and Ethnology in 1933. During her studies, she met the architect and fellow art historian Karl Langer, whom she married in early 1932. Unable to find work as an art historian, Langer worked for her husband in his architectural practice. In 1937 she was finally appointed lecturer at the Wiener Volkshochschule, a major Viennese adult education centre.

After the March 1938 Anschluss, Jews were no longer regarded as citizens and became subject to a series of discriminatory, and later deadly, measures rigorously defined in the national socialistic Nuremberg Laws. Classified ‘Jewish’ by the Nazis, Langer and her non-Jewish husband escaped Austria after the 1938 Anschluss and arrived in Sydney in early 1939. The mass exodus of German and Austrian refugees in Australia coincided with a bad economic situation and a general distrust towards non-British immigration. Like most of the pre-war refugees, the Langers were unable to find jobs. In mid-1939 the couple moved to Brisbane, where Karl Langer managed to resume his career as an architect.

Although she was the only trained art historian in post-war Brisbane besides her husband, who had finished a PhD degree in art history with the same supervisor in 1933, Langer could not find employment and started lecturing from her home. In 1953, the daily newspaper Brisbane Courier Mail appointed her its official art critic, a position she maintained until her death in 1984. From then on, Langer’s publicity increased dramatically. In 1961, she was appointed president of the Queensland Arts Council and continued in that position until 1975, when she took over the presidency of the Australian Arts Council. In 1968, she had been awarded the Order of The British Empire for her services to the arts. Langer served in a series of other positions and memberships. She was a foundation member and president of the Association of Arts Critics, a committee member and president of the Queensland Art Gallery Society and the artistic director of the Annual Residential School of Creative Arts in Brisbane. She died in in September 1984. Today, a prize for the best ensemble at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music and an annual lecture at the Queensland Art Gallery have been named after her.

Knowledge Accumulation
Gertrude Langer enjoyed a privileged upbringing. Her parents sought to provide her with the best possible education but also left her much space to express herself. They took part in the city’s vibrant cultural life and shared their interests with their two daughters, taking them to different cultural events on every possible occasion. ‘At a very early stage I was taken to the theatre and to art galleries and museums,’ Langer later stated. She was sent to the famous Schwarzwaldschule, a private girl’s high school, founded and led by the pedagogic, social reformist and women’s rights activist Eugenie Schwarzwald. Langer described her school time as a very positive experience: ‘As soon as I went to that school, there was a sense of incredible happiness, and freedom, and joy,’ she later stated. Tolerance and openness were basic principles that accompanied the teaching at the Schwarzwaldschule, and matched the way Langer was brought up. She said:
From the beginning, I had this sort of very democratic outlook, also my father [sic]. He always said to me … you do not choose your parents or your country … you just happen to be born into it and then you have to make something of that.19

By employing some of the leading figures of the Viennese art scene, such as the architect Adolf Loos, the painter Oskar Kokoschka, the composer Arnold Schönberg and the dancer Grete Wiesenthal, the school placed a strong emphasis on promotion of the arts.20 Boosted by this multi-disciplined art education, Langer developed a passion for ‘visual things’.21 At the age of 16, she nurtured the idea of becoming a painter. Although initially reluctant, her parents enrolled her into drawing lessons at the Studio Julius Klingler. The famous contemporary graphic art designer introduced Langer and six other students in his salon-like atelier not only to the art of drawing but also to the theory of avant-gardism: ‘He introduced me to Van Gogh and to Beardsley and to just about everything,’ Langer later claimed.22

By the time she left school, Langer had already made up her mind about her professional future. ‘I wanted to … study history of arts’.23 At that time, the University of Vienna had established itself as ‘a leading site of art historical scholarship’.24 Since the appointment of a first lecturer in art history in 1847,25 Viennese art historians had developed rigorous and ‘scientific’ activities through the introduction of systematic methods of analysis,26 and formed what later became known as the Vienna School of Art History. Luring experts and knowledge from all regions of the Habsburg Empire and Germany, the school has long been recognised as ‘having played a crucial role in the development of the discipline’.27 In 1909 the university introduced a second professorship, which caused a temporary split into two rival institutes, one led by Josef Strzygowski and the other by Max Dvorak.28 While the latter pursued traditional thoughts of the Vienna School of Art History, securing the place of Christian Europe in the classical tradition, Strzygowski tried to change the horizons governing his colleagues’ understanding by comparing art throughout the course of history in different areas of the world. Thus, he has been frequently described as an ‘early champion of world art history’.29 His alternative geography of art emphasised affinities and lines of descent that went completely against the grain of art-historical opinion and, crucially, ‘turned Europe into a province within a much larger global artistic territory’.30 Despite his growing nationalist and anti-Semitic language31, which ironically contradicted his global outlook, Strzygowski managed to become ‘a major figure on the art historical landscape’.32 He lectured widely at different European, American and Asian universities, and his institute became a centre of study and teaching for scholars from various countries and disciplines.33 Langer later recalled that more than half of her fellow students came from other states, most of them from England and America.34 Strzygowski also embraced abstract avant-garde art and was the first Viennese art historian to write a book that dealt in length with modern art and architecture.35
Langer was aware of that split in the institute before she enrolled, and was clearly attracted by Strzygowski’s approach: ‘We had to really absorb it all, and Strzygowski was the choice,’ she later justified. He insisted that his students acquire an overall knowledge of the world’s art before choosing to specialise: ‘That I found so alluring and so fascinating because that again fitted completely with the ways I was brought up,’ she later stated, and continued, ‘Where I studied with Strzygowski, naturally I could not be tied down to a teaching that made something unique and the only thing out of the Italian Renaissance. I could only believe in a teaching where all the arts had their place.’ Langer became very studious, soaking in as much information as possible and also attending lectures in different academic disciplines: ‘Strzygowski simply inspired me. Every lecture and actually my whole studies were just a joy.’ She also spent two additional semesters at the Sorbonne with the art historian Henri Focillon. Her time in Paris augmented her passion for avant-garde painters.

By the time she graduated from the University of Vienna (1933), with a dissertation that compared medieval column statues to Chinese-Buddhist and Iranian parallels, she had acquired a broad understanding of the multi-faceted, global nature of the arts. She had developed a deep interest in, and a firsthand knowledge of, modern art, and embraced the expressionist philosophy that art was for all people and should elevate the mind and spirit.

Even before she took up her studies, Langer knew that her chances for employment ‘would not be very great’. In fact, Austrian state subsidies for the arts were at an all-time low. Museums and archives had to downsize or merge, which led to an oversupply of experts in the field. The gloomy financial conditions of the young Republic of Austria even forced the government to sell parts of its art collections to back the currency. The situation was tough, particularly for women, and Langer supported her husband in his architectural practice after finishing her studies. In 1937, she was hired to lecture occasionally at the Wiener Volkshochschule, a major Viennese adult education centre founded in the late nineteenth century to offer affordable education. During that time, she became accustomed to speaking in public and to delivering lectures to larger audiences.

Knowledge Import and Diffusion
Langer’s new environment in Brisbane differed greatly from fin-de-siecle Vienna. Australia at that time was regarded as a ‘predominantly a conservative, isolated, pastoral society’. Art history as an academic discipline, and art curatorial scholarship, did not exist before the late 1940s. Before that time, art historicism was largely grounded in connoisseurship and a scholarly amateurism. Due to the ‘comparative vacuum’ of art historical scholarship and cultural debate in Australia, there was a ‘perceived backwardness – in terms of Australia’s connectedness with contemporary currents’. The first scholars to constitute official art scholarship in Australia were migrants from Europe. British art scholar Joseph Burke was appointed inaugural professor of Fine Arts at Melbourne University in 1947 and almost immediately hired the Viennese refugee art historian Franz.
Philipp to assist in preparation for undergraduate teaching. Four years earlier, German refugee art historian Ursula Hoff was appointed Assistant Keeper of Prints at the National Gallery of Victoria.

Brisbane differed much from its southerly neighbours, Melbourne and Sydney. Culturally, Queensland was homogenous, conformist, and its capital city was viewed as a ‘big country town’. There was very little immigration, resulting in a lack of cosmopolitan flavour. Until the 1950s, cultural activities in Queensland were primarily organised by amateurs and on a local level. At the time Langer arrived, Brisbane’s small art world consisted only of four organisations: the Royal Queensland Art Society, the Half Dozen Group of Artists, the Queensland National Art Gallery and the Central Technical College. There were no professional identities that might have shaped and given direction to the tiny art world, which was described as immature and inadequate for the development of its art and artists. Consequently, European modernism, which had started to ‘infiltrate into the visual arts in Sydney and Melbourne’ after World War I, became apparent in Brisbane only after World War II. ‘Brisbane in 1939 was prim, set in its ways, and sure of its ways … [it] had a blind prejudice against women improving their station,’ as the Brisbane-born former director of the National Gallery of Australia, Betty Churcher, put it decades later. In an interview, Langer also delivered a damning indictment of her new hometown:

Well the landscape was the least that worried me. What worried me was rather the city. I mean, the architecture worried me very much and … just the lack of culture. I mean, I could not believe it that there wasn’t a professional theater and things like that. The orchestra was something dreadful at that time … Except for a few visiting companies, things were pretty bad. The art gallery in those days … when we arrived the pictures … the only art gallery was in the city hall. It was something dreadful, you know it was non-existent.

Soon after her arrival, Langer tried to become involved in the cultural life and make herself known in her new hometown. Figure 1 shows her one year after her arrival at a local art show in Brisbane. However, despite her obvious qualifications she could not find a job or a voluntary function. Her status as enemy alien and as woman did not support her position. Initially, she encountered what had been described as a ‘boycott by the establishment’ serving to keep her out of the few existing voluntary and professional positions.

A few months after her arrival, she consequently began to promote herself. She began giving salon-style lectures in ‘art history’ and ‘art appreciation’ in her private home, and initiated a media campaign in local newspapers. Langer and her husband had managed to save their comprehensive art library from Nazi clutches and she centred her teaching around the ‘reproductions, prints and books of her library’.

Langer’s lectures filled a vacuum and stimulated public interest. Her popularity grew from lecture to lecture, as did her audience, which consisted of ‘all
Figure 1. Viennese art critic Dr Gertrude Langer inspecting a local art show, Brisbane, 1940. Image courtesy State Library of Queensland.
sorts of people’ from graduates and teachers to secretaries, housewives and journalists.59 ‘I might start with six people and all of a sudden have 12 and then I had about 18 and I took them in two groups,’ she stated in an interview.60 When she designed her courses she drew on Strzygowski’s teaching approach, which she had studied at the University of Vienna, offering a comparative, instead of a chronological, analysis of single aspects of the arts covered with different global examples.61 ‘And that is how I taught because I think the system was marvelous’.62 Already in her first year some social clubs, such as the Business Professional Women’s Club, the Women’s Graduates and the Queensland Art Fund, asked her to deliver lectures.63 Soon, others followed.64 The local media received Langer’s activities largely favourably: ‘Dr. Gertrude Langer has an attractive personality, which is certain to enhance the interest of the first public lecture she is to give,’ the Brisbane Courier Mail reported in March 1940.65

The nodes that formed the city’s small art world in the late 1930s were all products of a sealed-off community that shared congruent ideas, prejudices and values, and made the introduction of new ideas ‘highly unlikely’.66 The same people operated in all existing spheres of art and fostered conservative values within the community.67 Since Langer did not have access to those circles, she had to find ways to make herself known and to promote her views, which she found ‘most undignified’.68 Langer used her lectures and public appearances to introduce existing European art systems shaping their students’ understanding of the arts in other parts of the world. Thus, she was among the first people in Brisbane to advance change and promote contemporary values in art.69 Her stories of artist’s groups such as Die Brücke, a collective of architecture students who set up an expressionist artist studio to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the state of German art early in the twentieth century, influenced three local artists to form Miya Studio, Brisbane’s first cooperative art studio, in 1945. This represented a first change towards modernism in Brisbane’s artistic culture.70 Consequently, she opened their first exhibition.71 Langer also used her lectures to educate people towards the appreciation of modern arts. In one of her earliest lectures, about ‘The Abstract in Art’, she advocated an interpretative view:

As we approach music, we do not ask what sounds in nature correspond with the sound in the sonata … We do not take in the single sounds separately, but try to find the theme. We feel in the first instance … And here is the beginning for an understanding … Art is not and never must be imitation of nature, but interpretation.72

In another of her lectures, she gave further insights into her understanding of art:

We must make up our mind what kind of resemblance we ask for – superficial resemblance of outward features … or resemblance to soul and character. If the latter is desired, we must be prepared to accept certain distortions because how should the artist express the abstract [sic]?73
The existing conservative institutions of Brisbane’s art world obviously did not share the general appreciation of Langer’s public engagement. Consequently, most of her early attempts to become involved with official organisations failed; her efforts with the Queensland Arts Council were blocked for some years: ‘The Arts Council actually … tried to keep me out.’

She also tried, unsuccessfully, to become a trustee of the Queensland Art Gallery. In an interview she later claimed, ‘The art gallery never made use of me. My brain was a little bit picked in the background.’

The following story allows insights into the rejection Langer encountered at that time. During an exhibition in 1952, she approached the chairman of trustees of the National Gallery to buy an early painting of Sidney Nolan. In an interview, Langer described his reaction: ‘He pattered me [sic] on the shoulder and said, “Ha, ha, ha, you don’t mean it”.’ ‘You wicked man. It is not what you like, it’s what we need here in Brisbane to have. This is a highly gifted artist who will be very famous one day,’ Langer responded irately.

Knowledge Translation and the Production of New Cultural Capital

Langer’s efforts matched the general developments within the Australian art scene, which underwent major changes from the late 1940s. Refugee intellectuals and artists such as Ursula Hoff, Gerhard Buchdahl, Leonhard Adam, Franz Philipp, Andrew Fabinyi, Maximilian Feuerring and Kurt Baier added an intellectual dimension that made Australia seem part of the greater universe and helped pave the way towards cultural expansion. Consequently, Australia opened itself towards modernism and its cultural landscape diversified spatially: aspects of Australian modernism, which had already emerged in the southern capitals of Melbourne and Sydney, diffused into Brisbane and surrounds, disrupting its ‘provincial cultural climate’. The renowned Johnstone Gallery, which had opened in 1952, was crucial for that development. It showed not only a ‘wide range of work by leading southern artists’ but also ‘some of the earliest exhibitions of European contemporary art in Brisbane’.

Langer had become a prominent figure in Brisbane’s art scene during the early 1950s, although she was not affiliated with any organisation. In a later interview she admitted that she felt she had not fully used her knowledge, and remembered being ‘very frustrated’ because she was ‘given no opportunities whatsoever’. Langer’s private lectures were in high demand. During the 1950s the number of her regular students increased to over 100, attending 30 lectures per year. Although she had become a prominent lecturer, she never managed to teach at a University. The art school at the Central Technical College was ‘long criticised as “old hat”’ and only introduced a Fine Arts diploma in 1970. ‘That is really what I would have liked, to lecture at the university, but there was no chance. By the time the chance sort of came, I was too old,’ Langer said.

Autumn 1952 brought a first change of Langer’s situation when the Brisbane daily newspaper Courier-Mail asked her to become its official art critic. Traditionally, newspaper art reviewing in Queensland was a minor piece of journalism and did not require any specific training. Prior to her appointment, reviews
were written by a variety of journalists, literary critics, music critics and even poets, but never by someone trained in art. Initially reluctant, because of the ‘terrible state of art criticism’ at that time, Langer hesitated to accept the offer. But finally, on 16 March 1953, her first two art critiques were published.

To succeed in her new job Langer had to develop new techniques and styles to present her knowledge to a broad audience largely unfamiliar with the topic. ‘Not that I was trained for critiques … I hadn’t written critiques before but the main thing is I had the knowledge,’ Langer justified. When reviewing art, she benefited from her knowledge of methods of analysis and comparison that she had acquired at the University of Vienna.

The translation and adaption process was not always easy. She later claimed she had the biggest problems with the ‘popular’ style of writing that she felt ‘wasn’t worthy of an art historian’ because she ‘was constantly trying to coax people to have a look at it’. The lack of space for her reviews, as well as the ‘many misprints’ in the newspapers further worried her. But her new position made her widely known in Queensland and cemented her role as an opinion leader. It provided valuable publicity and helped her not only achieve her aim of ‘gaining a wider public to educate towards the arts’, but also shifted her struggle to have her knowledge accepted and valued by the local art institutions.

When reviewing art exhibitions, Langer sought more than pure skill in the handling of materials. She was looking for evidence of creativity in art, which meant for her an originality of ideas as well as a personal interpretation of the subject by the artist. This view reflected her interwar education. Thus, she differed from most of the other local art critics, who were ‘restricted to subjective statements about overall composition and colour harmonies because of a lack of formal art education’. Following her aim of educating people towards the arts, she used her articles as a media forum to promote awareness of contemporary values in art. In a 1954 review, she rallied against an exhibition of paintings from traditional painters such as Richard Godfrey Rivers and Thomas W. Couldery: ‘Bad art is of two kinds, that which is merely inefficient, dull or stupid, and that which is a lie and a sham. The paintings in the exhibit fall into one or other of these categories.’ In other critics, she praised the works of younger painters such as John Thomas Rigby, Helge Jon Molvig and Sidney Nolan, the latter of whom she characterised as a ‘Master of Suggestion’:

Without any hesitancy I class the following artist not only as outstanding … but also as really fit to compete in this important Australia-wide contest … [While] John Rigby, from promising beginnings has developed into a fine artist with that characteristic manner of expression which one calls style and I feel sure, he soon will win wider recognition … [and] Molvig is an interesting painter. His semi-abstract ‘Landscape Arrangement’ and ‘Burnt Landscape’ are strong and impressive.

Her divisive reviews placed her further in the public limelight, but also provoked resistance: ‘In the beginning, actually it was a terrible job … because whenever I
wrote something unfavourable about a painter ... I got the most nasty letters,' Langer claimed. Different letters to the editor in contemporary newspapers bear witness to the broad range of public reactions to her criticism. Her uncompromising endorsement of modern arts was especially subject to negative reactions: ‘In my opinion, that kind of criticism is worthless. It indicates bias and a biased judge gives no true judgement,’ an upset reader wrote in a letter to the editor in 1953. Another reader wrote in 1953: ‘If a criticism is given, please let's have a fair criticism, giving due credit to some of the old fashioned, but artistic school, not over crediting pictures, which at most could be termed “utter rubbish” and an “absurd waste of paint.”’ Strong criticism came also from traditional artist circles, as the following article by the painter Harold Chester shows:

The latest opus from the sneering pen of Gertrude Langer was directed at that capable brush Robert R. Jackson who portrays the Australian landscape as it is, not through the jaundiced and perverted vision which Gertrude Langer seems to delight in. For some time now the vapourings of this lady, claiming to be an ‘expert’ on modern art have been carefully analysed by a group of conscientious artists who see nothing wrong in ‘giving recorded beauty of nature to the people …’

Over time, Langer’s reviews became a fixed part of the *Courier-Mail*. She continued to write reviews until the week before her death in 1984, thus becoming the longest serving modern art critic on a newspaper in Australia. Langer improved her writing by learning from others. She actively sought the advice and writings of art critics in other states or abroad, and she became a foundation member of the International Association of Art Critics Australian Division.

Her appointment as art critic made her ‘the authority’ in Brisbane’s art world; she was described as ‘feared and respected’. The most important changes in her professional career, however, took place in 1960 when Dorothy Helmerich, founder of the Arts Council of Australia, asked her to take over presidency of the Council’s Queensland Division. This marked the end of her long-time struggle for official recognition. Again, Langer initially hesitated, being aware of the very time-consuming nature of this voluntary position. Helmerich, however, managed to convince her, and in 1961 she was appointed president of the Queensland Arts Council. At the same time, she became involved in the foundation of the Contemporary Art Society as an executive founding member.

The very same year she ceased her lecturing activity, knowing that her new task would require her full attention. When she took over, the organisation was de-facto non-existent. ‘It was going badly,’ Langer stated, ‘all that happened was what New South Wales Division of the Arts Council brought across the border’. Langer had no experience in managing arts; however, she commenced her new appointment with commitment: ‘I just wanted to do this exciting work, because it fulfilled me so much doing something for all the arts’. Although she had never worked as a cultural administrator, she possessed the skills to become
successful: ‘Everything I had learned fell into place. I knew what was a good poster for publicity. My interest in the theatre and all that strong influence from seeing the best in Vienna and Paris and places like that made me very discriminating in my choices and only promoting the very best.’

Langer knew her plans would require sufficient funding. The organisation had only 500 pounds in its bank account when she took over presidency. She started a series of fundraising events, hired volunteers and organised media support through her newspaper connections, thus dramatically increasing the available financial means. She later claimed that her success was connected to her publicity: ‘Through writing for the paper and lecturing I had made a name, so people even in the country knew who I was. I think it really helped.’

Her appointment gave her the unique opportunity of combining her two major aims, the promotion of contemporary art, as well as the education of a wider public towards the art. She adapted her knowledge of contemporary art to her work in arts management and fostered cultural change in Queensland. Her first activity for the Arts Council was to organise a modern art exhibition, entitled *Sydney Contemporary Painters*. Being familiar with art exhibitions, she was very assured of her existing knowledge: ‘That is something I can do myself, because to arrange an exhibition would be no major problem for me.’ Her second project aimed to bring art to rural Queensland. She arranged a child art exhibition to tour the country, proving that there was interest in art exhibitions in rural Queensland. As a follow-up project, she gathered contemporary paintings from local painters and toured them through the country. Consequently, she extended the program and established a wide range of cultural activities, including ballet, opera, theatre and art exhibitions. Organising a touring program in Australia’s largest state was a challenging task, which needed sophisticated logistics. Langer not only supported and encouraged the establishment of country branches of the Arts Council, she also organised private funding to build up the necessary infrastructure.

Langer demonstrated a great willingness to learn from others and to adopt new ideas. Her attendance in a local painting vacation school inspired her to initiate a week-long Creative Arts Vacation School at the University of Queensland in 1962. The winter school aimed at nurturing arts practise instead of her usual aims of educating the public. She served as its artistic director for 16 years and the school became her favourite project.

Langer remained president of the Queensland Arts Council until she retired in 1975. During that time, she managed not only to extend her imported cultural capital and adapt her knowledge to new conditions, but also to create new migration-specific knowledge by combining practices and ideas of two cultures. During her 14 years presidency, the Queensland Arts Council grew from a de-facto non-existent body with a budget of 500 pounds to the largest arts touring organisation in Australia with 15 regular staff members, 50 country branches and an annual turnover of 1.2 million dollars.
Conclusion
This study showed the wide reach of influences of Austrian and German refugee art historian scholarship and thus exemplified the global diffusion of knowledge in the field caused by the Nazi takeover in Germany and Austria. The cultural capital that Langer translated into Australia had significant effects on the local art scene, but in turn was also reciprocally influenced by her new environment. It was the combination of the resources she brought with her and those she developed in situ that helped her create distinctly new knowledge.

The Bourdieusian approach I drew on exemplifies the different types of cultural capital Langer had acquired in her old Heimat, and shows how she transferred them to her new homeland. Before Langer was able to successfully translate her ‘treasure chest’ of cultural capital in Queensland, she had to justify it against a conservative environment. Her status as enemy alien and woman additionally complicated this procedure and required even more personal endeavour. Her efforts not only supported her growing public recognition, but also brought Queensland ‘in line’ with modernist developments in the Australian art world during the 1950s and 1960s.

This paper argues that Langer’s struggle for recognition against the conservative establishment eventually triggered many of her outstanding performances. In order to have her ‘foreign’ cultural capital recognised and valued she had to gain publicity, exercise agency and influence public opinion. Her long-time struggle for recognition came to a definite halt with her appointment as president of the Queensland Arts Council in 1961. From then on, Langer’s role as a fixed part of Queensland’s cultural life was no longer questioned. Not having her capital recognised forced her to become an opinion leader in post-war Brisbane and finally enabled her to use her knowledge to effectively influence not only the local art world, but also the ‘larger story of art in Australia’.

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