

MAKING SENSE:
AN EXPANSIVE STUDY OF IMAGINATION, STRUCTURAL METAPHOR, AND
AESTHETIC NORMATIVITY WITH CALVIN SEERVELD

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*It all means more than I can tell you.
So you must not judge what I know by what I find words for.*

-Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*

To live in this world

*you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it*

*against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it
go,
to let it go.*

-Mary Oliver, *In Blackwater Woods*

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Normativity with Calvin Seerveld**

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I never felt alone in this.

ABBREVIATIONS

For selected works of Calvin Seerveld

- BFOL *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves: Alternative Steps in Understanding Art*, 2nd revised edition, Toronto: Piquant, 2000.
- CCAL *A Christian Critique of Art and Literature*, revised edition, Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1995.
- DLA “Dooyeweerd’s Legacy for Aesthetics: Modal Law Theory,” in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, edited by John H. Kok, Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014.
- RFW *Rainbows for the Fallen World: Aesthetic Life and Artistic Task*, 2nd edition, Toronto: Tuppence Press, 2005.
- VLAH “Vollenhoven’s Legacy for Art Historiography,” in *Art History Revisited: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, edited by John H. Kok, Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014.

For selected works of Katya Mandoki

- EA *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture, and Social Identities*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007.
- IEA *The Indispensable Excess of the Aesthetic: Evolution of Sensibility in Nature*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015.

For selected works of Richard Kearney

- PDP *Poétique du possible: phénoménologie herméneutique de la figuration*, Paris: Beauchesne, 1984.
- POI *Poetics of Imagining*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1998.
- TWI *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture*, London: Routledge, 1998.

For miscellaneous works

- IP Vollenhoven, D.H.Th. *Isagôgé Philosophiae: Introduction to Philosophy*, translated by John H. Kok, Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2005.
- NC Dooyeweerd, Herman, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, translated by David H. Freeman, William S. Young, and H. De Jongste, 4 vols., Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1984.

INTRODUCTION | Attending to the Everyday

What do we do *after art*? The question has been at the forefront of aesthetics discourse since Hegel first heralded the “death of art” early in the 19th century, a death knell infamously re-tolled by Arthur Danto in the 1980s.¹ At the time, many—artist, critic, and scholar alike—took this to mean anything goes: to mean that art is boundless and therefore aimless, that criticism takes on a necessary pessimism in the face of the inaccessible “meaning” of an artwork or cultural artifact or “intent” of an artist, and that scholarship becomes foundationless and destructive in its attempts to make claims about what art is or could (much less *should*) be. Each of these fields outlined an approach to art and culture that had seemingly closed in upon itself.

In the face of this “life-or-death” dilemma, there is a noticeable trend of aesthetic theories since then consciously “choosing life.” Approaches like everyday aesthetics and various attempts to retrieve ontological concerns in the discipline of aesthetics, for example, reject the conditions that led to the *death of art* thesis in the first place. Furthermore, in the wake of a dominant aesthetic theory that privileges the value of reflective distance (seen in both the prevailing interpretation of Kantian aesthetic disinterest and in the notion of autonomous art), these everyday and ontological aesthetic frameworks also attempt to ground aesthetics firmly in an understanding of the unique ability of aesthetic experience to connect the sensing subject to her environment.² These approaches advocate for a more widely accessible field of aesthetic experience and relevance to life that, at the same time, reframes the aesthetic as a *natural*

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 11; Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

² Katya Mandoki, *The Indispensable Excess of the Aesthetic: Evolution of Sensibility in Nature* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 49–50. Mandoki notes the contemporary prevalence of web metaphors as an indication of increased interest in aesthetic, theoretical, and hermeneutic principles of connection.

(fundamental) condition of the world rather than an exclusively *artistic* (second-order) way of being.³ Once aesthetics as a discipline becomes committed to non- or extra-artistic ways of understanding, new questions can be raised, they maintain, as to the direction of the discipline and what might serve as its guiding principles.

Reformational philosopher Calvin Seerveld (1930-) is interested in raising just these kinds of questions. Writing out of the post-autonomous-art context and actively countering the *death of art* thesis, he is driven to consider how we might make sense of aesthetics anew, and readily discusses this act of sense-making in terms of his proposed “creational aesthetic ordinance” of *allusivity* (RFW 49). *Allusivity*, for Seerveld, is the key to not only conceptually opening up the discipline of aesthetics, it is also an integral way in which our very humanity and the world with which humans engage open up into the fullness of their abundant variety. *Allusivity*, furthermore, bears witness to a *distinctly aesthetic normativity* to life.

The overall goal of this thesis will be to unravel the implications of Seerveld’s claims regarding this distinctly aesthetic normativity that *allusivity* provides. To do so, I will compare Seerveld’s theory of an ontically primary aesthetic mode characterized by *allusivity* to the structuring and directing role of *metaphor* and *imagination* in the work of bio-aesthetics philosopher Katya Mandoki (1947-) and continental cultural philosopher Richard Kearney (1954-), thereby situating Seerveld’s idea of *allusivity* within the broader scope of everyday aesthetics theories and a growing interest in retrieving ontological concerns in contemporary

³ Calvin Seerveld, *Rainbows for the Fallen World: Aesthetic Life and Artistic Task*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Tuppence Press, 2005), 10–15; Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture, and Social Identities* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 7–48; IEA 107–34; Katya Mandoki, “The Sense of Earthiness: Everyday Aesthetics,” *Diogenes* 59, no. 1–2 (February 2012): 138; Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), 169; Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 53. The meaning of construing aesthetics as “natural” will be explained in greater detail later on (cf. footnote 58 of this thesis).

aesthetics. In doing so, I will ultimately argue for a stronger recognition of the role of openness in Seerveld's propositions for aesthetic normativity.

In Chapter 1, I present a summary of Seerveld's aesthetic theory as a means of introducing the terms of the subsequent discussion. I first survey Seerveld's aesthetic works, then locate his arguments in the context of the Dutch Reformational philosophical tradition. Finally, I plot the prevalent themes, impulses, and developments of Seerveld's systematic aesthetic project as they provide the backdrop for how and why he goes on to outline *allusivity* as aesthetically normative.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the work of both Mandoki and Kearney as a means of expanding the terms of Seerveld's theory as outlined in the previous chapter. The choice of these two particular figures is not arbitrary. In Mandoki's case, her biological semiotic-aesthetic theory takes direct influence from the "symbol thinkers" that Seerveld lists as meriting further attention both in their own right and in connection with his own aesthetic theory (RFW 131-5; DLA 46, 77-8). In the case of Kearney, Seerveld directly points to Kearney's work on the ethical call of the poetic imagination as a worthwhile resource for study, particularly in regard to contemporary postmodern "impasses" (CCAL 149). Additionally, these interlocutors provide consonant examples of aesthetic theories of openness in line with Seerveld's suggestions. That is, they help reveal details of the structural and directional elements of Seerveld's theory of *allusivity* beyond the terms of his own argument through their comparable commitments to ontological frameworks and in their conscious thematic couplings of *excess* and *connection*.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I return with greater focus to the issue of distinctly aesthetic normativity. To do so, I consider how Seerveld both employs and challenges the connection of

law to aesthetic normativity in his preferences for the open activity of imagination over judgments of taste and for *allusivity* over beauty—ultimately in order to divorce aesthetic normativity from the stricter normativity of law. Throughout this chapter, I place Mandoki and Kearney into closer conversation with Seerveld on the specific issue of aesthetic normativity. This closer comparison of Mandoki and Kearney to Seerveld runs both ways. That is, it highlights how Mandoki's and Kearney's gestures toward aesthetic normativity help us insist on the terms of openness Seerveld lays out for himself, and likewise how Seerveld's clearer readiness to define aesthetic normativity helps us uncover Mandoki's and Kearney's intimations of an aesthetic guiding principle to life.

The hope is that the effort of reading Seerveld closely on this score will highlight both the challenges specific to Seerveld's aesthetic theory as well as some of its points of ongoing viability. Furthermore, putting Seerveld into conversation with Mandoki and Kearney calls attention to their shared desire to elucidate a natural aesthetic condition that is neither reductive nor relativistic, and displays a suggestive variety of ways thinkers might advocate for an expansive view of the human creature in a post-metaphysical context.

CHAPTER I | Modal Aesthetics and Creation: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Structural Horizon of Human Experience

Earth I am, it is most trew, disdain me not, for soe are you.

- Model of a book (1672), Ashmolean Museum collection, Oxford

Seerveld’s aesthetic theory is scattered like so many leaves across a number of his “sundry writings” and “occasional lectures.” The various pieces of his theory first came to be within the world of Reformational philosophy and Dutch Reformed religious communities, and have there made their home quite comfortably. As such, their influence has tended to operate in much the same way as a face-to-face interaction: those who have had the pleasure of coming into their neighborhood and meeting any number of these writings, of conversing deeply with them, often come away feeling they have made a friend, a constant and amusing traveling companion as they continue along their aesthetic journeys. These writings themselves do not get out of their neighbourhood much on their own, but their influence is carried far and wide in the hearts and ongoing work of those who have met them.

As laudatory as these opening remarks knowingly are, what follows will strive in good faith to identify challenges and provide cases that might test the aesthetic theory Seerveld offers in these writings, all in an effort to open this neighbourhood to others—but first, we must get to know the neighbourhood itself. To that end, this chapter will serve as a map intended to collate and introduce the content of Seerveld’s aesthetic theory by first surveying Seerveld’s works on aesthetics, then locating his arguments in the context of the Dutch Reformational philosophical tradition of Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) and Seerveld’s mentor Dirk Vollenhoven (1892-1972). Finally, it will plot the prevalent themes, impulses, and developments in Seerveld’s systematic aesthetics project that invite challenges and might also provide inroads and points of

live comparison in subsequent chapters. This survey will therefore strive to be as thorough as possible, though it will not aspire to be exhaustive. That is, it will not discuss every aspect of Seerveld’s work, but will instead introduce aspects of his theory that are relevant to the overall goal of exploring the dynamics identified at the outset of this thesis—namely, the implications of his notion of *aesthetic normativity* characterized by *imaginativity* and *allusivity*, which commentators on Seerveld’s work have often identified as his distinctive contribution to philosophical aesthetics.⁴

A Survey of Seerveld’s Aesthetics

To understand the context from which Seerveld’s aesthetic arguments derive, I will first make a broad-strokes introduction to the content of those arguments that are found in his major aesthetics texts. Seerveld’s academic career ostensibly began with the publication of his PhD dissertation, *Benedetto Croce’s Earlier Aesthetic Theories and Literary Criticism*, in 1958.⁵ Seerveld’s work has since then navigated between art historical criticism and philosophical aesthetics (as well as making an increasing number of forays into Biblical exegesis).⁶ The bulk of his essays, articles, and books have been variations on these topics and are unified by the consistent intention of pushing his fellow evangelical-Protestant Christians into more charitable

⁴ Lambert Zuidervaart, “Untimely Voyage: Calvin Seerveld’s Normative Aesthetics,” in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), xiii–xviii. “Imaginativity” is one of Seerveld’s neologisms coined in an effort to emphasize the distinct subject-side functioning of imagination over against considering it a capacity. Both “imaginativity” and “imagination” will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

⁵ Calvin Seerveld, *Benedetto Croce’s Earlier Aesthetic Theories and Literary Criticism* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1958). Croce is recognized as a kind of forefather of aesthetic expressivism whose aesthetic theory attempted to find a middle way between Kant and Hegel. Seerveld’s dissertation explores his early aesthetic theory in order to highlight its poetic-linguistic presuppositions. Cf. RFW 131.

⁶ Lambert Zuidervaart and Henry Luttikhuisen, eds., *Pledges of Jubilee: Essays on the Arts and Culture, in Honor of Calvin G. Seerveld* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 328–49. This collection of essays contains an extensive bibliography of Seerveld’s written works from 1957 to 1994.

and critical engagement with the wider culture when, historically, reflection on these topics within these groups has tended to treat them as secondary.

Seerveld's first major post-dissertation work in aesthetics is his book *A Christian Critique of Art and Literature* (CCAL 1968), a series of lectures that discuss the nature of art with an eye to identifying its guiding principles in other-than-theological terms—terms which Seerveld identifies as “symbolical objectification,” allusivity, and imagination.⁷ To accomplish this, he takes up the question of a distinctly Christian philosophical approach to the arts by using the “cosmomic” modal law theory of Dooyeweerd, and by proposing a theoretical alternative to Dooyeweerd's claim that “beautiful harmony” is what characterizes both art-making and an aesthetic mode of being in the world. Seerveld's fellow art historian Hans Rookmaaker (1922-1977) also upholds Dooyeweerd's understanding of the aesthetic, so Seerveld's major contention in this work—that *allusivity* replace “beautiful harmony” as the core aesthetic guiding principle—immediately distinguishes him as doing something different from those with whom he nonetheless shares a philosophical tradition.⁸ To instead expect art to be “law-abiding allusive,” Seerveld says, “is to affirm that it must be heightened by a playful, suggestion-rich

⁷ Calvin Seerveld, *A Christian Critique of Art and Literature*, Revised edition (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1995). Relevant sections to refer to for these claims would be: the section of Lecture Two: The Nature of Art and Slant of Christian Art entitled “Symbolical Objectification: Aesthetic Law of Allusivity (42-48), as well as the following sections of Lecture Three: Literature Among the Arts: “Contemporary Judgements on Imagination” (76-9), “Perspective on Knowledge from Dooyeweerd” (79-83), and “The World of Imagination” (84-8).

⁸ Although Seerveld and Rookmaaker respected each other's work, I would argue that Seerveld finds Rookmaaker's suggestions problematic because Rookmaaker considers the inexhaustibility to which artistry and creativity bear witness to lie solely on the side of the world-as-object rather than in the manner of human relationship with and in the world. For example, Rookmaaker argues, in the method shared by many Christian theologians of the arts, that the naming of the animals in the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden from Genesis 2 is the paradigm of human creativity and that the text shows that this creative calling “means ordering, finding relationships, and perceiving individual qualities. It means discovering, *not inventing* (*for man does not really invent anything*), what the created world in its inexhaustible multiformity and variety has to offer.” H.R. Rookmaaker, *The Creative Gift: The Arts and the Christian Life* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 56. Emphasis mine.

ambiguity, its internal thematic convergence and consistency must make aesthetic sense by bearing a characteristically oblique, metaphorical constituency.”⁹

In the course of discussing Dooyeweerd’s contributions to aesthetics, Seerveld passingly suggests that his own understanding of aesthetic activity is attuned to what Dooyeweerd called “depth dimensions” of the “subjective human consciousness” (CCAL 86n.8).¹⁰ In the context of a much later discussion of Vollenhoven’s historiography, Seerveld once again mentions “depth dimensions,” this time in relation to proposed changes to certain of Vollenhoven’s definitions in order to account more fully for how multiform latent cultural processes are expressed and develop over time (VLAH 47n.61). While this terminology is not explicitly defined or developed in either instance, what he seems to find fascinating is Dooyeweerd’s proposal that subjective human consciousness—rather than being constituted by a series of “insulated” faculties of knowing, imagining, and willing—is instead lived or experienced as these modes being “meshed” together, and that different ways of relating to one’s environment can be “assumed” at any given time but never in such a way that eclipses the foundational “meshed” state. A persistent attention to this dynamic foundation of human consciousness and the imagination could be said to characterize much of Seerveld’s aesthetic work.

⁹ CCAL 46. Full quote: “To posit that it behooves symbolical objectification to be law-abiding allusive does not mean it [art] must have logical non-contradictory identity or lingual univocality, both of which symbolification anticipates; nor does it mean that symbolical objectification needs only technical well-managed cohesion and psychic stability, upon both of which symbolification does retroflect. To posit that symbolical objectification must be law-abiding allusive is to affirm that it must be heightened by a playful, suggestion-rich ambiguity, its internal thematic convergence and consistency must make aesthetic sense by bearing a characteristically oblique, metaphorical constituency.”

¹⁰ CCAL 86n.8. “The depth-dimensions here maintained are not fractures in the law-side of reality, but are nodes the subjective human consciousness can assume.” Seerveld then goes on in the footnote to quote an article on anthropology from Herman Dooyeweerd, “De Leer van Den Mensch in de Wijsbegeerte Der Wetsidee,” *Sola Fide* 7, no. 2 (1954): 8–18. “The act-structured life activity of humans discloses itself in three basic ways: knowing, imagining, and willing; but these three may not be separated into insulated ‘faculties,’ because they are completely meshed with one another.”

The themes introduced in *A Christian Critique of Art and Literature* will continue to occupy Seerveld for the rest of his career. This is, for example, the text in which Seerveld first argues for the qualified and malleable nature of making aesthetic claims: “Nobody may dictate, nobody *can* formulate absolutely what that modal law under which art specially falls must exactly be... Postulation of the aesthetic ordinance into an artistic norm is neither timeless nor mathematically discrete by nature” (CCAL 45).¹¹ Seerveld also takes an opportunity in this text to decry the imagination’s status as an “epistemological orphan” and proposes that, rather than falling neatly on one or the other side of the “badly formulated antinomy” of “naïve experience” and “theoretical synthesis,” the imagination might instead be the key to overcoming this antinomy and formulating a different framework of human consciousness.¹² For now, we will

¹¹ Seerveld is distinguishing a couple different things here: 1) he is saying that allusivity as a cosmic law is not discrete, 2) he refuses to allow allusivity to act as an identifiable and enduring rule for art. Full quote: “Therefore this too must be said: symbolical objectification takes place under the specific law of allusivity. One practices art directly, I have said, before the command of God (‘Love me with all your heart’), and also within the cosmonomic order which inevitably breaks down antinomically conceived action; well, peculiar to the mode of symbolific activity is an ordinance, a structuring of time meshing with other ordinances, which is neither a logical quality in objects or a governing faculty of autonomous subjects but an ontic order laid down in creation by God which is binding upon all operating symbolific activity. How an artist postulates what that aesthetic ordinance should be determines the kind of style his or her art will show. Nobody may dictate, nobody *can* formulate absolutely what that modal law under which art specially falls must exactly be, so that you would have a 100% defined criterion against which you could gauge art products like students doing twenty mathematical problems. Postulation of the aesthetic ordinance into an artistic norm is neither timeless nor mathematically discrete by nature.”

¹² CCAL 78-9. In this section, Seerveld states that Alexander Baumgarten’s proposal that the imagination act as a “hybrid” between cognition and sensation does not overcome this antinomy. Dooyeweerd’s theory of naïve or “undifferentiated” experience is indeed comparable to the move many recent Neo-Kantians also make by highlighting the Heideggerian reading of Kant’s systematic epistemology—that is, the reading that advocates for a strong understanding of Kant’s claim that the imagination is the common root of all knowledge. Cf. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. David H. Freeman, William S. Young, and H. De Jongste, IV vols. (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1984), I.II.IV.6, II.II.II.3; Katya Mandoki, “Applying Kant’s Aesthetics to the Education of the Arts,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 70–72; Jean Luc-Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, trans. Robert De Loaiza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 81–109; Alexander M. Schlutz, *Mind’s World: Imagination and Subjectivity from Descartes to Romanticism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 119; TWI 156-69. Kant published two editions of the *First Critique*, one in 1781 and the second in 1787. According to Luc-Ferry, Heidegger disapproved of Kant’s second edition amendment to the *First Critique* on the systematic place and role of the imagination. Heidegger’s criticism was that the change leads Kant to relegate the imagination to a secondary role rather than maintain it as a bastion of this originary receptivity (i.e., he ends up dividing finitude from sensual receptivity). Seerveld also notes this change in the editions of Kant’s text (RFW 115n.5).

simply note Seerveld's distinction between an aesthetic ordinance and an aesthetic norm, and his proposal that imagination operates as a kind of epistemological third way, and will return to consider these claims in greater detail later on.

After this first publication of *A Christian Critique* Seerveld goes on to author, among other things, his inaugural address to the Institute for Christian Studies entitled *A Turnabout in Aesthetics to Understanding* (1974) where he argues that if aesthetics as a discipline is to matter to the world, it must: "show that 'aesthetic' is not just there, a category, a property, or quality that is optional to humanity, but that 'aesthetic' is a cosmic dimension, a certain way the Lord asks us to respond to God, that everyone has a definite aesthetic-calling-to-obedience."¹³ By refusing to identify the "aesthetic" as a category, property, or quality—as an easily identifiable *thing*—but instead naming it as a "cosmic dimension" of life, Seerveld introduces a core contribution and challenge of the modal aesthetics he proposes. That is, on the one hand, how to articulate the irreducible yet interconnected space and dynamic in which things and people function aesthetically and, on the other, identifying an "aesthetic-calling-to-obedience" that directs that functioning.

A further consideration of these challenges, and perhaps Seerveld's best known and most comprehensive account of his aesthetic theory, comes a few years later in the form of his book *Rainbows for the Fallen World: Aesthetic Life and Artistic Task* (1980). In this text, Seerveld sets for himself the difficult and delicate task of outlining a distinctly Christian aesthetic that is

¹³ Calvin Seerveld, "A Turnabout in Aesthetics to Understanding," in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 242–43. A little later in this section, Seerveld makes the following proposal regarding the distinctive characteristic of aesthetic life: "aesthetic life, I would venture to point out, is a matter of the ordinary playful, and when opened up, styleful life zone of our creatureliness whose nuclear meaning is 'suggestion'." Rookmaaker responded to Seerveld's address: H.R. Rookmaaker, "Review of C. Seerveld, *A Turnabout in Aesthetics to Understanding*," *Philosophia Reformata* 42, no. 1–2 (1976): 77–79.

simultaneously open about its underlying commitments yet not separationist. In Seerveld's words, this distinctly Reformational "slant" to art and aesthetics "affirms that there is more to life and history than salvation of humanity... [and] there is more to creation than human creatures" (RFW 61-2).¹⁴ The core of Seerveld's aesthetic project in this text might be further summarized by the following comment:

Secular aesthetic theorists by and large have won the war against "beauty," as I see it, but are in danger of losing the peace of aesthetic meaning because they have simultaneously excommunicated any (aesthetic) normativity other than various makeshift, subjectivist varieties. The call to *aesthetic* (and artistic) *normativity* does not, however, have to be made in the tainted name of Beauty. (RFW 124-5)

In its most basic terms, the problem, as Seerveld outlines it here and throughout the book, is the threat of a polarizing swing from subjectivist sensationalism (in context, an absolute relativism of individual experiences) to a reductive-transcendental idealism (for which "Beauty" acts as stand-in), and the failure of either of these poles to account for the fullness and variety of art and aesthetic experiences.

For Seerveld, the solution lies in directing attention toward the "creational" and "creaturely" significance of aesthetics as a study and mode of being. In the context of a discussion on the pitfalls of various theologically- and ideologically-charged understandings of Beauty, Seerveld remarks, "Beauty is no help at all in discovering what is creaturely 'aesthetic' if it only draws you into speculating about the nature of God and *per obscurius* settle down on what the answer is for creation, without any careful systematic historical examination of art, for example" (RFW 10-5, 122-3).¹⁵ In this remark, Seerveld shifts through a number of perspectives. First, he addresses the inability of beauty aesthetics to account for art that does not make beauty

¹⁴ This claim does not spring up in this text out of the blue—he is already committed to this view in CCAL 52.

¹⁵ Cf. Seerveld, "A Turnabout in Aesthetics to Understanding," 241.

its starting point or end goal. Then, he takes up the perspective that art might have other uses than being beautiful in order to drive home the point that it is not sufficient to state what *other ends* the arts and aesthetics can be put to. Finally, he shifts back to the perspective that there is nonetheless a need for something ontic about the aesthetic if not beauty. That is, beauty still leaves us with the task of understanding what the arts uniquely do here and now, and of naming what singular dynamic of reality aesthetic experiences bear witness to.

It is well beyond the bounds of this thesis to argue for or against a specific theology of creation on Seerveld's behalf, and in the discussion of Seerveld's Reformational philosophical influences, it will become clearer what is assumed by Seerveld's philosophical understanding of "creation" and "creaturely reality." At this point, however, we should note that Seerveld's methodological insistence on naming a "creational ordinance" for art and aesthetics plays a couple of different roles in *Rainbows*. First, it is the means by which he consciously expands the 'realm' of aesthetic experience beyond the bounds of a subjectively insulated human mind and beyond the strictures of a sterilized view of fine art into a broader, fully embodied, and historically situated matter of everyday life.¹⁶ And second, it is his way of thematizing an ontically primary stance of absorption; an *active taking-in* of this aesthetic aspect of everyday life as it "impinges itself upon us."¹⁷

¹⁶ RFW 49, 105. "...there is an irreducible facet of human experience, *better, an irreducible aspect of creaturely reality*, which we may call 'aesthetic.'" Emphasis mine.

¹⁷ RFW 126-130; Mikel Dufrenne, "Is Art Language?," *Philosophy Today* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1970): 199–200. In the section quoted above, Seerveld is speaking particularly about how "art-as-such... impinges itself upon us," implying that same dynamic is also relevant to the broader nature of aesthetic experience. He also cites the phenomenological aesthetics of Mikel Dufrenne in this section, quoting: "the esthetic object expresses itself in making itself manifest." Earlier in the same work by Dufrenne, regarding the "artificial institutions" of language upon "natural institutions," Dufrenne states: "but precisely the phenomena of ambiguity and polysemeity [sic] aside from the fact that they allow for the subtle game of tropes in introducing a certain amount of play into the system, confirm that the code is not only natural, but that it engages us with nature" (Dufrenne, 192).

In the article "Poetry and Poeming," Carroll Guen Hart states that pragmatist John Dewey's ecological theory of art and Seerveld's theory about the 'everydayness' of art share a similarity of spirit, both claiming that art is not

Over the following twenty years, Seerveld teaches, lectures, and continues writing on these themes, authoring two articles specifically on the imagination. The first is “Imaginativity” (1987), where he carves out a space for acts of imagination that are “irreducible” to either “sense-perceiving or image-constructing or conceptual functioning,” and in which he considers Edward Casey’s phenomenological study of the acts of imagination.¹⁸ The second article is “The Halo of Human Imaginativity” (1991), where he argues that “Imaginativity is not pivotal to human life, but it is integral to normal creaturely well-being,”¹⁹ and that the “quality of imaginativity characteristic of humans resides in all the other ways the LORD created us to be too.”²⁰ During this time, Seerveld also writes two more technical philosophical articles on Dooyeweerd’s role in laying the groundwork for his modal aesthetics and on Vollenhoven’s contribution to art historiography, respectively—always framing his claims in terms of their creational grounds.²¹

In 2000, Seerveld returns to the task of outlining a creational basis of aesthetic normativity in a more focused manner by publishing his book *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves:*

supernatural or disconnected, not a “world unto itself but [something that] enriches our whole lives.” In the course of her active comparison of Dewey and Seerveld’s ‘natural aesthetic’ impulses, Guen Hart also mentions Seerveld’s theory of “depth dimensions” as a notable point of contact between the two. Cf. Carroll Guen Hart, “Poetry and Poeming: John Dewey and Calvin Seerveld on Norm and Process,” in *Pledges of Jubilee: Essays on the Arts and Culture, in Honor of Calvin G. Seerveld*, ed. Lambert Zuidervaart and Henry Luttikhuisen (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 136–43; Carroll Guen Hart, “Grounding Without Foundations: A Conversation Between Richard Rorty and John Dewey to Ascertain Their Kinship” (PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, 1993); John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 5th ed. (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 34, 52, 80-2.

¹⁸ Calvin Seerveld, “Imaginativity,” in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 31–33; Edward Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Calvin Seerveld, “The Halo of Human Imaginativity,” in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 24.

²⁰ Seerveld, “The Halo of Human Imaginativity,” 24-5.

²¹ Calvin Seerveld, “Dooyeweerd’s Legacy for Aesthetics: Modal Law Theory,” in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 45–80; Calvin Seerveld, “Vollenhoven’s Legacy for Art Historiography,” in *Art History Revisited: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 23–60. These articles will be discussed in more detail in the following section. Cf. RFW 107.

Alternative Steps in Understanding Art. In this text, Seerveld commits himself to an understanding of aesthetics predicated on a notion of everyday “diaconality,” or a stance in which aesthetic study and experience and artistic creation are offered as abundant service to others, and as a means of healing and of joy (BFOL 103-9).²² While Seerveld’s rhetorical style in this text often adopts the polemical language many Christians employ with regard to the arts, the spirit in which he does so nonetheless strives to push beyond the comfort of preconceived ideas of what makes art “good” or “bad,” instead remarking:

[The] elision of “subject matter” [i.e., that an artwork does not need to provide a moral lesson] and conversion of a criterion of “beauty” into the norm of symbolic metaphor—have, I think, been relatively sound in the formative history of painterly art. Noting these changes is important so that we do not expect the wrong things from our neighbour’s art today. [... A]rtistic quality is not defined by the picture being a pleasing harmony but by the picture being a metaphor. Although secularization has motivated and accompanied this development, I believe that these tenets can help us Christians better understand and be busy with art in our godless day. It is not the subject-matter that counts in a painting but the spirited vision at work in it; it is not a lovely Beauty that defines artistic quality but a crafted allusivity.²³

²² Calvin Seerveld, *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves: Alternative Steps in Understanding Art*, 2nd revised edition (Toronto: Piquant, 2000), 1–5. Seerveld uses the language of art as a “spilled perfume” and admonishes his fellow Christians to not withdraw from engagement with the arts and artists in the world (BFOL 103-5) and to instead “go the extra mile” with them (BFOL 105-9). Cf. Lambert Zuidervaart, “Introduction,” in *Pledges of Jubilee: Essays on the Arts and Culture, in Honor of Calvin G. Seerveld*, ed. Lambert Zuidervaart and Henry Luttikhuizen (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 3.

²³ BFOL 90, 94-6. Seerveld makes these specific comments in regard to “painterly art,” though the conclusions he draws are more broadly applicable. He also points here to a chapter in his earlier *Rainbows for the Fallen World* entitled “Modern Art and the Birth of a Culture”—a title that further sets himself apart from his contemporary Rookmaaker whose best known (and far more critical) reflection on contemporary art at the time is H.R. Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1970). As an alternative to this, Seerveld suggests that Christians should lament with modern art rather than dismissively scold it: “one needs to hear what [modern artists] are saying, and show enough patience to gather in what lies behind the sounds and sights uttered.... [we] need to learn how to respond wisely and engage charitably” with the art around us (DLA 79n.75). For a reconsideration of the impact of Rookmaaker’s seminal work, cf. Jonathan A. Anderson and William A. Dyrness, *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016).

To remain concerned *only* with a moral message and a pleasing beauty is to be ahistorically distracted from the question at hand.²⁴ A growing pessimism from art not meeting those standards is like being disappointed that your dog will not do your laundry: it is simply not fair to expect it of him in the first place, much less to kick him out of the house as a result of your disappointment. In this manner, Seerveld actively works to divorce aesthetic normativity from reductive or dismissive standards inherent to other frameworks or sets of concerns.

To conclude this brief introduction of the general terms of Seerveld's aesthetics, I will simply summarize more succinctly what I have already outlined as Seerveld's key and consistent impulses throughout these texts. First, he goes to extensive lengths to avoid the reification of aesthetic experience on either subject- or object-side of an easy subject-object division. Second, he is methodologically committed to a non-theological Christian "slant" to art-making and aesthetics founded on a notion of creation/creatureliness. Third, he insists that aesthetic claims and aesthetic normativity are of a contingent historical nature, predicated upon a primary stance of ever more inclusive openness. These things, together, constitute the broader spirit in which his specific claims about allusivity and the imagination operate.

Other Than Immanence and Transcendence: The Perspective of Reformational Philosophy

In order to approach the details of Seerveld's theory and the specific topic of this thesis, it is necessary at this point to transition from broad strokes to a more focused discussion of his direct philosophical influences. Much of the language Seerveld adopts—such as "ordinances,"

²⁴ BFOL 103. "And an artwork does not have to be beautiful to be normative." In *Rainbows for the Fallen World*, Seerveld describes following his proposal for a metaphor-based understanding of art as "much more difficult, dangerous, and basic than simply being a moral man or woman in an immoral society, because it is more inclusive" (RFW 16-7). For a discussion of the opening and increasingly inclusive "longitudinal" dynamic to normativity in Seerveld and Dewey, cf. Guen Hart, "Poetry and Poeming," 130-2.

“modes,” “aspects,” and “cosmic dimensions”—are pieces of a larger systematic drawn directly from what has come to be called the “Amsterdam school” of philosophy founded by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. The Reformational spirit that Seerveld considers himself to be taking up, though, lies deeper than his simply speaking the language.

In the 1930s, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven jointly formulated a “cosmomic philosophy” or “modal law theory” in response to the growing academic interest in an encyclopedic account of knowledge, on the one hand, and the newly established philosophical method of phenomenology stemming from the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), on the other.²⁵ The most comprehensive forms of this philosophy can be found in Dooyeweerd’s efforts to uncover the ubiquity of religious “ground motives” in *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (1960), in his delineation of a “modal ontology” in his three-volume systematic *New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953), and in Vollenhoven’s introduction to philosophy lectures compiled in *Isagôgé Philosophiae* (1930-1945), as well as his vast yet unfinished efforts to chart and systematize a complete history of Western philosophy according to *problemgeschichte* (problem-historical method).²⁶

²⁵ Seerveld, “A Turnabout in Aesthetics to Understanding,” 234-6; DLA 45-52; Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2004), 55–58, 450-1. Seerveld details the encyclopedic impulses within the academy leading up to the time Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven were writing, and includes a list of major figures and their works in the 19th-century (and preceding) push for a systematic account of scientific knowledge (*Wissenschaft*).

²⁶ D.H.Th. Vollenhoven, *Isagôgé Philosophiae: Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2005); K.A. Bril, *Vollenhoven’s Problem-Historical Method: Introduction and Explorations* (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2005); D.H.Th. Vollenhoven, *Schematische Kaarten*, ed. K.A. Bril and P.J. Boonstra (Amstelveen: De Zaak Haes, 2000); Albert M. Wolters, “On Vollenhoven’s Problem-Historical Method,” in *Hearing and Doing: Philosophical Essays Dedicated to H. Evan Runner*, ed. John Kraay and Anthony Tol (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 231–62. The portion of the *New Critique* wherein Dooyeweerd discusses aesthetics most extensively is Volume 2 on the “General Theory of the Modal Spheres.” For a complete list of Vollenhoven’s works see: John H. Kok, *Vollenhoven: His Early Development* (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1992), 363–80.

In addition to the numerous discussions of Reformational philosophy that occur throughout Seerveld's work, two of his articles are respectively dedicated to outlining his inheritance from these two thinkers: "Dooyeweerd's Legacy for Aesthetics: Modal Law Theory" (1985) and "Vollenhoven's Legacy for Art Historiography" (1993).²⁷ While it is well beyond the scope of this thesis to summarize Reformational philosophy as a whole, these articles will help highlight what Seerveld takes up from the "provisional" conclusions of this tradition, as well as what he elects to alter.²⁸

Dooyeweerd's main contribution to aesthetics, according to Seerveld, is his defense of aesthetics as a "special science" possessing "its own kind of integrity because there is an irreducible order of reality that demands special treatment as aesthetic reality, interwoven with all the other features of the universe" (DLA 46). This, Seerveld admits, was not Dooyeweerd's direct intention, but rather an inevitable conclusion drawn from his wider modal ontology which advocates for a distinct-yet-interrelated variety of spheres of activity inherent to and discernible in the fabric of reality (DLA 78-80).²⁹ From the spatial and numeric to the juridical and religious,

²⁷ Other articles relevant to the discussion of Vollenhoven's influence on Seerveld which will also be referenced for further clarification when necessary are: Calvin Seerveld, "Biblical Wisdom Underneath Vollenhoven's Categories for Philosophical Historiography" and "Towards a Cartographic Methodology for Art Historiography," in Calvin Seerveld, *Art History Revisited: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014).

²⁸ DLA 62n.35. Seerveld lists a number of resources and reflections on modal law theory in this footnote, openly acknowledging that many have misunderstood or poorly formulated the impulses of Reformational philosophy because it is easy to ignore Dooyeweerd's and Vollenhoven's self-description of their claims as being "provisional" and "propositional," and to mistakenly take them up as unquestionable elements of established theoretical edifices (see footnote 44 of this thesis). Cf. VLAH 45.

²⁹ DLA 54-8. Many thinkers have discussed the influence of Abraham Kuyper's Calvinist theology and social philosophy on both Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven—an influence Seerveld also discusses at length in these articles. For a discussion of these influences, cf. Anthony Tol, *Philosophy in the Making: D. H. Th. Vollenhoven and the Emergence of Reformed Philosophy* (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2010), 42–54. Dooyeweerd's *New Critique* is furthermore predicated on its being a critique in two directions. It is a "transcendental critique" of the Idealism of Hegel (for example) and the various presumptions toward objectivism Dooyeweerd sees at play in Kant's systematic rationality and the scientism of his day. It is also an "immanent critique" of various strands of what Dooyeweerd dubs "immanent humanism," like materialism, psychologism, Husserlian phenomenology, and Cartesian subjectivism. The former claims a universal perspective while the latter group closes all of experience down to *only*

Dooyeweerd proposed fifteen “modal aspects” that name the discernible structure of the created world (each contributing its own distinctive core element) and that outline the multivalent ways in which people and things can function and act—*none* of which individually subsumes any of the others under its own standards.³⁰ Dooyeweerd’s somewhat Augustinian claim (according to Hendrik Hart) that stems from this proposal is this: together, these modes and their respective internal dynamics *means each in its own way* rather than *has meaning* on the basis of its being able to be taken up into or made sense of by “scientific knowing” (i.e., theoretical reflection) (NC I.Introduction; II.I.I.4).³¹

Seerveld is especially drawn to Dooyeweerd’s thesis regarding the “[b]uilt-in connection of these various aspects,” arguing that the experienced but often unnoticed “actual richness of acts, events, and things is a creational a priori” (DLA 53-4).³² Thus, although aesthetics is not the

individual perspective. Seerveld notes extensively some of his own struggles with portions of Dooyeweerd’s theory, such as Dooyeweerd’s tendency toward idealist conclusions despite framing them otherwise, and like the question of how one discerns the “meaning nucleus” of a given mode. Seerveld even acknowledges the difficulty of labelling Dooyeweerd’s theory itself, which leads Seerveld to mention Robert D. Knudsen’s proposed definition of Dooyeweerd’s theory as “empirical-transcendental” (DLA 73n.61). Cf. NC I.I.I, II.I.I.

³⁰ NC I.I.I.8; DLA 62n.35. It is important to note here Dooyeweerd’s, Vollenhoven’s, and Seerveld’s (among many others’) absolute insistence that modal aspects in Reformational ontology are not somehow “things” in themselves (what Seerveld labels the Idealist’s error), but rather ways in which things and creatures function. The modal aspects are more relational, dynamic zones of “life activity”—though they tend to escape attempts at specific definition. Cf. RFW 106.

³¹ Hendrik Hart, “Conceptual Understanding and Knowing Other-Wise: Reflections on Rationality and Spirituality in Philosophy,” in *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, ed. James H. Olthuis (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 19–53. This reading of Augustine is also implicit in Gadamer’s brief observation (made in terms of a discussion on speculative language theory) that Augustine’s thought (wherein the multiplicity of what is thought proceeds from the originary unity of the Word) might be seen as a “hint” toward later speculative theories of language. Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 484; Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2016), 15–18. A similar impulse to highlight the “voices of creation” can be seen in Seerveld’s introduction of Chapter 1 of *Rainbows for the Fallen World* with an exposition of Psalm 104 and Genesis 2.

³² Already in *A Christian Critique of Art and Literature*, Seerveld names Dooyeweerd’s theory of the richness of “naïve experience” as “perhaps the most significant idea” he offers, and applauds Dooyeweerd for considering “unscientific human knowledge” as genuine knowledge rather than at best “purely sensuous, animalic reception of impressions which one must refine into reliable information” (CCAL 79-80). Though Seerveld finds Dooyeweerd’s clear delineation of “naïve experience” from “scientific knowing” problematic in itself, Seerveld still finds useful his attention to that which does not clearly fall along the lines of “scientific knowing” [theoretical analysis]. Cf. NC I.I.I.2.1; DLA 48n.11.

only way in which we function in and relate to this richness, Seerveld tirelessly insists on aesthetics' disciplinary legitimacy and aspectual distinctiveness precisely for its capacity to elicit how this “basic, common, everyday human knowing is the full-fledged bodily action of an individual enmeshed in the very continuity of temporal reality.”³³ The kind of trustable, unmediated contact with the world Dooyeweerd observes under the rubric of “naïve experience” is the level at which Seerveld's philosophical aesthetic notion of allusivity is at play beyond the stricter bounds of art-making (CCAL 79-80)—although the difficult question is the degree to which how we construe the aesthetic is nonetheless informed by art.³⁴ By identifying this as his area of interest, Seerveld does not deny the possibility or appropriateness of reflective moments in aesthetic judgments, artistic creation, or imaginative acts. He does not, however, want to conflate these reflective moments with what he considers to more broadly qualify those acts *as aesthetic*.

According to Lambert Zuidervaart, Seerveld's inheritance from Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven can be condensed into the following three motives: to reinforce the value of

³³ CCAL 79. Cf. DLA 79; Calvin Seerveld, “Badt and Dittman: Art Historiographic Testing of Heidegger's Aesthetics,” in *Art History Revisited: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 145–49. In an extensive discussion of the art historical theory of Kurt Badt and the aesthetics of Martin Heidegger, Seerveld considers Badt's proposal—that art-making functions as the natural “coalescence” of being and the world—a suggestive alternative to Heidegger's idea in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) of an originarily poetic “world” that humans create through an ongoing *struggle* with and *against* the “earth.” By doing so, Seerveld wishes to highlight Badt's attempts to “demythologize” the Heideggerian conception of art and to uphold his view of art-making as more fundamentally in tune with the ways of the world rather than a primal effort to overcome it.

³⁴ Seerveld's exposition of Dooyeweerd's rather phenomenological understanding of naïve experience/intuition continues: “...a human being's grasping for acquaintance, one's learning and appropriating knowledge of concrete things and events takes place directly, casually, in an ontically given involvement of subject and objects and other subjects. There is no studied distance between knower and know-able. And this ordinary *habitus* of perception is unproblematic, *i.e.*, not that you do not have problems, meet resistance, make mistakes, but that your feeling and judgment and speech and forming is carried on, albeit intelligently and self-*sub*consciously, carried on without the estrangement of abstraction. You deal naïvely in ‘wholes,’ however complex. Even when naïve cognition is opened up, developed, ... such enstatic perceptive action is still uncomplicated by scientific epistemic structuration” (CCAL 79-84). This quote will be returned to later in this thesis.

aesthetics as a distinct discipline of study, to name the aesthetic as a distinct mode of reality, and to propose that the arts are qualified by this aesthetic mode.³⁵ Zuidervaart also notes the key ways in which Seerveld alters Dooyeweerd’s modal ontology mentioned above: by replacing “beautiful harmony” with allusivity and imaginativity as the qualifying characteristic and activity of the aesthetic mode, and by making the aesthetic mode more foundational to the overall structure of the ontology—placing it after the “techno-formative” and before the “semantic” modes.³⁶ What is not obvious from Zuidervaart’s lists, however, is exactly where Vollenhoven’s influence comes into play.³⁷

Admittedly, Seerveld mentions Vollenhoven’s influence most often in his art historical studies—specifically in relation to Vollenhoven’s “cartographic method” which outlines categorical types at play in specific temporal moments as perduring themes and concerns, and as the introduction or creation of new “problems” throughout the history of Western philosophy.³⁸

³⁵ Zuidervaart, “Untimely Voyage,” xv.

³⁶ DLA 80n.77; CCAL 99n.11. Seerveld’s complete proposed list of modal aspects in ascending order is as follows: numerical, spatial, kinematic [movement], physical, organic, psychic, techno-formative [material history/culture-making], aesthetic, semantic, analytic, social, economic, jural, ethical, and confessional [spiritual/faith]. Seerveld notes that fellow Reformational philosopher Hendrik Hart seems to also have adopted this order. Hart is similarly busy in his writings with “opening up” the philosophical subdiscipline of ontology. Cf. Hendrik Hart, *Understanding Our World: An Integral Ontology* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984).

³⁷ While it makes methodological sense to highlight the philosopher Dooyeweerd’s influence on Seerveld’s aesthetic *philosophy*, and to focus on the historiographer Vollenhoven’s influence on Seerveld’s art *history* and *historiography*, Vollenhoven himself was both philosopher and historian/historiographer. Thus the impulses, observations, and principles at play might justifiably be translated across these disciplinary boundaries.

³⁸ Calvin Seerveld, “Towards a Cartographic Methodology for Art Historiography,” in *Art History Revisited: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 74–76; VLAH 47n.61. Vollenhoven identifies five types in the ongoing history of philosophy, discussed at length here: Bril, *Vollenhoven’s Problem-Historical Method*, 39–66. Seerveld outlines the three “coordinates” at play in the historiographical underpinnings of the idea of style he derives from these types: synchronic (existing together at a certain time), perchronic (enduring through time), and diachronic (ongoing change). This, he states, provides an alternative to the “thinner” two-dimensional conception of Ferdinand de Saussure (for example). In VLAH 47n.61, Seerveld explains why he insists on this particular threefold terminology: namely, because Vollenhoven’s own “theory of historiographic method tends to slight the actual *historical* changes that take place, what Saussure would call the factual diachronic processes in the history of language, philosophy, or art: in my terms Vollenhoven seems to conceive diachronic non-contemporaneity as perchronic!” It is here also that Seerveld mentions the “depth dimension of history” that these three “coordinates” allow him to more fully highlight. Cf. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 5–8.

Explicitly, Seerveld uses this method to develop a similar proposition around *styles* throughout Western art history. Seerveld also makes an analogous move in his aesthetic theory by proposing that an understanding of and attention to such *styles* (rather than an arrival at a judgment of *taste*) be a “categorical aesthetic concept.”³⁹ More implicitly, however, Vollenhoven’s influence on Seerveld extends beyond Seerveld’s ability to adapt from him art historical tools. According to Seerveld, Vollenhoven’s work is also influential in defending the distinctiveness of aesthetics as a discipline (DLA 46). Furthermore, Seerveld considers his efforts to go beyond both immanent and transcendental critique by means of his proposed historiographical categories seriously underrated (IP 25-6). He argues that Vollenhoven’s driving historiographical insight—that the development of philosophies is “typological rather than teleological or genetic”—allows us to consider how change and continuity (even at the level of large-scale, long-term ideological change) might be conceived of differently: in more active, creative, or even haphazard ways rather than as either meaningless movements, on the one hand, or predetermined developmental inevitabilities on the other (VLAH 48).⁴⁰

I think Vollenhoven’s historical sensitivities have a greater impact on Seerveld’s *aesthetic theory* than is generally recognized. A deep appreciation for Vollenhoven’s thematization of humanly-shaped and deeply embedded change at the level of historical development of philosophies, I would argue, lies close to the heart of why Seerveld alters what

³⁹ RFW 130. It is for this reason that Seerveld prefers an ever-changing and communally determined “categorical aesthetic concept” of style to that of taste: “In its original sense then, ‘style’ would be the dated, particular world-and-life view-oriented, allusive moment to human life, as it rules art in uncountable ways, and as it fellow-travels functionally within dress, thought, feeling, worship and all other kinds of human activity.”

⁴⁰ Calvin Seerveld, “Biblical Wisdom Underneath Vollenhoven’s Categories for Philosophical Historiography,” in *Art History Revisited: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 12. From VLAH: “It is a mistake to look for causal influences in affairs artistic to ascertain art history: this historical connection is to be found in what a new generation *makes of its inheritance*. The crux to be noted by an historian of art is not so much what is given as what is taken. The historical connection is the unpredictable innovative modification made across the break in continuity.” Emphasis mine.

he does about Dooyeweerd’s proposals for modal ontology. This can be seen, for example, in Seerveld’s finding most of Dooyeweerd’s specific claims about the arts and aesthetics “unserviceable for designating anything with ‘surplus meaning,’” and in Seerveld’s considering the metaphorical-creative aesthetic theories of Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), Susanne K. Langer (1895-1985), Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) significantly more fruitful for attending to a kind of “symbolic knowing activity” that not only acknowledges but *positively upholds* the playful ambiguity of meaning (DLA 46, 77-8).⁴¹ The fact that Seerveld’s moving the aesthetic into a more foundational position on the modal scale comes hand in hand with his suggested changes of Dooyeweerd’s proposed “historical” aspect into the more humanly-developed “techno-formative” aspect also bear witness to another hermeneutical priority *with which* he then reads a Reformational modal ontology of “creation order.”⁴² Furthermore, Vollenhoven’s clearer conceptual delineation of the differences between a creational *law* and a posited *norm* allows Seerveld to more strongly divorce aesthetic claims

⁴¹ Seerveld’s dissatisfaction with Dooyeweerd’s reduction here can be more specifically located in his equating “symbol” with “sign.” Thinkers who have been influenced by Seerveld and who have gone on to do extensive academic work on these symbol theorists are: Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin who has worked extensively on Langer and her relation to Cassirer, and Lambert Zuidervaart who has written on Gadamer. Although, as of yet there is no specifically Reformational philosophical study on Ricoeur’s understanding of symbol and metaphor of which I am aware. Cf. Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, “Mind, Body and Art: The Problem of Meaning in the Cognitive Aesthetics of Susanne K. Langer” (PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, 1999); Lambert Zuidervaart, “Cultural Paths and Aesthetic Signs: A Critical Hermeneutics of Aesthetic Validity,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 29, no. 3 (2003): 315–40; Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello, SJ (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

⁴² CCAL 99n.11. Cf. Hendrik Hart, “Creation Order in Our Philosophical Tradition: Critique and Refinement,” in *An Ethos of Compassion and the Integrity of Creation*, ed. Brian J. Walsh, Hendrik Hart, and Robert E. Vander Vennen (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), 67–96; Nicholas Ansell, “Between Creation and Eschaton: The Foundational and Transcendental Directions of Time,” in *The Annihilation of Hell: Universal Salvation and the Redemption of Time in the Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 210–61; Wolters, “On Vollenhoven’s Problem-Historical Method,” 233-4. This chapter of Ansell’s book contains a thorough engagement with Hart’s ontology and with both his and Dooyeweerd’s theories of time, offering alongside Hart a kindred example of reading Reformational modal ontology with an eye toward a hermeneutical—as well as ontic and temporal—priority of openness or “possibility” (which he distinguishes from “potential” or “telos”). This distinction of “possibility” from “telos” will prove particularly relevant in the following chapter.

from moral-theological and universalizing-rational ones (IP iii-xxxii, 1-20).⁴³ This is not to say at all that such impulses are absent from Dooyeweerd's thought (since he clearly does restrict his philosophical claims and observations to the "structural horizon of human experience" (NC II.II.IV.1-5), and warns repeatedly against unduly "absolutizing" creational aspects).⁴⁴ Rather, while Dooyeweerd's articulation of a modal ontology gives Seerveld the space to consider how the aesthetic mode is distinctly normative, it is arguably Vollenhoven's work that gives him the necessary theoretical tools to open up that structural notion of normativity into a fuller dated, located, and embodied *allusive call* (RFW 130-1).

⁴³ D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, "Calvinism and the Reformation of Philosophy" (1933), "Norm and Law of Nature" (1951), and "The Unity of Life" (1955) in *Dirk H. T. Vollenhoven Reader*, trans. John H. Kok (1998), 21-53, 103-111, 146-56; Kok, *Vollenhoven: His Early Development*, 9-54; Lambert Zuidervaart, "The Great Turning Point: Religion and Rationality in Dooyeweerd's Transcendental Critique," *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (January 2014): 65-89. The normativity associated with creational laws, according to Vollenhoven, by definition transcends and structures creation's bounds and potential, while the normativity proper to a humanly constructed norm is such that it takes a malleable position that contingently holds, and is socially and historically proposed, taken up, altered, etc. There are ongoing debates internal to Reformational philosophy regarding (on the one hand) the notion of "law" as an overarching principle and (on the other) the "religious supra-temporal heart" as a kind of directing spirit that suffuses or 'flavors' an individual's existence and activities in and through all aspects of existence (such as norm-creating). Often these are characterized as distinct principles of *structure* and *direction*, respectively. But where precisely *structure* ends and *direction* begins is a theoretical *aporia* within this systematic. There is predominant agreement that, according to Reformational philosophical principles, laws themselves are not directly discernible within creation, but manifest as modal aspects. The slippage occurs in the implication that a modal aspect being identified as such is akin to having identified a creational law that holds universally. In the strictest terms, though, positing modal aspects and qualifying characteristics therein can only ever rightly be considered *positing*, which is why Reformational thinkers since Dooyeweerd (including Seerveld) have proposed varying numbers and orders of modal aspects. Seerveld himself is nonetheless sometimes inconsistent in his use of "law" throughout his writings. The contexts of his discussions, however, usually make it obvious when he is making a conjecture about metaphysical laws/ordinances and when he is making contingent or propositional claims. Recall this quote from earlier: "Nobody may dictate, nobody *can* formulate absolutely what that modal law under which art specially falls must exactly be... Postulation of the aesthetic ordinance into an artistic norm is neither timeless nor mathematically discrete by nature" (CCAL 45). Cf. RFW 108-9.

⁴⁴ CCAL 81-2, 86; NC II, 437-75, 479-480. For an insightful discussion of Dooyeweerd's claims about the fundamentally "perspectival" nature of truth and human knowing/experience, cf. Lambert Zuidervaart, "Dooyeweerd's Conception of Truth: Exposition and Critique," *Philosophia Reformata* 73 (2008): 170-89.

Imagination, Allusivity, and “Adverbial Service”

The intent of the preceding outline of Seerveld’s influences is to show how his work in aesthetics occurs within a particular world of discourse and responds to a specific set of concerns. He is not proposing a solution to every problem in aesthetics, but is addressing a specific polarized set of tendencies that sees the arts and aesthetics as either everything or nothing at all—and is offering an alternative to prevailing approaches that further what he considers either this overblown or dismissive view. In the simplest terms, Seerveld is trying to chart a third way.

To conclude this chapter, I will take yet another step closer to focus on the actual content of Seerveld’s definitions of *imaginativity* and *allusivity* before turning in subsequent chapters to consider the implications and nuances of his claims and to consider some of the challenges to making such claims—all in order to more concretely outline what aesthetic normativity means for him. Although the arts are not the only means by which subjects and objects function imaginatively and allusively for Seerveld, they do function in the aesthetic mode with a unique “metaphoric intensity” that is less forcefully on display in the rest of life: “Art calls to our attention in capital, cursive letters, as it were, what usually flits by in reality as fine print” (RFW 27). What follows, however, will highlight Seerveld’s proposals regarding imaginativity and allusivity in “ordinary aesthetic life.”⁴⁵

⁴⁵ RFW 141-3; Calvin Seerveld, “Ordinary Aesthetic Life: Humor, Tastes, and Taking a Break,” in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 113–18. In both these texts, Seerveld offers his “tin can” model of the human being and proposes a view of “ordinary aesthetic life” that counters both instrumentalist and dualist anthropologies. Similarly, Dewey calls artworks “celebrations... of the things of ordinary experience,” and argues that through aesthetic experience and work, one might lead an “expanding and enriched life.” Cf. Dewey, 16, 34; Guen Hart, “Poetry and Poeming,” 136-7. The version of Seerveld’s tin can model in his later article on imaginativity and schooling, “Ordinary Aesthetic Life” (p.114), contains more detail than the earlier version in RFW (p.143). In RFW, one of the “kinds of

In his article “Imaginativity,” Seerveld makes a quick survey of the history of Western thought on the topic of imagination, touching on Plato and Aristotle, Kant, the Romantics, and Seerveld’s phenomenological contemporaries—pointing out along the way the reductive, dismissive, or escapist pitfalls of each of these approaches, and refusing to land among them.⁴⁶ As Seerveld sees it, they each contribute in their own way to the “ontological homelessness of imagination” in his day, which stems from “the inability of most philosophers to recognize the irreducible nature and function of imaginativity.”⁴⁷ Later, when he states his position more clearly, he claims: “The prime mode of creaturely existence that determines the nuclear kind of functioning we may call ‘imagining’ is, as I see it, the aesthetic aspect of God’s creatures.”⁴⁸ Basically, imaginativity is a discrete activity characterized by allusivity in this formulation: ontic structure (the “prime mode” of the aesthetic aspect) creates the conditions of possibility for a specific kind of human activity (imagining) then characterized by the dynamic of allusivity.⁴⁹

Imaginativity as a function “has an *as if* character and delights in ambiguity, hidden resemblances, concealed surprises.[...] and works on human consciousness with the hidden surprises that are characteristic of metaphor.”⁵⁰ Seerveld’s notion of imaginativity provides room for the subject to attend to and “live into” the multitude of possible meanings contained in a

affairs humans embody and enact corporeally” is simply identified as “imaginativity” (accompanied by the following list of subjective functions: fun, fantasy, playfulness, expressivity, wit, entertainment, adventure, tastefulness, becomingness, and celebrativeness). In “Ordinary Aesthetic Life,” this model is more clearly divided into a “Ways we humans are created” side (containing the aesthetic mode and a list of “aesthetic analogues” in all the other modes), while what was formerly “imaginativity” expands to “aesthetic life-imaginativity” with the core “gesture” therein being identified as “as-if doing, making believe.”

⁴⁶ Seerveld, “Imaginativity,” 27-30.

⁴⁷ Seerveld, “Imaginativity,” 27. On CCAL 149, Seerveld lists useful resources for study—one of which is Richard Kearney’s *The Wake of Imagination*.

⁴⁸ Seerveld, “Imaginativity,” 33.

⁴⁹ Seerveld, “Imaginativity,” 31-40. See Seerveld’s appreciation for the thoroughgoing study of various kinds of imaginativity done by Edward Casey and Seerveld’s call for more such work to be done. Casey, *Imagining*.

⁵⁰ Seerveld, “Imaginativity,” 32.

given aesthetic object or moment. The *whole-self, as-if, living-into* character of imaginativity trains or primes us in some fashion to open up to ambiguity and possibility in our lived realities, and is present in anything from playful bouts of daydreaming to religious beliefs, according to Seerveld (RFW 55-8).⁵¹

Allusivity is, for Seerveld, a much more deeply embedded notion than the activity of imagination, which he defines at one point in the following manner:

The ordinary human ability to be humoured and to be merry, to indulge imagining things and to be playful, displays concrete functions of a person's aesthetic life ... the dimension of nuance is the aesthetic dimension to one's activity, whatever it be... Aesthetic life is not a matter of feeling or of thinking, of breathing or of trusting someone, but aesthetic life is indisolubly [sic] bound up with feeling and thinking, breathing and trusting. (RFW 49)

In true Seerveld dialectical fashion, allusivity is neither the creative formation capacity upon which it is founded nor the linguistic/semantic clarification capacity which it anticipates (CCAL 46). In the scheme of Seerveld's proposed ontological structure, the aesthetic mode is the handle by which he gets at the allusive character that suffuses the whole of creation. That is, the kind of metaphorical space, open relation, and capacity for possibility and connection-forging that calls forth an expansive sense of attention and absorption. This allusivity in which subjects and objects function aesthetically is characterized by metaphor, nuance, and play: all of which, for Seerveld, serve as open alternatives to closed-down definitions.

Regarding the first of these, metaphor, Seerveld repeatedly upholds it for its "suggestion-rich ambiguity" and its "characteristically oblique" referentiality (CCAL 46) that is

⁵¹ "Reverie is a state of consciousness in which you are delightfully, favourably open and disposed toward whatever passes by or pops into your head. You feel playfully non-directed, not focused on ordinary sensory perception, not crowded with standard associations, but just loosely sensitive to new juxtapositions of half-remembered experiences and current, cursory impressions as fragmentary as cloud formations." [...] A religious/spiritual "confession with no play in its rope—if it is uptight, tense, nervous—is a high-strung, *thin* confession."

not reducible to definition or semantic precision.⁵² Metaphor, for Seerveld, bears witness to the “intensed, disciplinedly elliptical [aspect of] reality” (RFW 132). Regarding the second of these, nuance, there seems to be a difference between acting nuancefully—which characterizes Seerveld’s concomitant notion of *style*—and being *attentive to* nuance, which Seerveld does not clearly distinguish.⁵³ Indeed, attention and absorption seem to be a more appropriate way of framing what Seerveld is getting at (for example, when he speaks of the allusive moment of games being tied to “*focusing* all the ways you are and your human responsibilities *playfully*”).⁵⁴ On this basis, Seerveld contends that what we should be aesthetically attentive to is a more diffuse notion of style and nuance rather than making a judgment of taste.⁵⁵ Regarding the third of these, play, Seerveld speaks most clearly of this as a “subordinate” moment to allusivity (RFW 53, 146), seemingly in order to avoid what he considers significant pitfalls to an ontology or epistemology based on *play*—namely, the view of play as a “sacred loophole” by which to escape reality (Gadamer), play as an ontological entity that is concretely manifest and developmentally discrete in human psychology/anthropology (Johan Huizinga), and play as a constructivist basis for arguing the fundamental groundlessness of existence and of any

⁵² M. Elaine Botha, *Metaphor and Its Moorings: Studies in the Grounding of Metaphorical Meaning* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2007), 15–20.

⁵³ Seerveld, “Towards a Cartographic Methodology,” 74.

⁵⁴ Calvin Seerveld, “Joy, Style, and Aesthetic Imperatives, with the Biblical Meaning of Clothes and Games in the Christian Life,” in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 100–101. Emphasis his. Attention and absorption *gone awry*, though, can lead to a proliferation/intensification of sensationalist and attention-grabbing art-making (and correlative aesthetic ‘need’ or addiction). This warning of how aesthetic absorption can go awry comes through in Seerveld’s characterizations of kitsch, pornography, propaganda, etc.

⁵⁵ VLAH 48n.63. Adopting a more modernist approach to Kant here, Seerveld mentions Hogarth’s *Analysis of Beauty* (1745–53) and Edmund Burke’s examination of the sublime being taken up into Kant’s analysis of aesthetic taste and thereby “liberating aesthetic norms from constrictive ‘beauty’.” Cf. Calvin Seerveld, “Both More and Less Than a Matter of Taste,” in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 139–44.

structures or systems (Friedrich Nietzsche). Rather “the world of play is an optative world, you might say, or at least a subjunctive kind of life” (RFW 52).

In each of these subordinate moments within allusivity and within the activity of imagining, Seerveld proposes that one may be either aesthetically “obedient” or “disobedient.” In other words, one may either open up or close down the full rainbow of possibilities, and one may offer their aesthetic functioning or cultivate their aesthetic sensibility as a gift—as an “adverbial service”—and way of welcoming their neighbor or may use it to be self-absorbed in fantasy, sensationalism, or aesthetic abuses.⁵⁶ What one cannot do is *not function aesthetically*. Even though you may shut down or abuse allusive functions, sensibilities, and ways of being, you cannot avoid allusivity. Both the rhetorical method of Seerveld’s aesthetic theory and the content of his claims and observations about imaginativity and allusivity gesture toward considering an aesthetic mode as an aspect of essential excess inherent to creation: an un-pin-downable abundance and captivating openness to life often misconstrued as a secondary feature. This gesture toward openness invites further comparison. Therefore, to take seriously Seerveld’s proposals about a distinctly aesthetic normativity guided by a basic principle of openness, a more expansive approach—beyond what Seerveld, by his own admission, can offer—is needed to clarify both the structural and functional sides of this relationship.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Seerveld, “Imaginativity,” 42.

⁵⁷ RFW 59. Seerveld makes the self-relativizing comment here that his aesthetic observations might be “normative and obedient”... “*in [his] generation*” [emphasis mine] but that continued (re-)consideration of the merit of his own theory and the merit of others’, as well as the generation of new timely theories, is both necessary and good.

CHAPTER II | Excess and the Everyday: An Aesthetic of Life

Why is there repulsion when the high achievements of fine art are brought into connection with common life, the life that we share with all living creatures?

- John Dewey, *Art as Experience*

In the previous chapter, I have attempted to outline how Seerveld is theoretically committed to a principle of creational openness by characterizing the aesthetic mode and aesthetic activity in terms of *allusivity* and *imagination*.⁵⁸ In this chapter, I will introduce the work of both Katya Mandoki and Richard Kearney as a means of considering cases that might test Seerveld's aesthetic theory on this score—a move that might furthermore expand, challenge, and illuminate Seerveld's work in the areas identified in the previous chapter. Specifically, these interlocutors will help reveal details of the structural and directional elements of Seerveld's theory of *allusivity* beyond the terms of his own argument, and allow us to address more directly

⁵⁸ Given Seerveld's, Mandoki's, and Kearney's differences in terminology, it is difficult to pinpoint a term that fairly captures for each of them what is meant here by "creational" (pertaining to the world broadly construed as real and sensorily available). Among the three, "creational" is unique to Seerveld, while Mandoki and Kearney would use more secularized language to signal their desired expansive understanding of the "natural." Nonetheless, all three set their theories over against "naturalism," by which each (either implicitly or explicitly) means *reductive-determinist* naturalism or materialism (i.e., that everything that exists is, *in essence*, either the direct or eventual effect of material causes). Seerveld, Mandoki, and Kearney also readily include socio-cultural and historical phenomenon as embedded within the "natural" or "creational" rather than superadded to it, thereby complicating any easy delineation between nature and culture. Mandoki, for example, directly criticizes the "naturalistic fallacy" which "assumes, wrongly, the fact that if something exists or is natural it means that it is necessary or unchangeable" (IEA 22). Being more explicitly scientifically grounded in her discussions, Mandoki considers the natural in terms of "earthiness" and the "biological." When Kearney discusses the poetic and imagination, he tends to employ the language of whoever his interlocutors are, but he readily makes use of the term "ontological" to indicate claims about that which exists in reality. Kearney also repeatedly puts forward "naturalism" as a static, reductive materialism incapable of accounting for the poetic and non-determinative dynamics to which he is attuned, even though his method of inquiry is heavily influenced by the "naturalist" (an anachronistic label in this case) Aristotle.

In their various ways, Seerveld, Mandoki, and Kearney all nonetheless adopt theoretical stances grounded in attention to and existence within the natural (temporal-material) world. One might therefore suggest employing a catchall term of "naturalist" to refer to their projects with the understanding that doing so precludes the reductive valence they all wish to avoid. Cf. EA 7-35, 45-8; IEA 107-8, 134; Mandoki, "The Sense of Earthiness," 138; TWI 169; POI 53.

how each provides a contemporary example of retrieving ontological and normative concerns with regard to aesthetics and the imagination.

Mandoki and Kearney are interested in vastly different kinds of projects, both from each other and from Seerveld: articulating a semiotic-modal aesthetics as an outgrowth of evolutionary biology in Mandoki's case, and in Kearney's case, proposing a poetic-ethical hermeneutic anthropology. By comparing Mandoki's and Kearney's projects (and subsequently, with increased focus, Seerveld's), I am not implying that each approach fits perfectly flush with the others, nor am I intent on making a grand revelation that differences in terminology throughout are merely nominal in projects that are, in essence, identical. For example, it would be fair to characterize Kearney as uncovering the aesthetic/poetic foundations to philosophy, ethics, and life rather than being particularly intent on accounting for a contemporary systematic aesthetic theory (a project much closer to Mandoki's and Seerveld's hearts). In the case of Mandoki, it would be inaccurate to claim that her metaphysical presuppositions or religious sensibilities (and, therefore, the implications she draws from aesthetics to these areas) are the same as either Kearney's or Seerveld's. Thus, although I will emphasize points of contact, the respective differences in focus and argumentation of each of these thinkers must be kept in mind.

Even so, one such point of contact is actually their respective differences themselves. The disciplinary breadth of these writings is indicative of a wider contemporary commitment to aesthetics being relevant beyond the realm of its traditional conception. That is, they each reject the presupposition that aesthetics' exclusive area of study is a particular kind of disinterested experience of the fine arts which leads to the creation of judgments of taste, and instead consider

aesthetics both conceptually and existentially foundational to every aspect of life.⁵⁹ I will therefore argue that making the comparison which follows will allow for the recognition of a shared manner of reading certain key aesthetic texts, which will ultimately lend more clarity to the stakes and challenges of Seerveld's claims about what constitutes a distinctly creational aesthetic normativity in the following chapter. This manner of reading Mandoki and Kearney is consciously not comprehensive.⁶⁰ That is, it will not address the full scope of their respective bodies of work, nor will it exhaustively account for their use of sources, but it will treat them with an eye more narrowly attuned to elements of their work that connect to the array of challenges raised by Seerveld in passages like the following:

[M]ost exciting for me, since precedents are scarce, will be a systematic pursuit of “allusiveness” as not just the entitary qualifying object-function of art and literature, but as one kind of real, functionally coherent way-of-being-there all creaturely things either subjectively display or objectively can be taken as. A careful exposition of the ontic irreducibility of “allusiveness,” that there be this prime structural dimension of creation... its modal reality cannot be established frontally, as it were, by an argued deduction. Instead, one will need to collate and contrast examples of affairs embedded in our normal daily experience that beg for recognition of this “aesthetic” kind of structural horizon and regional order of functioning. (RFW 133)

⁵⁹ Arnold Berleant and Allen Carlson, eds., *The Aesthetics of Human Environments* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2007); Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, “Art and Embodiment: Biological and Phenomenological Contributions to Understanding Beauty and the Aesthetic,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 3 (2005): n.p.; Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, *Mind, Body and Art: The Problem of Meaning in the Cognitive Aesthetics of Susanne K. Langer* (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit, 1999); Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizome* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1976); Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1970); Tom Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012); Ossi Naukkarinen, “Everyday Aesthetics and Everyday Behavior,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 15:1 (2017); Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).; Dewey, ch.1.

⁶⁰ The discussion in this chapter will stem primarily from a specific set of writings by Mandoki and Kearney: Mandoki's *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture, and Social Identities* (2007); and *The Indispensable Excess of the Aesthetic: Evolution of Sensibility in Nature* (2017); and Richard Kearney, *Poétique du possible: phénoménologie herméneutique de la figuration* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984); *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (1998); and *Poetics of Imagining* (1998).

In particular, this reading will allow us to focus in on the implications of considering the aesthetic mode more ontically foundational (founded in the “techno-formative” and anticipating the “semantic,” to use Seerveld’s terminology) and to pay increased attention to how the aesthetic “is present somehow in all that goes on, not just in art” (CCAL 90). It will also allow us to ask what kind of openness the aesthetic mode enables in this formulation and to what degree of possibility.

Furthermore, making such a comparison through the work of Mandoki and Kearney, specifically, is pertinent because on the one hand, Seerveld directly mentions Kearney’s work on the imagination as a worthwhile resource for those who might wish to continue with more detailed study of the issues Seerveld raises.⁶¹ On the other hand, the thinkers Seerveld names as suggestive sources for considering further the ontological “home” of the imagination and the role of “symbolic knowing activity” (DLA 46, 77-8) are sources Mandoki and Kearney take direct influence from and engage with extensively in their writings.⁶² I will therefore argue that Mandoki’s and Kearney’s use of a two-pronged principle of porousness/openness and creativity (*aesthesis* and *autopoiesis* for Mandoki, *posse* and *poiesis* for Kearney) allow us to attend with greater intensity to a dimension of reality and experience comparable to that which Seerveld outlines as the aesthetic mode. I will argue this by considering Mandoki and Kearney in tandem throughout this chapter, moving from an exposition of their foundational ontological positioning of a principle of natural metaphor, to a study of how this then informs their respective

⁶¹ Seerveld notes *The Wake of Imagination* in a list of suggestions for further reading in the 1995 edition of CCAL.

⁶² RFW 131-5. Some of the thinkers Seerveld lists are: Ernst Cassirer, Susanne K. Langer, Hans Georg Gadamer, John Dewey, and Paul Ricoeur. He notes in particular their theories of the “symbolic,” “expressive form,” and “expressivity.” Mandoki extensively and explicitly writes in response to Cassirer, Langer, Gadamer, and Dewey (among others), while Kearney studied under Ricoeur, is deeply influenced by his thought (especially his understanding of metaphor and the imagination), and is intent on pushing it further.

porous-creative anthropologies. This will prepare us to consider in the final chapter the implications of these principles for what Seerveld would call the normative or directional potential of aesthetics.⁶³

Aesthetic Ontology: Playing In Finitude

It is somewhat easier to highlight Mandoki's ontological commitments and framework because she is quite open about having them, while Kearney's ontological positioning requires more effort to uncover. Both Mandoki and Kearney, though, clearly adopt a metaphysics grounded primarily in a form of play-based metaphor, and therefore firmly located in the tradition of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Johan Huizinga (1872-1945), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), and Eugen Fink (1905-1975).⁶⁴ Both Mandoki's and Kearney's use of metaphor as a two-pronged principle of porousness and creativity can be further narrowed to a shared constructivist reading of Kant's aesthetic theory—specifically, with regard to Kant's account of the transcendental imagination as, on the one hand, a direct intuition of time and space and, on the other, as the “common root” of all knowledge and grounding of human

⁶³ Mandoki prefers the term “semiosis” to “metaphor.” The specifics of her definition will be clarified in due course, but in this chapter, her use of semiosis is considered interchangeable with the use of “metaphor” throughout the rest of this thesis.

⁶⁴ EA 94; John Caputo, “Being, Ground and Play in Heidegger,” *Man and World* 3, no. 1 (1970): 41; Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Foundations of Culture,” in *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 322–26; Clive Cazeaux, “Kant and Metaphor in Contemporary Aesthetics,” *Kantian Review* 8 (2004): 6–7. Cazeaux acknowledges that Kant does not speak directly of metaphor, but rather of analogy, then goes on to explain how analogy is fundamental to outlining the relationships of Kant’s architectonic. Cf. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); Eugen Fink, *Play as the Symbol of the World: and Other Writings*, trans. Ian Alexander Moore and Christopher Turner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016); Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* [1887], trans. Horace B. Samuel (Stilwell: Digireads.com Publishing, 2007) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: The Modern Library, 1905).

subjectivity itself.⁶⁵ On this score, both Mandoki and Kearney also therefore read Kant through Heidegger’s genealogical interpretation of him, arguing that the *Critiques* offer an intuitive and compelling “enquiry into the conditions of the possibility of knowledge.”⁶⁶ A thoroughgoing attention to these “conditions of possibility” might fairly characterize what Mandoki and Kearney wish to draw out of their aesthetic inquiries.⁶⁷ Furthermore, this philosophical lineage accounts for Mandoki’s and Kearney’s strong phenomenological sympathies in their respective modes of questioning—as well as accounts for how they adopt metaphysical frameworks in a post-metaphysical theoretical landscape at all.

Mandoki, in full awareness of the destruction of philosophical foundations engendered by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in particular, flatly rejects the strand of “antifoundationalist foundationalism” (EA 101) in contemporary philosophy, characterizing it as an inadequate account of our phenomenal experience of meaning-full life. Kearney likewise echoes Mandoki’s reading by critically characterizing this same strand as self-destructively based on a “foundationless foundation” (POI 53, PDP 39). Rather than accept the blanket rejection of

⁶⁵ TWI 167-8; Cazeaux, “Kant and Metaphor in Contemporary Aesthetics,” 2-6. Seerveld also adopts this reading of Kant, saying: “The act of imaginative knowing rests in the same bed of intuition, shall we say, as theoretical knowledge and everyday knowledge” (CCAL 84).

⁶⁶ Pannenberg, 378; Schlutz, 119-21; Luc Ferry, 108; Clive Cazeaux, “Metaphor and Heidegger’s Kant,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 49, no. 2 (1995): 348; Chaplin, “Mind, Body and Art,” 27–32; Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 44; Caputo, 26-7; POI 9; IEA 25-6. The slight difference in terminology between “genetic” and “genealogical” raises a question as to whether the “genetic” approach as characterized by Caputo of Heidegger and the “genealogical” approach of Nietzsche, Foucault, and taken up by Mandoki are able to be taken interchangeably. My contention is that they are since both approaches seek to trace an inherited lineage back through time (and through developmental levels of consciousness) to the fundamental “building blocks” that lie beneath the current appearances of things as a means of accounting for the “forgotten” constructive elements of their appearance as such. Cf. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, 3 vols. (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

⁶⁷ Chaplin, “Mind, Body and Art,” 32. Chaplin outlines how the understanding and ‘productive imagination’ in Kant’s systematic is the mediating means by which concepts are formed from sensation. As such it produces “transcendental schema” (“symbols” for Kant) that are transcendental in the sense of providing the structural “conditions for the possibility in which concepts can be applied to perceptions.” Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer, and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), B177, B185).

meaningful frames of reference (and even of metaphysics itself) advocated for by this approach, Mandoki suggests a recasting, rather than rejecting, of foundations:

Theory is not about building perfect temples for Truth to abide [in], but houses for our mind to dwell [in]. It is definitely architectonic, as Kant has taught us. Thus, a viable and productive interpretation [of aesthetic phenomena] that permits an acceptable degree of understanding is firm enough. We cannot be free either of some metaphysical claims, if not any longer “the metaphysics of presence” denounced by Derrida, at least a metaphysics of ongoing, unfolding processes. Where are we going to begin from if not, precisely, the basics of these processes, namely those that occur in the nucleus of a cell, the hub of life? As all experience and the very primordial processes among live creatures depend on concrete meaning exchanges throughout the whole spectrum of life, we cannot but start from semiosis. (EA 101-2)⁶⁸

Mandoki’s claims in the quote above are sweeping, but revelatory of her overall approach to aesthetics, which advocates for a metaphysics of biological-aesthetic relation rather than of Being—a metaphysics in which time and space (an originary embeddedness in history and embodiment/physicality) are the primary grounding conditions for the world itself, as well as our experience of it.

Throughout her work, she contends that these “concrete meaning exchanges” *emerge* from the foundations and conditions of experience such that “[u]sing spatial metaphors, aesthesis is an *underlying* rather than a *superimposed* process” (IEA 120), and that “[i]t is aesthetics, not

⁶⁸ At this point, one could fairly raise the objection that Mandoki’s use of scientific terminology is analogical or heuristic at most, and could bring into question the scientific basis of her claims that metaphor/semiosis or “concrete meaning exchanges” are *actually* present in things like cellular reproduction and environmental osmosis between entities. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to justify her doing so, but she is far from the first to blur the scientific-metaphorical/linguistic lines by using semiosis as a conceptual tool. By doing so, she explicitly operates in the vein of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), Thomas Sebeok (1920-2001), Francisco Varela (1946-2001), and Humberto Maturana (1928-)—to name a few—and regularly compares her claims to those of Max Black, Thomas Kuhn, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. She also extensively references various “adaptationist” evolutionary theorists, criticizing those which reduce “higher” human functions to the mechanistic outworking of various animal instincts, and commending others like Stephen J. Gould and Richard Lewontin who refuse to understand evolutionary adaptations solely in terms of functionality or cause-and-effect (IEA 130-5). Cf. S.J. Gould and R.C. Lewontin, “The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B, Biological Sciences*, 205, no. 1161 (September 1979): 581–98; Ricoeur, 188-9.

art, that emerges directly from nature” (IEA 134). She further characterizes the foundational relationship of semiosis and aesthesis as a “Möbius-strip relation” (IEA 211) wherein aesthesis predicates (but does not predetermine) any autopoietic activity in which an organism then *subsequently* might engage (IEA 102-8).⁶⁹ Mandoki’s adoption of an emergent and processual “Kantian architectonic” based in semiosis allows her to then use metaphor as a kind of boundary-breaking, relation-enabling tool at all levels of her systematic when such boundaries are otherwise considered to be impermeable barriers.⁷⁰ Like Max Black (1909-1988) and Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) calling attention to the ignored impact of metaphorical structures in scientific theories and communities, and like cognitive scientists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s intention of drawing out the ubiquity of bodily schematic metaphors that enable self-conceptions and worldview-building, Mandoki uses “semiosis” and “aesthesis” to thematize both a necessary ontological precondition of relationality as well as the ongoing porousness of boundaries present in the natural processes of the world—quite literally—from the ground up (IEA 53, 60-1).⁷¹

By designating the meaning exchanges outlined above as semiotic and aesthetic, she characterizes this porousness as simultaneously *excessive* and *connective* in a manner irreducible to the one-to-one correspondence of “signs” (IEA 103). Thus, although *semiosis* is itself a

⁶⁹ One way in which Mandoki justifies her connection of “aesthesis” and “semiosis” is by arguing that Alexander Baumgarten’s seminal yet unfinished aesthetics text *Aesthetica* was intended to cover semiotics as well (IEA xiii).

⁷⁰ Chaplin, “Mind, Body and Art,” 27-31; Clive Cazeaux, “Kant and Metaphor in Contemporary Aesthetics,” 9; Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 102. Cazeaux, in one of his many expositions of the influence of Kant’s *Critiques* on contemporary philosophical uses of metaphor states: “Metaphor (of which analogy is a form) is introduced precisely because it is *the disrespector* of domains, the cognitive principle which, lacking a domain of its own, operates by rupturing the conceptual landscape and placing two formerly incongruent semantic fields side by side.” According to Chaplin, the historicized “extension” of Kant’s architectonic by Neo-Kantians like Ernst Cassirer “is a legitimate extrapolation from Kant’s original formulations. However, it also implies one significant deviation: whereas Kant’s forms of perception and categories of understanding are fixed and universally available structures of the human mind, Cassirer’s symbolic forms are *dynamic and historically evolving processes* which allow reality to be presented in an infinite number of different ways.” Emphasis mine.

⁷¹ IEA 194-5; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 3-6, 14-19, 88-9; Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 18; Ricoeur, 83-90.

linguistic concept, pairing it with *aesthesis* qualifies her understanding of *semiosis*—the former thematizing porous-sensate excess and the latter thematizing the activity of communication. Together, they indicate her affinity with other “symbol thinkers,” and outline her attention to a depth dimension that is distinguishable from and prior to the lingual communication it enables.⁷²

This observation leads her to propose extensive, detailed “heuristic” models of her own: a “propositional taxonomy” of Darwinian aesthetics, in one case, and an historical-developmental “matricial model” in the other. Her book *The Indispensable Excess of the Aesthetic* lays out this propositional taxonomy in terms of three “orbises”: first, the “physical universe of matter-energy and space-time,” second, organic “bare life,” and third, the symbolic collective/communal realm. She further characterizes the aesthetic character of these orbises as follows: “The *primus* is moving. The *secundus* is in activity because it deals with the labor of all creatures in their survival. The *tertius* is dedicated to the work which is cumulative and bequeathed to the next generation” (IEA 7, 45).⁷³ Similarly, her book *Everyday Aesthetics* lays out this aesthetic-semiotic “matricial model.” In her distinction of “matrixes” (i.e., a historically incarnated and dynamically auto-poetic social organism) from “paradigms” (i.e., an indexical, “partial synchronic cut of a dynamic changing matrix at a certain point and time”) operative at interpersonal or social levels of society, she identifies the “blurred borders” (EA 182-4) and porousness possible among matrices as the grounds for preferring it to a paradigm model.

⁷² Chaplin, “Mind, Body and Art,” 183-4. Chaplin helpfully outlines Langer’s nine distinct definitions of “symbol,” arguing: “Although this inventory reveals that many of Langer’s definitions of symbol seem to contradict each other at a superficial terminological level, there is nevertheless an underlying diachronic consistency. This is rooted in a shift away from symbol *as an entity* to a position in which symbolisation is considered as *both a process and a fundamental human capacity*.” Emphasis Chaplin’s.

⁷³ Compare especially the third orbis to Seerveld’s remarks with regard to historical dynamics (broadly construed, although he discusses these dynamics in the context of art history here): “It is a mistake to look for causal influences in affairs artistic to ascertain art history: the historical is to be found in what a new generation *makes of its inheritance*. The crux to be noted by an historian of art is not so much what is given as what is taken. The historical connection is the unpredictable innovative modification made across the break in continuity” (VLAH 48).

Mandoki's proposed matrices operate as historical, social, collective spaces for action that are both diachronic (developing) and synchronic (particular to a specific time and place), while paradigms are "traces of matrixes" and attempts to totalize a particular matrix.⁷⁴

Throughout both books, this coupled porous-creative aesthetic dimension is discernible at all levels of life—and actually constitutes her hermeneutical key for understanding the distinctness and inter-relatability of those "later" or "higher" aspects in the first place. It is this precise positioning of aesthetics on her part that betrays a deep affinity with Seerveld's comparable positioning of the aesthetic mode between the foundational "techno-formative" and "semantic" modes in his own modal scale.⁷⁵ Mandoki argues that the "essence" of a given matrix is determined as "identities converge toward a symbolic center in each and every social matrix" (EA 295)—terms very similar to how Seerveld attempts to outline the meaning "kernel" of a given mode. In a further echo of Seerveld's proposed modal ontology, Mandoki clarifies with regard to her matrix model:

The separate analysis of each matrix here performed runs the risk of being misunderstood as if these would actually exist as discreet [sic], finite and clearly limited units (similar to a reductionist interpretation of Lotman's semiospheres). It is necessary to assert, however, that matrixes are not separated from others. On the contrary, society is constituted by networks of integrated matrixes sharing a manifold of connections in a dense multidimensional fabric whose most approximate image is perhaps the brain's network of synaptic connections.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ EA 182-4. In Mandoki's terms, Heidegger is someone who makes the mistake of totalizing a given matrix into a paradigm. Cf. Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 150-89.

⁷⁵ EA 295-300. Seerveld differentiates between the lingual/semantic and the symbolic. He contends that 'symbol thinkers' (of which he considers Langer to be one) hint rightly at "the fact that there is a structural modal difference between lingual signification and pre-lingual symbolification" such that their idea of *symbol* denotes another order of reality preceding lingual clarity. He clarifies that the "symbolical sphere of reality I am willing to call the aesthetic ordinance in creation." He further claims: "what I have tried to establish is that one misreads reality if in one's ontological theory one does not differentiate precisely the lingual and the symbolical; and what characterizes the symbolical form aspect of the cosmos is suggestion" (which he later calls *allusivity*). Cf. CCAL 88-91.

⁷⁶ Seerveld, regarding the idealist alternatives to his modal ontology, argues that proposing structures is not itself misguided. Rather, the reification of the structures and *forgetting that we have ascribed a structure to the world of experience* is where the "error" of idealism comes into play: "idealism goes wrong, however, in ascribing entitary

In other words, the ontic weight of matrices are made sense of by receptive and constructive *living* rather than identified and located by *logic*.

Mandoki expands on the character of this realm of aesthesis by echoing René Descartes (1596-1650) and citing the semiotic theories of Thomas Sebeok (1920-2001) and interactionist biologist and philosopher Francisco Varela (1946-2001) in her coined phrase “*signo ergo sum*,” or “I mean, therefore I am.” She uses this phrase to argue that the foundational aesthetic mode of life equals excessive signifying at any scale, that “signification corresponds to action,” and that “there is no action without meaning” (IEA 52-3).⁷⁷ According to Mandoki, the biological notion of a thing *being alive* is characterized by a richness of “meaning exchanges,” which are themselves further characterized (first and foremost) by an Aristotelian relation of *motion* and (at more complex levels) of *action* rather than a relation of *causality*.⁷⁸ Any subsequent “autopoetic” (or, self-distinguishing and creative) activity is predicated on a pre-existing field of aesthetic

reality to what is essentially an abstraction from modal structuration. As if *modes* be *things*—which they are not” (RFW 106).

⁷⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, 26, 75-98. Sebeok, in “The Sign Science and the Life Science” (1999), coined the term “zoosemiotics.” Lakoff and Johnson also place themselves in the same “embodied cognitivism” tradition as Varela, further citing Dewey and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty as establishing the organism-environment relationship as a valid philosophical starting point and horizon. Lakoff and Johnson also identify the work of Aristotle as the basis from which these “embodied cognitivism” and “embodied realism” traditions establish arguments for the direct connection of mind to world wherein no clear split exists between ontology and epistemology. According to their reading, embodied realism *accepts* the main tenets of Greek direct realism (i.e., an existing material world and a natural ability to function in it, as well as the lack of a mind-body gap or disconnect) but *rejects* its objective structure and its contention for the absolute knowability of the world. Contrary to this approach, Lakoff and Johnson argue: “What disembodied realism [...] misses is that, as embodied, imaginative creatures, *we never were separated or divorced from reality in the first place*. What has always made science possible is our embodiment, not our transcendence of it, and our imagination, not our avoidance of it” (p.93). Emphasis theirs.

⁷⁸ Cassirer, 70; Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 123ff.; Ricoeur, 9-43. Mandoki’s line of argumentation draws heavily on Aristotle’s definition of organic life being defined by motion, which he puts forward in the *Physics* (201a 10-11, 27-29). From this starting point, she then claims the “unaesthetic” is not ugliness, but rather the “insensitivity of inanimate matter” (IEA 211). In the context of clarifying her own argument that this characteristic *motion* develops (in more complex sociocultural strata) into the characteristic of *action* rather than *causality*, Mandoki passingly mentions Hannah Arendt’s distinction of the transformative capacity of *action* from the determinative aspects of either *work* or *labor* in *The Human Condition* (1958) as a pertinent conceptual comparison. Also cf. Caputo, 35 on the inadequacy of “causality” to account for Heidegger’s fourfold distinction-relation of *world*.

relations and possibilities. Her aesthetic-semiotic preference for *motion* developing into *action* (as the generation of something new and previously unaccounted for in the world) rather than *causality* (as a teleological inevitability discernibly present in an object's or creature's origin) will be important when we turn to consider the directional implications of her theory later on. In terms of the ontological presuppositions at hand, however, an understanding of metaphor guided by *motion* and *action* allows her to establish her subsequent aesthetic arguments on the basis of abundant vitality and fundamentally playful-creative freedom, rather than on the basis of narrowing denomination.⁷⁹

Kearney shares many impulses and presuppositions with Mandoki. His position on the ontological status of the imagination comes through most clearly in his earliest academic work on Heidegger's theory of the imagination and in what he carries forward from his mentor Ricoeur's philosophy of metaphor. Kearney, like Mandoki, identifies Heidegger's work in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929) as the flashpoint at which we become able to reconsider the significance of the imagination as a source of being—as “our most original mode of *temporal existence*” (POI 9).⁸⁰ Thus, the transcendental imagination bears direct and foundational epistemological, ontological, and ethical implications for Kearney; and the importance of

⁷⁹ Ricoeur, 61-6, 104-8. Discussing Pierre Fontanier's understanding of metaphor in *Les figures du discours* (1830) to make the point that it anticipates Wittgenstein's distinction between 'seeing' and 'seeing as,' Ricoeur states that “we will say that to *figure* is always *to see as*, but not always *to see* or *to make visible*.” Regarding this distinction, Ricoeur continues: “This is why Aristotle's definition [of metaphor] is not abolished by a theory that no longer deals with the place of metaphor in discourse but with the metaphorical process itself.” Ricoeur then goes on to discuss contemporary theories of metaphor (the “new rhetoric”) that stem from the work of Black, Cassirer, and others at length. Among these, he discounts theories of metaphor that see it as “a modality of denomination” based on nothing more than “logico-linguistics” (104). Such a “semic *reduction*” (107-8), according to Ricoeur, “ends up splitting the field of metaphor into a denominative function, hence one of delimitation, and an aesthetic function that only emphasizes a trait of an object in order to give ‘a new impression’ of the object” (108). He argues that this creates an unbridgeable divide between linguistic (denominative) and aesthetic (impressionistic) metaphor, and leads him to raise the question: “Is denomination truly the pivot of the problem of metaphor?”

⁸⁰ POI 47-49. Emphasis mine. Here Kearney explicitly outlines the imagination's relevance to thought (epistemological), to being (ontological), to the Other (ethical); and identifies the contribution of the Heideggerian-Kantian view as the disclosure of the “inseparable link between imagination and temporality.”

temporality in particular leads Kearney to advocate for a more relationally-emphatic “hermeneutic imagination” which draws on our finite embeddedness in and interpretation of the world *as given* (PDP 11, 22).⁸¹

In his published doctoral dissertation, *Poétique du possible: phénoménologie herméneutique de la figuration* (1984), Kearney first considers this ground in which his proposed hermeneutic imagination is embedded. Rather than make explicit use of Aristotle’s naturalist trope of *motion* and *action*, however, Kearney considers Aristotle’s rhetorical trope of *poiesis* as the key to understanding the imagination as the ground of experience. Even so, it is necessary to note that what Kearney inherits from Ricoeur and implies (or outright states) himself by making this choice is nonetheless deeply entrenched in Aristotle’s naturalism. Consider, for example, the following passage from Ricoeur’s *Rule of Metaphor* in which Ricoeur reflects on Aristotle’s *mimetic* theory in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*:

It would appear that the expression *imitation of nature* takes us out of the domain of the *Poetics* and into the *Metaphysics*. Is the entire preceding analysis not subverted by restoring the connection between discursive creation and natural production? In the last analysis, does not linking the fullness of meaning to natural abundance render the deviation of metaphor useless and impossible? We will have to return, then, to the reference to nature, such a scandalous stumbling-block in an aesthetics that nevertheless wishes to make room for *muthos* and metaphor.⁸²

⁸¹ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 117, 149–77; POI 46-52; Luc-Ferry, 104-9; Cf. Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 178. According to Heidegger’s reading, given that a constitutive aspect of our finite existence is our existing in time, and that, according to Kant’s formulation, aesthetic experience is a form of intuition especially attentive to this conditioning structure of time, the pure constructive possibilities of the transcendental imagination provides a unique window onto the dynamic ground of Being. Jean Luc-Ferry shares this view of Heidegger’s reading, characterizing it as Heidegger’s (and Kant’s) way of thinking out radical finitude, and arguing that: “the link to an *originary receptivity* must not be broken—the imagination, as faculty at once receptive and spontaneous, being the milieu where this link to receptivity, and therefore to finiteness, is thematized as such.” Kearney later nuances his terminology of the “hermeneutic imagination” into a theory of “narrative imagination” based in a method of hermeneutics. Alternatively, he also proposes an “ethical-poetic” imagination. Despite the changing terminology, his view of the imagination’s role has remained fairly consistent throughout his career to this point.

⁸² Ricoeur, 41. The title of this work when originally published in French in 1975 was *La métaphore vive*. The title of the English translation became *The Rule of Metaphor* in 1977.

Regarding the wide array of human activities that Aristotle leaves open as a realm proper to poetics, however, Ricoeur continues:

Reality remains a reference without ever becoming a restriction.... We believe that we understand *phusis* when we translate it by *nature*. But is not the word *nature* as far off the mark with respect to *phusis* as is the word *imitation* concerning *mimêsis*?... Perhaps it is because, for [the typical Ancient Greek], nature is itself living that *mimêsis* can be not enslaving and that compositional and creative imitation of nature can be possible. Is this not what the most enigmatic passage in the *Rhetoric* suggests? Metaphor, it relates, makes one *see things* because it “represents things as in a state of activity” [...] But *mimêsis* does not signify only that all discourse *is* of the world; it does not embody just the *referential* function of poetic discourse. Being *mimêsis phuseôs*, it connects this referential function to the revelation of the Real as Act. This is the function of the concept of *phusis* in the expression *mimêsis phuseôs*, to serve as an *index* for that dimension of reality that does not receive due account in the simple description of that-thing-over-there. To present men “*as acting*” and all things “*as in act*”—such could well be the *ontological* function of metaphorical discourse, in which every dormant potentiality of existence appears *as* blossoming forth, every latent capacity for action *as* actualized. *Lively* expression is that which expresses existence as *alive*.⁸³

Throughout *Poétique du possible*, Kearney takes up Ricoeur’s argument for natural, abundant metaphor outlined above by making extensive reference to *métaphore vive* in contradistinction to *métaphore morte* (PDP 180-5). From this basis, Kearney argues for the metaphysical establishment of metaphor as a self-aware “temporal incarnation-transcendence” (*métaphore vive*) over and against a view of metaphor as a lie, fantasy, or deviation from reality (*métaphore morte*).⁸⁴ This establishes “live metaphor” as the natural and dynamic capacity to transform (*poiesis*) toward possibility and an eschatological horizon of openness (*posse*). The “figuration”

⁸³ Ricoeur, 42-3. The text and reference of the “enigmatic passage” of the *Rhetoric* that Ricoeur quotes is the following: “It has already been mentioned that liveliness is got by using the proportional type of metaphor and being making (ie. making your hearers see things). We have still to explain what we mean by their ‘seeing things,’ and what must be done to effect this. By ‘making them see things’ I mean using expressions that represent things as in a state of activity” (1411 b 24-5). Translation taken from: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.3.iii.html>.

⁸⁴ PDP 184. Translation mine. Original text: “*La métaphore n’est pas seulement relève métaphysique qui efface son propre relèvement temporel-extatique. La métaphorique peut aussi s’opérer comme transfiguration vive, c’est-à-dire comme incarnation-transcendance temporelle qui se reconnaît comme telle. La métaphore vive est celle qui dé-couvre plutôt qu’elle ne re-couvre sa propre structure de figuration.*”

this metaphor engages in is playful and elusive, but not evasive.⁸⁵ It is actually the basis for establishing and making sense of connections with reality at all levels of human experience, rather than a means of trapping us in a fictional, constructed world that is absolutely unable to contact the “Real.” I think Seerveld would agree with Kearney on this score. While neither Kearney nor Seerveld would say that metaphor is *unable* to mislead, trap, or distract us, both would contend that it does not *necessarily* or *exclusively* do that. That said, I think Kearney is more pointedly interested in arguing that metaphor *shapes* and *frames* our experience of the world, while Seerveld is interested in arguing more generally for the fundamental importance of metaphor/*allusivity* to living a full creaturely life.

Kearney’s focus on a narrative imagination is also therefore schematic or architectonic in the Heideggerian-Kantian sense. That is, within Kearney’s overall philosophy, the narrative imagination provides the conditions of possibility for humanity’s experience of the world. The metaphorical-poetic underpinnings of Kearney’s imagination act almost as the means by which *time* (in the form of the bearing-witness of the past and the in-breaking of the eschatological future to any overly “forgetful,” insular, or universalizing ontologies, anthropologies, or ethical systems) and *space* (in the form of our being always already dated, located, encultured, and embodied) establish and continually shape the very form of our relationship with the world,

⁸⁵ Ricoeur, 258-9. Cf. Jacques Derrida, “Le retrait de la métaphore,” in *The Phenomenology of Man and of the Human Condition* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983), 273–300. In this essay, Derrida puts forward his theory of an ever “retreating” metaphor—a stance which both Ricoeur and Kearney argue against extensively. Their disagreement can be boiled down to this: for Derrida “excess” and “transcendence” are absolute and therefore always untouchable; for Ricoeur and for Kearney, the excess and transcendence that confronts us in the form of the Other always exceeds us, but nevertheless must also be recognized as *having come into contact with us in the first place* (one way of which is through creation). This volume is also filled with essays on the question of a retrieval of nature with respect to phenomenology and our understanding of “the human condition,” including an essay by Paul Ricoeur: “Can Fictional Narratives be True?” (pp. 3-19).

keeping us porous on all fronts.⁸⁶ In other words, the temporal and embodied character of the world (its being both prior to and beyond us) is such that it holds our experience dialogically accountable to its existence as Other (as well as to the existence of others). Even so, things like poetic creation or imaginative activity do not exist as contingencies upon or within a stable reality, or simply as changeable modes in which subjects come into contact with a stable world.⁸⁷ Rather, Kearney's reading of the transcendental imagination focuses on temporality and corporeality as constitutive dynamic forces of reality itself—as the hidden grounding of human subjectivity and objectivity itself, making experience possible in the first place.⁸⁸ Thus for Kearney, as well as for Mandoki, a distinct and easily identifiable line does not exist between the natural world in which we exist and our experience of or engagement with it. At the level of sensation and intuitive aesthetic experience, rather, nature and culture and subject and object become co-constitutive of each other such that (to use the words of Clive Cazeaux) “*everything arises out of metaphor.*”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Caputo, 42. “The function of this question is precisely not to be ‘closed’ (or ‘answered’ like ontic questions) but always to stay open. For what it inquires into is a groundless play, to which anything like a final explanation is simply inappropriate.” Arguably, Kearney's later fascination with narrative and his extensive reflections on especially post-Holocaust narrativity and an alternative ethics of memory to the Absolute Other of Levinas (especially in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961)) could be seen as a kind of reckoning with a somehow more realist ontology of time that constitutes the very ground of our experience rather than absolutely undermines the validity of said experience. Cf. Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁸⁷ Caputo, 32. Caputo's recognition of Heidegger's historicization of Being proves helpful. Caputo contends that for Heidegger, “Being is conceived of here as the overpowering hand of time. Time is the power of the overpowering itself. Being is not an underlying substance (*ousia*), static and permanent in itself, of which time is an ‘accidental’ modification. Being is time itself.”

⁸⁸ TWI 167-8n.29. “There are three main meanings of ‘transcendental’ in Kant. First, as in the term ‘transcendental imagination’ it means that imagination serves as an *a priori* condition of knowledge, as opposed to the *a posteriori* or empirical sources of knowledge. Second, the term ‘transcendental’ is opposed in Kant to ‘formal’ (e.g. as two different kinds of logic). And third, at the level of expression, Kant speaks of a transcendental use of the categories.”

⁸⁹ Cazeaux, *Metaphor and Continental Philosophy*, 12; IEA 15; Lakoff and Johnson, 7-12. Cazeaux is helpful in identifying how Heidegger, Nietzsche, and phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty share the view of the senses not as passive receivers, but as active transformative creators of the perceived world. Amid a discussion of the “science wars,” Cazeaux outlines the stance of “anti-realism,” which asserts “the Kantian view that it is our concepts which shape and determine the nature of reality.” Likewise, regarding Heidegger, Cazeaux argues that he “configure[s] the encounter between subject and world as an opening, which is to say that subject and world meet each other not as

Aesthetic Anthropology: Latching On and Trying Out

Given such a metaphorical opening, what do the preceding ontological claims advanced by Mandoki and Kearney mean for their respective anthropologies more narrowly? That is, what constitutes aesthetic experience for humans when framed in these terms? Mandoki's attention to a ubiquitous and biologically based mode of aesthesis leads her to make a number of propositions regarding how an aesthetic dimension to life manifests *beyond* both exclusively human experience and traditional artistic boundaries (EA 51). She is willing, for example, to consider things like “zoo-aesthetics” or the possibility of attributing an affective life to animals, although she is wary of over-anthropologizing animals in particular or nature in general (IEA 98-9, 107; EA 49-50).⁹⁰ For the purpose at hand, though, her understanding of aesthetics leads her to consider the developmental continuity of humans' “higher” functions with their “lower” ones (IEA 120)—that is, to define aesthesis as “that particular nature of subjectivity that makes it

two pre-formed components but as entities who acquire their being through their mutual participation in or as an opening.” In his own argument for the ontological status of metaphor quoted in part above, Cazeaux clarifies what he means in advocating for its ubiquity as an opening: “Assigning metaphor this ontological value means I take the view that *everything arises out of metaphor*, but this is not the same as saying ‘everything is metaphor’. The latter locates everything within metaphor, has everything belong to metaphor, whereas the former, with its action of ‘giving rise’ to entities, grants us the room to question what belongs to metaphor.”

⁹⁰ Chaplin, “Mind, Body and Art,” 60-9; Lakoff and Johnson, 555-66; Gadamer, 58. For Mandoki, the direction from which our inquiry comes matters—it must stem from the ground up—and a “forced anthropomorphic framing” of the world is as much of a misunderstanding as is a mechanistic reduction of it. Mandoki's sensibilities in this regard might be characterized as advocating for a kind of panentheism versus advocating for a kind of pantheism. Other contemporary turns to more ‘enspirited’ or Neo-Romantic accounts of nature have become increasingly prevalent in the fields of philosophy of science and environmental philosophy. Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers in particular are notable for countering a reductive scientific history with less mechanistic and utilitarian views of the world with their proposed “Gaia principle” and “cosmopolitics.” Cf. Isabelle Stengers, “Comparison as a Matter of Concern,” *Common Knowledge* 17, no. 1 (2011): 48–63; Albená Yaneva, “Introduction: What Is Cosmopolitical Design?,” in *What Is Cosmopolitical Design?: Design, Nature and the Built Environment*, ed. Albená Yaneva and Alejandro Zaera-Polo (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 1–20; Bruno Latour, “Waiting for Gaia: Composing the Common World through Arts and Politics,” in *What Is Cosmopolitical Design? Design, Nature and the Built Environment*, ed. Albená Yaneva and Alejandro Zaera-Polo (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 21–32; Bruno Latour, “How to Make Sure Gaia Is Not a God of Totality?: With Special Attention to Toby Tyrrell's Book *On Gaia*” (September 2004); Mandoki, “The Sense of Earthiness,” 138-147.

sensitive, receptive, or porous to its environment.... that, as a membrane, protects as well as exposes every live creature. Such [a] membrane is the contour that separates and at the same time connects the subject with its world or *umwelt* at any scale” (EA 48).⁹¹

This continuity approach to aesthetic experience is heavily influenced by the work of pragmatist John Dewey (1859-1952), and the porousness Mandoki proposes carries with it a distinctly appreciative valence. Like Dewey, Mandoki considers “aesthetic delight” to be an experience qualified by a difference in *degree* rather than a difference in *kind*:

[A]esthetics is not superimposed on the ordinary but emerges with it from the very beginning, together with semiosis, at the most basic level of the perceptor-effector functional cycle, and develops differentially through the evolution of each species. What we commonly call “aesthetic” is a matter of degree, not of type or kind, since all species exhibit their own forms of aesthesis depending on the particular condition of their neural system.... Aesthetic delight is a qualified aesthesis, not a superior or superimposed delectation on top of common pleasure. (IEA 107-8)⁹²

⁹¹ EA 73 184; Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 16-7, 85-91; Cassirer, 2-3. Taylor discusses various “continuity” perspectives with regard to language in particular (i.e., seeing language as a further evolution of the human animal’s survival instincts). He argues: “There are reductive accounts that would make [things like issues of justice, morals, and beauty] appear continuous.... When we come to aesthetics, this can be seen just as a matter of brute reactions, not based on underlying objective standards, but explicable psychologically. [...] The reductive account is meant to undercut, even refute, the phenomenology which tends to underscore the *sui generis* nature of linguistically informed modes of life. The reductive continuity approach encourages the concentration on description, or alternatively on the coding of information as the main function of language. From this perspective, the step to language can be read mainly as an advance of technique, furthering the continuing ends of survival and prosperity by more effective means.” Taylor goes on to define “human meanings” as related to “metabiological meanings.” For him, human meanings are distinct from those shared with other animals or forms of life and concern matters of interpretation: “goals, purposes, and discriminations of better or worse, which can’t be defined in terms of objectively recognizable states or patterns.” Although Taylor ultimately advocates for the multiform ‘unaccountability’ of human language capability in terms of its *distinctness from* ‘lower’ modes of communication more strongly than Mandoki would allow, Taylor’s text is particularly useful in highlighting the Neo-Romantic underpinnings to the strand of non-reductive naturalism under consideration in this chapter.

Cassirer, on the other hand, offers an explanation of “continuity” theory more in line with Mandoki’s distinctions of *degree* rather than *kind*. He favors Aristotle’s metaphysics over a Platonic split between ideal and natural realms explicitly on the basis of “continuity.” According to Cassirer, Aristotle presents a “continuity” of nature—of “life”—between the ideal and the empirical. This continuity is presented as an upward motion: “Sense perception, memory, experience, imagination, and reason are all linked together by a common bond; they are merely different stages and different expressions of one and the same fundamental activity, which attains its highest perfection in man, but which in a way is shared by the animals and all the forms of organic life. If we adopt this biological view, we should expect that the first stages of human knowledge would deal exclusively with the external world... described as acts which involve a sort of mental adjustment to the immediate environment.” Cf. Gadamer, 105

⁹² IEA, 123; Dewey, 47. Consider also the following excerpt from the first chapter of Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, “The Live Creature”: “Experience in the degree in which it *is* experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up within one’s own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the

This is the basis from which Mandoki claims that aesthetic experience is bound up and enmeshed in life as a whole rather than *disconnected* from its various aspects.⁹³ For example, she continues this line of thought into a counter-reading of the traditional Kantian understanding that reflective aesthetic experience is characterized by disinterested judgments of taste. She seems to take Kant's schematism as justification to instead consider this appreciative aspect of aesthetic experience to be a more primary and, thereby, more universal condition of aesthetic experience. Then, according to her argument, Kant's idea of disinterest can be re-framed. Instead of disinterest meaning that aesthetic experience or judgments must be sanitized, de-particularized, or radically separated from all other earthly concerns (a "meta-utilitarian" reading), disinterest can be understood in terms of "non-utilitarian" *gratuitousness* embedded in every aspect of life.⁹⁴ This allows us to recognize, she says, that "there is an excess that overflows necessity, a dimension of gratuitousness that opens the gates of freedom and attests to our creative role in evolution, as both creatures and creators" (IEA 114, 120-1).⁹⁵

world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events. Instead of signifying surrender to caprice and disorder, it affords our sole demonstration of a stability that is not stagnation but is rhythmic and developing. Because experience is the fulfillment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ. Even in its rudimentary forms, it contains the promise of that delightful perception which is esthetic experience" (Dewey, 19). Dewey consistently uses the spelling "esthetic" rather than "aesthetic" throughout his writing—a choice which has been maintained in this quote. Cf. Chaplin, "Mind, Body and Art," 297.

⁹³ RFW 49; Guen Hart, "Poetry and Poeming," 143. Guen Hart, more narrowly discussing the implications of Dewey's ecological theory of art and Seerveld's 'everydayness' of art, states that the two theories are alike on precisely this score: both claim that art is not supernatural or disconnected—it is not a "world unto itself but enriches our whole lives." Cf. Dewey, 52, 80-2.

⁹⁴ Katya Mandoki, "Material Excess and Aesthetic Transmutation," *Parallax* 7, no. 1 (2001): 71–72; Tom Leddy, "The Nature of Everyday Aesthetics," in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, ed. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 6–7. In this reading, disinterested delight "implies that it does not produce any kind of material benefits, does not generate concepts, and is an end in itself: pure gratuitousness." It is worth asking at this point, as fellow "everyday aesthetics" scholar Tom Leddy does, whether it would be better to consider this approach to aesthetics in terms of Kant's concept of "agreeableness" (pleasure stemming directly from sensation) rather than judgments of beauty. Leddy ends up rejecting this possibility because he considers the mind-body and pleasure-beauty dichotomies problematic in the first place. Cf. Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 184.

⁹⁵ Cf. EA 45-7.

Mandoki calls this gratuitous aesthetic delight “latching-on” to something, and repeatedly characterizes the experience as “productive and playful” (IEA 61-71; EA 68, 177-8). That is, rather than either lust or luxury, Mandoki considers aesthetic experience a matter of leisure wherein we find ourselves fully absorbed in attention to a given object or experience (IEA 130-6).⁹⁶ Continuing her engagement with Kant, she argues that: “aesthetic judgments are nonconceptual or, better, *transconceptual*, involving cognitive faculties but producing no specific concepts.”⁹⁷ According to her reading, there exist concepts of nature, freedom, fine art, and aesthetic ideas for Kant, “but there are no aesthetic concepts.” She takes this to mean that the “freedom” of aesthetic judgment ought not be understood as “unstructured or conceptless,” but as “not stop[ping] at any given concept.”⁹⁸ Thus, aesthetic experience for Mandoki has epistemic affects, but is not primarily a conceptual phenomenon. It is intuitive, bodily, excessive.

While Kearney’s understanding of the imagination as it pertains to human experience is also embedded in continuity with the web of preceding bodily, cultural, and historical relationships that ground and enable it, Kearney’s emphasis tends to be on the transformative

⁹⁶ Guen Hart, “Poetry and Poeming,” 134; Dewey, 277; Chaplin, “Mind, Body and Art,” 5-6. Mandoki argues extensively against fellow evolutionary and bio-aesthetics writers on this issue. In particular, she argues against the presumed synonymy of aesthetics and philosophy of art—a synonymy that is especially prevalent among evolutionary and bio-aesthetics writers (e.g., Denis Dutton, Ellen Dissanayake, Steven Pinker, Stephen J. Gould, Wolfgang Welsch, and Geoffrey Miller). She sees the ready connection of aesthetics and art that these particular writers make as further instances of a largely unchallenged presupposition that Darwinian evolutionary theory can only genealogically account for “higher human functions” in terms of instinctual survival drives and adaptations or sexual reproductive success—both construed as natural forces which a given individual is subject to completely and obeys out of unreflective necessity. Mandoki contends instead that “Art is the daughter of leisure rather than of lust, as the latter craves to satisfy the body immediately, whereas leisure is in no hurry and can play with the abandonment and fantasy that characterizes art and children. Artistic production is the ostentation of excess of available time, playful energy, and sometimes even of talent” (IEA 132).

⁹⁷ Mandoki, “Applying Kant’s Aesthetics,” 67–70. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁸ Mandoki, “Applying Kant’s Aesthetics,” 73-5. Regarding various possible “models” for reading the epistemological aspects of Kant’s claims in the *Critique of Judgment*, Mandoki says: “With *sensibilitas* in mind, we can go beyond the simplistic notion of ‘attention’ (indispensable to the featural model) which has nothing specifically related to the aesthetic about it, and consider both corporeal and mental modes of receptivity. Such receptivity is stimulated and structured by intuition, imagination, and understanding through categorial framing.”

capacity of the imagination. That is, even more strongly than does Mandoki, Kearney points out that the “openness” made possible by the imagination is a constantly transformational relationship to the world and others. That is, imagination has the ability to instantiate *newness*—and the act of internalizing the external (at the level of intrapersonal cognition, interpersonal relationships, international identities, and religious systems) and vice versa could characterize the formal quality of this relationship. In other words, imagination and the “living metaphor” that characterizes it always abides in the horizon of possibility (PDP 185).

This “free play” character of the imagination introduces for Kearney the “paradox of freedom and necessity”:

If imagination is that which *frees* us by suspending our servility to the facts of the “natural” world and by returning us to the world of possibility, it is also that power of “ideation” which discloses the laws of “eidetic *necessity*.” Free variation leads to necessary invariance. At this point a phenomenology of imagination points towards a phenomenology of transcendence ... [but] if imaginative consciousness is wholly free it runs the risk of relativism; and if it is wholly necessary it runs the opposite risk of determinism. (POI 29)⁹⁹

In other words, although the activity of imagination distances us from the “constraints of reality,” it cannot be wholly divorced from them. This is why Kearney consistently labels the imagination as hermeneutic, poetic, or narratival: that is, in constant referential and interpretative contact with where we locate ourselves in the world, though this contact is always of a playful, “as-if” character (PDP 11, 187-8).¹⁰⁰ Construing the function of the imagination in terms other than

⁹⁹ In context, Kearney is discussing the phenomenological imagination of Edmund Husserl as well as the Kantian transcendental imagination—hence Kearney’s mention of the phenomenological idea of “eidetic necessity.”

¹⁰⁰ TWI 103; Kearney, *On Stories*, 125-56. PDP original French text: “*Cette instance éthique de la métaphore transfiguratrice se manifeste clairement semble-t-il, dans le discours poétique que ‘dans lequel l’époché de la référence ordinaire est la condition négative d’un déploiement de référence au seconde rang.’ La transfiguration esthétique témoigne que la figuration se rapporte toujours à une possibilisation du sens (le posse) qui sert de référence secondaire fondamentale ... De cette manière, le herméneutique de la figuration esthétique nous apprend que tout interprétations soit au niveau implicite de l’expérience vécue, soit au niveau explicite de la spéculation, est toujours interprétation métaphorique, interprétation comme qui s’ouvre sur le possible.*”

either necessity or freedom allows Kearney to open up the activity of the imagination as a “hypothetical” mode of distinctly *metaphorical being/activity*. Etymologically, it is worth noting that *hypothetical* simply means “pre-” or “sub-theoretical,” and could be just as easily understood as the kind of broader cognitive activity labeled “intuitive.” It need not carry with it the dismissive valence that often comes with equating “hypothetical” with “fictional.”¹⁰¹

This distinction allows Kearney to explore the imagination as something other than simply a step on the way to “genuine” knowledge, but instead as an irreplaceable way in which we “play along with” a world that invites such play in the first place (PDP 264).¹⁰² Imagination is the means by which we ‘try things on’ and ‘feel into things’ by giving ourselves over to them wholly or imagining them as a “whole” (TWI 169; POI 50-3; PDP 111). In other words, imagination is the way we let the world and the other in as a constitutive part of who we are. For Kearney, imagination ultimately lays the necessary existential groundwork for an empathetic, ethical, full-bodied existence that is truly human (TWI 360-1).¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Ricoeur, 229; Casey, *Imagining*, 178-9; Gadamer, 55-67; Schlutz, 119-22. Gadamer argues: “Kant’s main concern, however, was to give aesthetics an autonomous basis freed from the criterion of the concept, and not to raise the question of truth in the sphere of art, but to base aesthetic judgment on the subjective a priori of our feeling of life, the harmony of our capacity for ‘knowledge in general,’ which is the essence of both taste and genius.”

¹⁰² Caputo, 34-40. Caputo argues, with regard to Heidegger’s proposals specifically, that: “Being ‘toys with’ man. The role of man is to ‘play along with’ (*mitspielen*) the play. The idea of freedom is transformed from the power to take over the direction of one’s Being to the willingness to ‘work with’ and ‘play with’ Being as mission. Being plays ‘because it plays’, and man is caught up in that play. Being as a groundless play also appears in Heidegger’s thought, we have said, under the form of the ‘play of the world’, which he calls the ‘foursome’ (*das Geviert*). The world is the totality.” Caputo continues after making reference to Piaget’s developmental theory and Huizinga’s cultural study of play: “The play of Being is not frivolous or inconsequential. It is the mistake of tough-minded rationality to underestimate the gravity of play. On the contrary, Heidegger asserts, the play of Being is the ‘highest’ and the ‘deepest’ because it concerns the most important matter: the truth of Being.”

¹⁰³ In the conclusion of *The Wake of Imagination*, Kearney makes a distinction between the ethical (critical) and poetic (playful, creative) aspects of the imagination. This distinction will be considered further in the next chapter (TWI 366).

Aesthetic Normativity: An Open Question

The preceding attention to Mandoki's theory of an evolutionary aesthetics and Kearney's theory of a poetic-ethical imagination attempts to illuminate how the "aesthetic dimension" in which these theories abide simultaneously moves in two directions: toward *sensible porousness* and *creative possibility*. As such, this aesthetic dimension operates as a kind of dynamic liminal point wherein the world continually gives shape to us as we continually give shape to the world. Their respective propositions thereby ground metaphor and the activity of imagination in a natural precondition of openness to the suggestive richness of the temporal-material world, and push metaphor and imagination in the direction of a creaturely capacity to be captivated, humbled, and enlivened by possibility. A greater attentiveness to this aesthetic dimension keeps us from thinking we determine or can master the world, yet allows us to be enthralled by and absorbed in the enjoyment of it—and to recognize that to be so is *life-giving*, not simply distracting or purely optional.

All this nonetheless leaves us with the question of where Mandoki's and Kearney's efforts to open up an understanding of aesthesis and metaphor might take us. Both explicitly reject autonomism and subjective relativism as desirable theoretical and existential outcomes to their claims, but by couching their views of metaphor and theories of imagination in the terms that they do, both Mandoki and Kearney effectively evade the question of normativity, even as they gesture toward it.¹⁰⁴ By construing a natural metaphoric capacity and activity as something that eludes boundaries—that breaks them, in fact—and that operates according to its own kind of

¹⁰⁴ Yuriko Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 48, no. 4 (October 1, 2008): 461–63, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayn037>. This is actually the strongest criticism fellow "everyday aesthetics" scholar Yuriko Saito offers in her review of Mandoki's book: that Mandoki refuses to draw out more (even if tentatively) the normative dimensions she hints at with her proposals.

“law,” Mandoki and Kearney are faced with various problems of circularity (IEA 62-70; PDP 185). In the words of Ricoeur: “If [metaphor constitutes its own standard] there can be no principle for delimiting metaphor, no definition in which the defining does not contain the defined; metaphoricity is absolutely uncontrollable.”¹⁰⁵

Both Mandoki and Kearney acknowledge that their theories leave the door open to potentially “uncontrollable” metaphor—that we may become addicted to or desensitized by the aesthetic objects which capture our attention (EA 67-71), and that aesthetic objects and the various ways in which we ‘story’ ourselves have the potential to be both destructive and self-destructive. In other words, good and bad metaphor is a metaphor in either case. How, then, are we to judge between good and bad metaphor or imaginative activity? In addition to this being a somewhat simpler question of aesthetic quality, the question can also be spun out into its weightier moral or ethical implications. It is therefore worth considering more closely what—if any—normative guidance Mandoki’s and Kearney’s proposals allow or make possible. For this reason, the final chapter of this thesis will put Mandoki and Kearney back into conversation with Seerveld.

¹⁰⁵ Ricoeur, 287. Cf. Pannenberg, 325.

CHAPTER III | An Earthbound Love Song: Aesthetic Normativity Reconsidered

And thus nature is never distinct and never vacant, she is always mysterious, but always abundant; you always see something, but you never see all. And thus arise that exquisite finish and fulness which God has appointed to be the perpetual source of fresh pleasure to the cultivated and observant eye; a finish which no distance can render invisible, no nearness comprehensible; which in every stone, every bough, every cloud, and every wave is multiplied around us, for ever presented, and for ever exhaustless.

- John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*

What does normativity look like in the wake of normativity's deconstruction? When various reductive (or overambitious) accounts of humanity have historically run their course or been recognized as insufficient—or even violent and destructive—where do we now look for meaning? Seerveld, Mandoki, and Kearney each in their own way attempt to address these large-scale questions in the suggestive moments of their respective aesthetic theories. By making the aesthetic principles of *allusivity*/metaphor and imaginativity so fundamental to the fabric of the world and our experience therein, it is evident that the question of how to be fully and properly human is at stake in the proposals they make.

Although Mandoki and Kearney share Seerveld's wariness of a traditional aesthetic normativity of beauty on the one hand and various aesthetic normativities of the "makeshift, subjectivist" variety on the other (RFW 124), Mandoki and Kearney do not explicitly concern themselves with aesthetic normativity. While Mandoki does speak intermittently about aesthetic "direction" and "healthy" or "unhealthy" aesthetic views and practices (EA 67-71), and while Kearney does address the need to be able to discern between "liberating" and "incarcerating" images (TWI 390), the goal of either is not to arrive at a distinct proposal for aesthetic *normativity*, which is what Seerveld explicitly concerns himself with outlining. Even so, Mandoki and Kearney do not act as if aesthetic normativity is irrelevant. I would argue instead

that their efforts to uncover a form of distinctly aesthetic normativity can be seen by the fact that they both expand their aesthetic proposals into the religious and ethical realms rather than the strictly artistic.

At this point, then, a decision must be made about terminology. Among these three writers—Seerveld, Mandoki, and Kearney—there is no shared term for what they might wish to designate as the possible means of guidance or direction within the aesthetic dimension of life. To speak of aesthetic normativity, then, has the potential to force Mandoki and Kearney into a conversation in which they might be at a disadvantage. As was the case in the previous chapter, however, the differences among them must be respected, and will be addressed in this chapter as they arise, but the focus will remain on Seerveld for laying out the terms of the discussion.

What follows will therefore highlight what each of these figures' understanding of *allusivity*/metaphor and imagination contributes to the concept of aesthetic normativity today. Mandoki's and Kearney's thematizations of excess and connection, which were discussed in the previous chapter, will be expanded in that direction. Mandoki's emergent, non-reductive naturalism and her stronger attempt to wed human aesthetic experience to an embodied, "earthy" mode of foundational trust, and Kearney's pairing of the poetic and the ethical when trying to clarify the openness we are called to inhabit will prove particularly important to outlining what Seerveld is more willing to identify as distinctly aesthetic normativity.¹⁰⁶ Together, all three help highlight what is at stake in opening up the question of aesthetic normativity.

As for the structure of this chapter, it will move from abstract reflection to a more pointed proposal for how to carry forward Seerveld's particular ideas for aesthetic normativity. To this

¹⁰⁶ Mandoki, "The Sense of Earthiness," 138-47.

end, the first portion of the chapter will address how Seerveld raises the issue of *law* as a point in need of re-framing if the traditional antinomy of aesthetic normativity is to instead become a productive dilemma. I will discuss at this point how Seerveld both employs and challenges the connection of law to aesthetic normativity by considering the more open and embedded “as-if” activity of imagination as the preferable alternative to disinterested judgments of taste—ultimately in order to divorce aesthetic normativity from the stricter normativity of law. The second portion of this chapter will carry these observations forward into a closer reading of Seerveld’s recurring arguments against beauty, primarily as an occasion to show two possible interpretations of Seerveld’s contention that *allusivity* is aesthetically normative. At relevant points throughout the chapter I will include Mandoki’s and Kearney’s gestures toward aesthetic normativity as a way of expanding the conversation. The hope is that the effort of reading Seerveld closely on this score will highlight both the challenges specific to Seerveld’s aesthetic theory as well as some of its points of ongoing viability.

Making Aesthetic Sense: Law, Order, and World Without End

The position from which Seerveld addresses the question of aesthetic normativity—as both Reformational and post-Kantian aesthetics philosopher—is framed on two sides by notions of law. Regarding the Reformational influence, the concept of law is a founding principle of the tradition and (as previously mentioned) has continued to occupy those working within it, deeply shaping the terms with which Seerveld addresses the question and the very framework he adopts. Compounding this influence is the fact that Seerveld is also writing in the discipline of aesthetics which, after Kant, must reckon with Kant’s enduring legacy of having outlined the domain of aesthetics (as well as the extent to which such judgment holds, and the manner in which such

judgment governs our actions and is itself governed) in relation to the laws of reason and the overarching goal of attaining truthful cognition.

In a study of the *Critique of Judgment*, for example, Alexander Schlotz contends that the faculty of aesthetic judgment is “legislated” by the mode of analogy and is not wholly locatable in the realms of either nature or freedom.¹⁰⁷ In other words:

[Aesthetic] Judgment, which does not have a proper domain, thus also does not have a proper realm of legislation, it gives its laws only to itself, not to nature, and in this fictionally autonomous but legally neutral position it can mediate between the two other legislative powers, reason and understanding. Everywhere and nowhere, autonomous but without true legislative power, judgment achieves the fictional a priori mediation born of the philosophical desire for unity and the possibility of truthful cognition.¹⁰⁸

In this formulation, Schlotz describes the traditional understanding of aesthetic autonomy outlined by Kant. That is, the autonomy granted to judgments of taste and to the feeling of disinterested pleasure that identifies them as aesthetic is such that it simultaneously opens up a realm of distinctly aesthetic activity, even as it cuts that activity off from any access to the sources of truth-content available to reason and understanding.

Seerveld recognizes the dilemma created by the connection of law to normativity in the traditional reading of Kant and in the prevailing understandings of aesthetics at the time he is writing. He therefore consistently tries to divorce aesthetic normativity from law altogether—or to at least drive home the point that it is worth maintaining a clear distinction in how the two operate.¹⁰⁹ For example, he at one point describes the Kantian emphasis on judgments of taste as “a juro-analogical aesthetic function of people’s acts, [which] posits a certain normative stand on action” (RFW 59). There are at least two layers to this description and the critique that Seerveld

¹⁰⁷ Schlotz, 119-121; Lambert Zuidervaart, *Artistic Truth: Aesthetics, Discourse, and Imaginative Disclosure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 55–57.

¹⁰⁸ Schlotz, 121-122.

¹⁰⁹ Seerveld, “Both More and Less Than a Matter of Taste,” 138-143.

goes on to level against judgments of taste on its basis, both of which stem from his characterization of taste as a “certain normative stand on action.”

On one level, he is arguing against taste as a *certain* normative stand on action. Recalling what we just read from Schlotz above, Seerveld grants that judgments of taste do possess a kind of analogous normativity, but not because the aesthetic dimension lacks a “real” capacity for normativity—that is, not because the aesthetic realm is fictional or mediational in character. Instead, the analogicity lies in the activity of formulating judgments of taste. Taste is undeniably an aesthetic activity, but Seerveld argues that it is *analogically* defined as aesthetic and is, rather, *characteristically* juridical in kind. While this line of argumentation can easily prove circular (saying that a certain activity is not truly aesthetic because “aesthetic” is defined by something else with which you have chosen to identify it), it is nonetheless worth exploring what makes judgments of taste an inappropriate aesthetic norm for Seerveld in order to see the dynamic he wishes to highlight instead. Taste, he contends, is not what identifies aesthetic activity as aesthetic because it overreads one way in which aesthetic activity has the possibility to develop as the primary way in which all aesthetic activity might be defined.¹¹⁰ In other words, a judgment of taste for Seerveld is a reduction of the aesthetic.

On another level, Seerveld is arguing against taste as a certain normative stand on *action*. Basically, he finds taste problematic, because in the context of aesthetics, it places the emphasis of value on the end result of action at the expense of the receptivity upon which aesthetic activity

¹¹⁰ Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 3, 11, 19, 182–86. Stafford distinguishes between analogy and allegory (what she calls “disanalogy”) specifically on the issue of emphasis. She contends that both analogy and allegory recognize that movement happens from A to B, but allegory emphasizes the discontinuity of this movement (that the possibility of movement in the first place reinforces the distance between two givens) and analogy emphasizes the connection. To further reinforce this idea that analogy *connects*, Stafford also characterizes analogy as a primarily *visual* relation to stress its immediacy (un-mediated-ness). Cf. Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 239–41.

is predicated and to which aesthetic activity is especially attuned. Receptivity of the kind that Seerveld endeavors to highlight as aesthetic is not passivity, but is a kind of patient, absorbed, and attentive intake of a given object or experience that presents itself to you—the kind of preconditioning and generative porousness that Mandoki and Kearney discuss at length. These receptive dynamics and processes are overlooked, he argues, when the emphasis is placed upon the *telos* of aesthetic experience (that is, aesthetic experience as the end result of art) and the question of what we might *do* with the end result. At a fundamental level, Seerveld instead contends for the value of aesthetic experience precisely for its capacity to arrest and direct us and to exceed our *doing*.¹¹¹

In a similar spirit, Kearney also considers the imagination valuable in its capacity to counter the relentless push to action and control. Throughout Kearney's various discussions of imagination, the influence of Emmanuel Levinas' (1906-1995) idea of the Other is palpable. This leads Kearney to (among other things) adopt the "concrete exigency of the *face to face relation*" (TWI 365) as the standard by which to gauge the normative impact of his proposals for the imagination. It also leads him to consider the imagination as a kind of transformative remembrance: a constant interpretative motion between the poetic and ethical elements of human imaginativity. The poetic and the ethical provide Kearney with the two guiding forces by which to "restor[e] some notion of a properly *human* imagination" (TWI 361): ethical action demands "constant discernment" (TWI 362) and the poetic is a "creative letting go of the drive for

¹¹¹ Zuidervaart, *Artistic Truth*, 57-8. Here, Zuidervaart describes Gadamer as taking Kant's and Schiller's subjectivist notion of play and instead "making it an ontological concept from which to derive the structure of artistic truth." Zuidervaart suggests that what is at stake in making play an ontological principle like Gadamer does is not so much an emphasis on either play or work but rather creating "the opportunity or setting to explore, where an exploration's goal emerges from the process of exploring and usually is not predetermined."

possession, of the calculus of means and ends” (TWI 368). Kearney emphasizes the ethical element through most of his work, but at the end of *The Wake of Imagination*, he contends:

The imagination, no matter how ethical, needs to play. Indeed, one might even say that it needs to play *because* it is ethical—to ensure it is ethical in a liberating way, in a way which animates and enlarges our response to the other rather than cloistering us off in a dour moralism of resentment and recrimination.[...] And here is perhaps the place to concede that the deconstructionist habit of foregrounding the idiom of “play” has, despite its frequent abuses and excesses, something very valuable to offer... the predominance of the play paradigm is not simply reducible to an intellectual Parisian fashion, but corresponds, in some respect, to a general rediscovery of the *poiesis* dimension of our world. (TWI 366-7)

In other words, an appropriate grounding in a more playful, poetic notion of reality would act as a counter-current to overly rigid, nihilistic, and “incarcerating” theories and practices established from any direction.¹¹² Kearney clarifies, though, that the free play of imagination is not sufficient on its own, since many examples of solipsistic, suffocating understandings of imagination exist (TWI 251-345). The free play of our imagination must be held in constant contact with our *ethical* relationships to our neighbor—that is, we must constantly attend to how our imaginative groundwork either opens us up to or closes us off from the people of our past, present, and future. This poetic-ethical imagination is therefore a constant process of invention, re-invention, and interpretation of the stories we tell about events, ourselves, and the world at large.¹¹³ Kearney insists that the interpretative motion toward liberating possibility—or the ethicality of our playful

¹¹² Caputo, 41. “Like the early Wittgenstein, Heidegger was convinced of the inadequacy of rational, representational language to express the truth of Being. Unlike Wittgenstein he resorts not to silence but to another language, beyond metaphysics and wedded to poetry, to speak out what there is to say. It is true that, in expressing the sense of Being as a play, Heidegger has chosen a phenomenon which we meet for the first time on a purely ontic level, that is, as an everyday activity of man.”

¹¹³ Kearney, *On Stories*, 89-90; TWI 103, 109-11nn.43-4; POI 180-1; Juhani Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (London: Academy Group, Ltd., 1996), 20. “[S]uch projections into the future would seem to suggest a certain ability of the image to move beyond the *given* sensible experience of our past in order to prefigure *possible* modes of experience.”

imagination—occurs altogether at the ambiguous “pre-theoretical” level of consciousness. He says: “such basic acts of discernment occur at an ethical level, long before we attempt to explain these distinctions in epistemological deductions, foundations or systems” (TWI 362). Both sides of this imaginative dynamic (the poetic and the ethical, the playful and the discerning) therefore occur at the immediate, bodily-temporal level of imaginative *encounter*. It is also therefore precisely this combination of epistemological undecidability (openness) and the ethical drive to decide (interpretation) being held together at the level of encounter that outlines the ethicality *proper to poiesis*, simultaneously constituting the domain of the imagination and guiding its activity (TWI 383-8).¹¹⁴ Within his hermeneutic approach, metaphor-based normativity is basically a matter of being *set off* in the right direction.

Kearney’s distinction and relation of the playful-poetic and the discerning-ethical sides of the imagination allows us to see a bit more clearly that Seerveld’s view of aesthetic normativity also takes on the deeper, more complex character of a face-to-face encounter (VLAH 57n.72).¹¹⁵ The playful openness of imaginativity is, for Seerveld, the means by which a person might attune to the structurally evident array of connections and suggestivity inherent to a given object or experience. For example, Seerveld proposes that in an “act of imaginative knowing,” a person assumes “a living-into-it attitude” (*Hineinlebenshaltung*) wherein she holds herself in:

still attention toward the originally perceived given and works at *apprehending it in a certain facet which eclipses yet collocates all the other modal complexities of the object*.
A person who is imaginatively busy tries to live into a given object’s multiple meanings,

¹¹⁴ In *The Wake of Imagination*, Kearney declares: “No image is either good or bad but interpretation makes it so” (TWI 358)—a claim he reiterates in his later work *On Stories*. There, Kearney more clearly criticizes deconstructive refusals to act, narrate, and represent as shortcomings in need of telic motivation and orientation. Architecture theorist Juhani Pallasmaa likewise simultaneously criticizes the “postmodern image” and holds out hope that “it is precisely the unfocused vision of our time that is again capable of revealing new realms of vision and thought... and gives rise to a participatory and empathic gaze.” Pallasmaa, 24.

¹¹⁵ From VLAH: “Openness to what is strange, care for what is human, and the timing of one’s judgment are probably crucial in the matter of whether one’s diagnosis of the neighbor’s face identifies its lineaments well or disfigures the profile.”

peripheral nuances and tributary connections, and catch all these meanings symbolically together, “esemplastically,” says Coleridge, as they present themselves through one special aspect of the object. (CCAL 84)¹¹⁶

This is a clear instance of Seerveld naming for himself the simultaneously excessive and connective dynamic of imaginativity that is neither purely sensory, rational, or definable by any other mode.¹¹⁷ And while he insists activity in the aesthetic mode does not supersede that in any other mode of being, this quote indicates that he nonetheless considers imaginativity especially attuned to various possible aspects of reality being somehow present altogether in a given instance. By describing this activity with the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s term “esemplastic” (a kind of unification of the disparate aspects of a given thing), he does not contend that this imaginative activity presumes to erase difference or to be comprehensive in the sense of attaining to a kind of untainted fullness of the object. Rather, by characterizing this activity as (and as encouraging) a “still attention,” Seerveld describes imaginativity as a receptive activity by which you allow a given object or experience to lead you through its fullness of possible connections, knowingly as something which necessarily exceeds your engagement with it—and *precisely for* its capacity to exceed and thereby shape your engagement.

Seerveld’s terminological roundabouts with regard to labelling this imaginative activity (“still attention,” “apprehending,” “imaginatively busy,” “catch all these meanings,” etc.) also signal his conviction that imagination as an aesthetic activity is a whole-body, whole-life, “as-if” activity, not simply a mental one. Zuidervaart agrees with Seerveld in this regard, and likewise

¹¹⁶ Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁷ CCAL 86. “But the *hineinleben* is not itself some kind of actual functional deed or psychic power. It is a peculiar structuration of human consciousness which permits a human’s aesthetic, that is, symbolific ability singularly to dominate one’s action toward reality. [... T]his imaginative operation displays a depth dimension (*dieptedimensie*) of temporal human nature which is neither the *ethos* order to naïve experience nor the *epoché* ordering of sciences, but an important third, comparable phenomenon.”

wants to reframe Kant's aesthetic judgment by paying more attention to the imagination in order to highlight aesthetic experience's excessive and connective dynamics:

Once one strips mentalist trappings from [Kant's] account of reflective judgment, one can see "taste judging" as a process of interpreting signs before, alongside, or against their established usages and significations. The same "object" that in other contexts functions as a conventional signal or symbol acquires or displays multiple layers of possible meaning in an aesthetic context. Kant would say that the object in such a context gives occasion for imagination and understanding to engage in freely harmonious play... [I]t would be preferable to say that aesthetic practices let the meaning of a sign become an open question, or that they let the openness of the meaning be constitutive for the sign.¹¹⁸

The nuanced reading Zuidervaart offers makes Seerveld's affinities with Mandoki and Kearney even more apparent—especially in regard to considering aesthetic activity as always necessarily embedded and playful, and in considering an indeterminable openness of meaning to be a constitutive aspect of the aesthetic dimension. Zuidervaart, like Seerveld, contends that an overly *rationalistic* understanding of judgment leads to many problematic proposals for aesthetics. For example, while discussing the merits of distinguishing aesthetics as a standalone 'science,' Seerveld proposes the following:

[W]hen "aesthetic concepts" shuck more of both logicistic and sensationalistic restrictions, that is, when "aesthetic concepts" stop trying to handle referents always as instantiations of some general class or presume that validity means their referents must be governed by a set of sufficient conditions... when "aesthetic concepts" gain *sui generis* metal as *aesthetic* concepts and are still shown to be sound analytic coin, then we will be ready for happy advances in aesthetic science. (RFW 116)

¹¹⁸ Zuidervaart, *Artistic Truth*, 59-60. "First, such creative interpretation is not monological, on the Kantian model of a judging subject and a perceived object. Rather it is dialogical, involving communities and practices of interpretation within which different interpreters interact. Second, creative interpretation is not unbounded. There are limits to the possible meanings that can 'make sense' for any particular sign, even though the limits often are discovered in the process of interpretation. Third, creative interpretation itself calls upon preunderstandings and vocabularies that are intrinsic to aesthetic practices as these have developed in sociohistorical settings." He continues: "Read in this way, Kant assigns to imagination, in conjunction with reflective judgment, an ability to present 'the meaning of something' in a preconceptual and prelinguistic way." He also goes on to discuss how Kant's "aesthetic ideas" precede and exceed other means of communication as "indirect modes" of presenting rational ideas.

Rather than simply problematize the presence of concepts in aesthetic experience or conceptual frameworks for aesthetic experience, Seerveld points to how the *governing implications* that accompany those concepts present the challenge: that the issue lies in their *aesthetic character* not being taken seriously enough.¹¹⁹

It is worth briefly expanding this line of thought, and in so doing, to highlight Seerveld's preference for "symbol" language over that of aesthetic "signs." If the rationalistic superstructure Seerveld mentions above is not sufficiently acknowledged, imagination could simply replace taste as an alternative that nonetheless remains in a relationship governed by reason (even if the terms of the discussion are expanded to include the body or emotions).¹²⁰ That is, in this framework, what is considered normative about aesthetic experience could nevertheless be restricted to its conceptual outcome (e.g., an ability to entertain multiple hypothetical possibilities). I recognize that the difficulty here is in large part a matter of finding apt terminology, and I do not wish to cast aspersions on scholarship that discusses aesthetic experience and activity in terms of "knowing." Such discussions rightly broaden a too-narrow view of knowledge and lingering mind-body dualisms. I simply wish to explore how far these terminological challenges reach—challenges that Zuidervaart also recognizes when he opts instead to discuss "imaginative disclosure," which echoes contemporary theories of "presencing."¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Seerveld, "Both More and Less than a Matter of Taste," 135-44; Seerveld, "Imaginativity," 28-9.

¹²⁰ Hendrik Hart, "The Impasse of Rationality Today (Revised Edition)," in *Wetenschap, Wijsheid, Filosoferen*, ed. P. Blokhuis et al. (Assen: Van Gorcum & Company, 1981), 186-93; Zuidervaart, *Artistic Truth*, 62-5. While describing "aesthetic validity" as something that stems from an intersubjective relation rather than exists as a property of objects, Zuidervaart states: "What gives rise to the apparent antinomy of taste is too narrow a conception of what counts as validity, one that ties validity too closely to a restricted notion of rationality."

¹²¹ Clive Cazeaux, *Metaphor and Continental Philosophy: From Kant to Derrida* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 61; Keith Moxey, "Visual Studies and the Iconic Turn," in *Visual Time: The Image in History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 53-55, 60-61; Stafford, 10, 141-2; POI 46-52; Gadamer, 66-74, 484; Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 16-25, 44-8. According to Kearney (in his reading of Heidegger), to disclose what was assumed to be

If, in the context of a discussion of aesthetic normativity, we were to characterize that aesthetic “facet which eclipses yet collocates” as knowledge—even as bodily, empathetic, or intuitive knowledge—and to further characterize that knowledge as a matter of recognizing norms, we would not be carrying Seerveld’s proposals quite far enough to undo the rationalistic superstructure he identifies.¹²² That is, theories which characterize imaginativity and aesthetic experience in terms of “knowing” can easily operate within a relationship of signs, establishing a more direct, designative connection between an aesthetic norm and a knowing subject (essentially reducing the aesthetic object or experience to a vehicle for communicating these norms) than Seerveld establishes with his more open-ended, constructive idea of *allusivity* as a kind of “everyday aesthetic” symbol theory.¹²³ While it is absolutely necessary to recognize that normativity constitutes a significant part of Seerveld’s theory, and that creating and articulating norms is an inevitable implication of this theory, there seems to be a notable difference worth maintaining between saying that his theory has normative characteristics or advocates for a distinct kind of aesthetic normativity and saying that the dynamic of and activity within that aesthetic realm is itself, at its heart, a matter of recognizing and articulating norms. In other words, there is a subtle difference between recognizing norms (or considering aesthetic norms to

eternal presence as a temporal being is to construe it as *poiesis*. That is, “as an event of creative imagination.” Cf. Ricoeur, 235-7.

¹²² Gadamer, 55-61; Cassirer, 2, 18; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 368-90; Dewey, 19. Gadamer frames the Kantian dilemma of the normativity of judgment as follows: “Kant’s main concern [in the *Critiques*] was to give aesthetics an autonomous basis freed from the criterion of the concept, and not to raise the question of truth in the sphere of art, but to base aesthetic judgment on the subjective a priori of our feeling of life, the harmony of our capacity for ‘knowledge in general,’ which is the essence of both taste and genius.” Recall likewise Mandoki’s definition: “aesthetic judgments are nonconceptual or, better, transconceptual, involving cognitive faculties but producing no specific concepts.” Cf. Mandoki, “Applying Kant’s Aesthetics,” 67-70.

¹²³ Zuidervaart, *Artistic Truth*, 7-9; RFW 138-55; CCAL 79-84. Zuidervaart applies the ways in which he has been influenced by Seerveld to the enduring question of the truth value of art. In this discussion, he defines imagination as “the intersubjective exploration, interpretation, and presentation of aesthetic signs,” and advocates for a “nonpropositional and noncorrespondence theory of artistic truth... as a multidimensional process of imaginative disclosure,” which echoes Seerveld’s earlier definition of imagination, but employs “sign” rather than “symbol” language.

be the *object* of aesthetic experience and activity) and acting in tune with whatever norms are operative aesthetically.

Even in discussions more focused on the realm of art, Seerveld's preference for open-ended symbol language ties closely with his insistence that claims of aesthetic normativity are offered as historically changeable, ongoing efforts at interpreting various objects and moments *in their discreteness*. Aesthetic normativity is not, he says by contrast, a matter of uncovering an enduring law *through* or *behind* an object or experience.¹²⁴ Recall this quote mentioned earlier: "Nobody may dictate, nobody *can* formulate absolutely what that modal law under which art specially falls must exactly be.... Postulation of the aesthetic ordinance into an artistic norm is neither timeless nor mathematically discrete by nature" (CCAL 45). This quote occurs in the midst of a larger effort at clarification:

[P]eculiar to the mode of symbolific activity is an ordinance, a structuring of time meshing with other ordinances, which is neither a logical quality in objects or a governing faculty of autonomous subjects but an ontic order laid down in creation by God which is binding upon all operating symbolific activity. [...] To posit that it behooves symbolical objectification to be law-abiding allusive does not mean [art] must have logical non-contradictory identity or lingual univocality, both of which symbolification anticipates; nor does it mean that symbolical objectification needs only technical well-managed cohesion and psychic stability, upon both of which symbolification does retroflect. To posit that symbolical objectification must be law-abiding allusive is to affirm that it must be heightened by a playful, suggestion-rich ambiguity, its internal thematic convergence and consistency must make aesthetic sense by bearing a characteristically oblique, metaphorical constituency. (CCAL 45-6)

Symbol language pervades this passage—with Seerveld going so far as to characterize art as the making of a "symbolific" object. Law terminology is also prevalent—even as it is used to

¹²⁴ RFW 130; Zuidervaart, *Artistic Truth*, 233-241. Zuidervaart's discussion of Theodor Adorno on the topic of aesthetic norms is indebted to Seerveld on this score. With regard to the failure of the traditional aesthetic model to account for "heteronomous" art, and popular art's apparently eschewing norms of any kind, Zuidervaart claims that Adorno is helpful precisely because he does not reject aesthetic norms but instead uncovers the misguided conviction that these norms are "immutable."

ultimately advocate that the “law” art abides by is allusively its own, and that the appropriate mode of “obedience” is a distinctly aesthetic playful metaphoricity. Combined consideration of symbol and law in his proposed “aesthetic obedience” therefore presents us with a difficult tension. Generally speaking, one either obeys or disobeys a law. If obedience is the goal of acting in an aesthetically normative manner, doesn’t the specific law or norm become the ultimate point of focus, replacing the aesthetic object or experience itself? But at the same time, Seerveld insists that aesthetic obedience is not that kind of an either-or matter. Rather, aesthetic obedience treats aesthetic objects and experiences as discrete *without* treating those objects and experiences simply as avenues by which an aesthetic norm (or the aesthetic ordinance of creation) becomes discrete.

Throughout this passage and the discussion which surrounds it, therefore, Seerveld problematizes considering aesthetic obedience to be a matter of establishing or recognizing clear connections to aesthetic norms—a presumption he instead identifies as a quality inherent to theories of *signs*. Even with Seerveld’s extensive efforts to reframe the question of aesthetic normativity, it is nonetheless often difficult to discern the specifics his claims entail, given that a positive notion of ambiguity lies close to the heart of his propositions. While too strong of an attachment to clarity on this matter could betray our unwitting adherence to a standard of “logical non-contradictory identity or lingual univocality,” and could reinforce some of the traditional aesthetic antinomies, we might still nevertheless bring the issue into greater focus. Having considered some of the more abstract implications of law and normativity, then, how might we make sense of these seemingly disparate impulses in more tangible ways?

The Necessity of the Gratuitous: Taking Allusivity in Another Direction

The goal of this thesis has been to explore challenges to Seerveld's aesthetic theory as well as to consider how he might offer a suggestive way of framing aesthetic normativity today. As a way of identifying these suggestive possibilities and as a way of considering the preceding observations in slightly more concrete textual terms, I will now turn to Seerveld's views on beauty in order to draw out what Seerveld considers *distinctly aesthetic* normativity. Someone with even a passing familiarity with Seerveld's work might quickly characterize his theory as anti-beauty, given his numerous arguments against it and the fact that he sets up *allusivity* as a beauty-alternative. These arguments against "the curse of beauty" (RFW 117) often arise from his historical surveys of aesthetics as a discipline up to that point, with beauty acting as a way of then framing a number of the main problems contemporary aesthetics faces in his day. In this way, beauty does play a large role in Seerveld's theory as a polemic foil to the *allusivity* he proposes, but I do not intend to account comprehensively for Seerveld's narration of how beauty became a problem in the first place. That said, it is necessary to note at the beginning of this section that he is attentive to the various historical roles beauty has played, and the idea of beauty therefore wears many hats for him. It is also worth noting that, despite these many hats, beauty is not actually the problem.

What I do intend to show here is how his setting up *allusivity* as an alternative to beauty occasions two possible interpretations of his proposals for aesthetic normativity. Unsurprisingly, the structure of his arguments against beauty echoes the simultaneous argumentation he employs

against judgments of taste.¹²⁵ With regard to taste, he grants on the one hand the terms of the traditional reading of aesthetic judgment but rejects its archetypal status as the distinguishing characteristic of aesthetic experience. In other words, he allows that aesthetic judgments of taste operate much in the way Kant describes—and that aesthetic judgments have their place—but he denies that judgment is primary. It is not at the heart of what guides our experience or activity within the aesthetic dimension of reality.¹²⁶ On the other hand, he denies the accuracy of the traditional Kantian understanding of aesthetics altogether. That is, he sees it as leading to a false dichotomy in the first place, relegating aesthetic activity to an inescapably secondary position, and demanding a fundamentally different way of framing the problem. With regard to beauty, there are likewise two possible ways of interpreting Seerveld's critiques, each providing some measure of insight into his understanding of distinctly aesthetic normativity. One interpretation grants the terms of the problem thrown forward by beauty, and proposes *allusivity* as a more appropriate alternative normative standard. Another interpretation, which better captures Seerveld's deeper impulses toward openness and his emphasis on aesthetic distinctness, construes *allusivity* as a means of problematizing normativity itself.¹²⁷ What follows will explore both of these interpretations in turn.

The task of the first interpretation would be to explore how *allusivity* might embody a *more truly aesthetic* kind of normativity. Seerveld, unlike many of his Christian aesthetics counterparts, has no interest in reviving the idea of beauty, and states quite plainly that it is not

¹²⁵ RFW 118-9. Seerveld describes Enlightenment theories of taste and beauty as act-object correlates, so the transference of argument is drawn out on this basis.

¹²⁶ Seerveld does not deny that there are *any* elements of judgment proper to the aesthetic dimension. Rather, even as he pursues distinctly aesthetic normativity, he attempts to counter the longstanding fixation on *making judgments* as the *goal* of aesthetic activity.

¹²⁷ Hart, "The Impasse of Rationality Today," 178.

the solution to the aesthetic woes which he feels we face. Rather than be guided by “the tainted name of Beauty” (RFW 125), which closes down aesthetic activity and inquiry, *allusivity* opens up the possibility for us to be playfully directed and suggestively active. One of the criticisms he levels against beauty is that it is too vague, directing attention toward the speculative and away from the world in which we live. He says, “[during the Enlightenment] ‘beauty’ meant, somewhat diffusely, architectonic wholeness and telic harmony,” and more recent attempts to revive beauty are often “working with an analogical metaphysics partial to an erotic ladder of Being, amid shadows of natural theology tintured with mysticism” (RFW 119-22). Adopting “Beauty in some transcendental way” as a means of understanding art and aesthetic experience, Seerveld argues, leads to an “apologetic attitude toward art and the ontological framework in which Beauty was born” (RFW 122). Among other things, Seerveld finds beauty’s ‘escapist’ tendencies the most aesthetically troubling because it construes the world as something to get beyond rather than as the most immediate source of meaningful experience.

Allusivity, according to this first interpretation, draws us to consider more closely the myriad ways in which a given object or experience is embedded in the very fabric of the world and bleeds into who we are. “Aesthetic life,” for Seerveld, “is a matter of the ordinary playful, and when opened up, styleful life zone of our creatureliness whose nuclear meaning is ‘suggestion’.”¹²⁸ Seerveld states outright that the “conversion” of the aesthetic norm of beauty into the norm of “symbolic metaphor” (or *allusivity*, in his later terminology) has been a positive historical development because the kind of engagement it calls for is more patient and attentive to the deeper “spirit” of an object or experience and to the multiplicity of aesthetic styles.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Seerveld, “A Turnabout in Aesthetics to Understanding,” 243.

¹²⁹ RFW 130. By discussing the “spirit” of an aesthetic object or experience, Seerveld sets himself up in direct relation to Hegel and Kant. Hegel’s theory of art is such that art (in each of its forms) is an objectified manifestation

Using many people's aversion to 'typical' modern art as an example, Seerveld argues that allowing *allusivity* to guide our aesthetic activity and engagement means to "show enough patience to gather in what lies behind the sounds and sights uttered.... [We n]eed to learn how to respond wisely and engage charitably" (DLA 79n.75). *Allusivity* interpreted this way is both cognitive and affective, calling us to give ourselves over to an object or experience and to heed the task of *paying attention*.

In terms of the preceding comparison of Mandoki and Kearney, this "conversion" of beauty into *allusivity* allows us to see Seerveld's desire to consider aesthetic meaningfulness in terms other than causality and teleology. Mandoki grounds aesthetic experience in ideas of naturally generative *motion* and *action*, Kearney constructively uncouples narrative imagination from teleological ends, and they both identify aesthetic activity as the mode by which we become radically (if often momentarily) captured by something and set off in a playfully undetermined direction of figuring out what it means. Similar observations lie behind Seerveld's claims that a key component of aesthetic life is its affirmation "that there is more to life and history than salvation of humanity... there is more to creation than human creatures" (CCAL 52). That is, aesthetic normativity is not about arriving at a set universal standard by which to gauge every particular aesthetic instance. The broader opening-up quality to which Seerveld's everyday

of both the larger longitudinal dynamic of *Weltgeist* (or the Spirit of world-history) and the more contextual *Zeitgeist* (or the specific time, place, and people-group from which a work of art springs and of which it 'speaks'). In Hegel's formulation, the "spirit" a work of art expresses is the "spirit of the age" or a given cultural context. Recognition of this "spirit" is an understanding of the distinctly human-crafted Idea(s) the artwork embodies, and the felt force of its truth-quality. Although Seerveld's notion of "spirit" bears many affinities with Hegel's (specifically Hegel's contextualization of "spirit"), Hegel's intellectualist and Idealist framework also differs greatly from Seerveld. A thorough comparison of Hegel and Seerveld, however, is far beyond the scope of this thesis. Kant also extensively mentions the "liveliness" or "vividness" grasped by the subjective aesthetic experience of an aesthetic object as the source of aesthetic pleasure. Cf. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 56-61, 91-105, 518-25; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), §9, §44-53, §68.

aesthetic theory of *allusivity* points (and for which Mandoki and Kearney provide support) is rather a matter of attending to the individuality and contextuality of each given instance.

Nonetheless, the inherent suggestivity of the world is not always self-evident. Seerveld therefore states that *allusivity* is the “creational ordinance” and “aesthetic-calling-to-obedience” that is directed toward life-giving suggestivity, and simultaneously requires more careful attention and more joyful abandon than does the recognition of beauty. In fact, to be “aesthetically obedient” means, on the one hand, to joyfully and charitably engage in “diaconal” aesthetic activity (BFOL 103-9) and, on the other hand, to attend more closely to the aesthetic “fine print” that “flits by” in the world (RFW 27). These are examples of the kinds of things that *allusivity* calls us to do as aesthetically normative. If we do not—or if we use aesthetic ways of being as a means of manipulating or desensitizing others or ourselves—we are “disobeying” the aesthetic ordinance of creation. This terminology, however, makes it challenging to consider how one can be “aesthetically obedient” in the kind of imaginative activity that is generative precisely in ‘disobeying’ established rules.¹³⁰ In other words, although Seerveld proposes *allusivity* as a way of encouraging Christians to (in terms of art) pursue new forms of art-making and learn to appreciate the deeper spirit of an artwork that seems to ‘not fit’ established conventions or sensibilities, and (in terms of his broader construal of aesthetic experience) to recognize things like surprises, gifts, and joy as aesthetically meaningful, speaking of these

¹³⁰ Mandoki, “Applying Kant’s Aesthetics,” 74. “Productive imagination in aesthetic-making can itself establish, not only obey, these demands by selecting and inventing materials and techniques, generating new styles, genres, languages, and startling aesthetic utterances. It also can play with the conceptual in relative freedom attempting totally unusual associations and mapping qualitatively different sets of coherence, as in metaphorical mappings.”

things as instantiations of “aesthetic obedience” seems to denature their rootedness in playful boundary-pushing.¹³¹

This way of construing *allusivity* as aesthetically normative is heavily inflected with a certain understanding of Christian theology—specifically a form of law-obedience. In this framework, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to justify seeing Seerveld’s proposals for *allusivity*—which, though stemming from his Christian beliefs about the world, are supposed to be generally available apart from belief—as meaningful to those who do not already adopt a Biblically-informed worldview. Furthermore, this reading would seem to outline a *Christian aesthetic doctrine* rather than what is distinctly *aesthetically* normative, thereby also falling into the kind of elision of theology with aesthetics that Seerveld often criticizes other Christian views of aesthetics and the arts for performing. Basically, we are left asking how this might matter to someone who does not already accept its Christian premises, and how someone might adopt this view of aesthetics or act “aesthetically obedient” without first having to adopt Christian theological premises. I do not think the solution to this challenge is to deny Seerveld’s openly Christian basis for his ideas, since to do so would be to do violence to his theory. Instead, I think running up against this barrier indicates that the line of questioning has slid into the realm of theology rather than aesthetics, and indicates the need to pursue another line of thought within his work—of which the following second interpretation of *allusivity* is an example.

¹³¹ Sarah A. Mattice, *Metaphor and Metaphilosophy: Philosophy as Combat, Play and Aesthetic Experience* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 54–55; Aaron Harper, “Playing, Valuing, and Living: Examining Nietzsche’s Playful Response to Nihilism,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 50, no. 2 (2016): 306–13; Pannenberg 325-34, 363-4; Gadamer 101-8, 445. Pannenberg describes Gadamer’s theory of play as outlining a player’s becoming ‘bound’ to the game: “The attraction of a game, the fascination it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game tends to master the players.” To consider this “mastery” as a simple obedience to rules is too narrow an understanding: “A combination of economic and bureaucratic rationality has gained the upper hand, with the result that religion, along with all the other functions of life that are meaningful in the narrower sense of the term and not simply ordered to rational goals, has been forced into the private sphere and subjected to the principle of arbitrary choice. In consequence, the concept of play too had been emptied.”

The main task of this second interpretation of *allusivity* in the context of Seerveld's various beauty discussions would be to recognize his attempt to aestheticize normativity itself. This interpretation pivots on Seerveld's repeated insistence on the distinctly *aesthetic* character of whatever terminology he employs. It is also occasioned by his claim that it is not enough to "dethrone" beauty in favor of a more flexible standard since doing so leads to an absolute relativization of aesthetic experience which still remains coupled with a suffocating form of normativity that is "unquestionable" either in its authority or its indefinability (RFW 121). Like Mandoki and Kearney, then, Seerveld recognizes that an overly diffuse and vague aesthetic theory has just as much potential to deaden aesthetics as does an overly single-minded and authoritative one. Furthermore, he contends that simply replacing beauty with another concept (of which the first interpretation of *allusivity* is an example) is precisely what leads to this conundrum.

Early on in *Rainbows for the Fallen World*, Seerveld notes the historical coincidence of the decline of beauty and the rise of aesthetics as a 'science' (*Wissenschaft*), which allows him to make the point that beauty has always held aesthetic activity accountable to a "general normativity" of "order":

the historical concept of "beauty," in all its variations, has been a concept of "order" paved with good intentions to maintain a sense of *general normativity*; therefore, "beauty" had to be broken, and will always have to be rejected as the kernel of art if the "aesthetic" is to be conceived in its *relative specificity*, that is, if "artistic" and "aesthetic" are to get beyond being designations of a vaguely nondescript quality [i.e., "beautiful"]. (RFW 117)

By outlining all of beauty's "variations" as veiling a normative standard of "order," he is not trying to make a counterpoint that beauty is "disorderly" in an order-disorder binary. Rather he wishes to highlight how the idea of beauty keeps aesthetics and aesthetic experience in

submission to a stultifying law of logic and order (RFW 62, 116, 122-6).¹³² In other words, “beautiful” simply acts as the aesthetic analogue of “logical,” marking just another region over which an abstract idea of lawful order is normative. Thus, aesthetic experience is expected to “make sense” *in the same manner* that logic might (i.e., the form of the relation takes on a similar shape), but the content with which it concerns itself is aesthetic (usually taken to mean “emotional,” “artistic,” or “sensory”) (RFW 116).

Instead of abiding by a clearly delineated and enduring lawful order, Seerveld contends that *allusivity* “holds somehow for all creaturely reality” and is attuned to by “aesthetic life,” or the “ordinary human ability to be humoured and to be merry, to indulge imagining things and to be playful. [...] Aesthetic life is not a matter of feeling or of thinking, of breathing or of trusting someone, but aesthetic life is indissolubly bound up with feeling and thinking, breathing and trusting” (RFW 49). The aesthetic dimension, when characterized by *allusivity*, is also “this structured, venturesome element of human life [that] may in turn serve both to open up our

¹³² In the midst of a criticism of technocratic consumerism in the context of an “obedient aesthetic life,” Seerveld offers the following explanation for his unwillingness to make stronger dictums for what *ought* and *ought not* be done: “I am being very careful not to dictate what a person should do, since taste is not a matter to be adjudicated any more than it is an algebraic problem to be solved.” This is admittedly a less technical example, but nonetheless reveals 1) his awareness of people’s desire to *adjudicate* aesthetic matters with a certain perceived level of authority and 2) his contention that just such a kind of authority is inappropriate to the realm of aesthetics. On p.116, Seerveld goes on to describe the implications of overburdening aesthetic activity with standards of logic. A bit later in the text, Seerveld goes on to specify what exactly he finds problematic about Dooyeweerd’s view of the aesthetic (as well as Rookmaaker’s use of it) in particular. In pp.124-6n.11, he labels Dooyeweerd’s understanding of aesthetic “harmony” as primarily “economic.” Nonetheless, he goes on to describe the economic character of Dooyeweerd’s notion of harmony as follows: “One suspects that ‘harmony’... shows up in jural deliberating more as a frugal thrift-calculating-constructive moment, indeed, an opened-up economic analogical function, deemed peculiarly aesthetic only because it is needed by the systematics.”

Cf. Hart, “The Impasse of Rationality Today,” 187-191. Hart makes a comparable observation with regard to the conflation of order and logic: “But one cannot conclude from the special relation between order on the one hand and knowledge of order through logical-analytic processes on the other hand that order is in fact logical. However, the related but distinct phenomena of order and analyticity have been conflated in our culture’s views of rationality. Autonomous rationality became the origin of order. To say that the universe is orderly or structured is the same, for many, as to say that it is logical or rational.” He continues: “Order differs from and is irreducible to the phenomena for which it holds.... All order, including logical order, is irreducible to logicity.” He goes on to conclude that, “Order is not (simply and only) logical, but knowing order is logical.”

feeling-life and formative-life as well as to fortify and buoy our speech and thinking, our making acquaintances and keeping friends, and yes, even our testimony and prayer-life” (RFW 54). This manner of speaking bears a strong resemblance to some of the themes Mandoki attempts to highlight as characterizing the manner in which aesthetic activity shapes us and takes shape itself. For example, Mandoki explicitly states that the religious, not the artistic, most effectively displays the excessive porousness she characterizes as aesthetic (EA 205). She also then goes on to suggest that such religious and theologically open aesthetic sensitivity would provide helpful tools to “closed down” evolutionary theories that cannot account for their own presuppositions by stating boldly that: “Aesthetics are, evidently, the key to selection and to directionality in evolution” (IEA 62, 212).¹³³ A slightly subtler manner in which Mandoki connects aesthesis and religion is in her recurring characterization of aesthetic openness as a fundamental trust in the world we inhabit:

What characterizes sensibility as openness (in sensation, discernment or regard) to the world is facing novelty not as a danger but trustingly, coming closer to and latching-on to the object because the subject feels safe. Not a strictly adaptive function, this valuation is biological excess for the subject since it alerts and sharpens its senses against the habit of automatic reactions. (EA 130)

In other words, to construe aesthesis as natural or everyday in the way that Mandoki and Seerveld do is not to construe it as automatic, predictable or mundane. All Mandoki’s efforts to

¹³³ Mandoki recognizes that dominant readings of Darwinian evolutionary theory act as their own (often unconscious) metaphysical frameworks when she pushes proponents of these readings to open themselves up to broader frames of reference not reducible to the unquestioned causality of natural processes. She argues, for example, that these theories have no means of accounting for things like variety, change, and irreversibility in evolution. Evolutionary theorists who do appeal to (literal or metaphorical) theological principles for evolutionary problem areas are: Alfred R. Wallace, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Ludwig Klage, Stuart Kaufman, Jacob von Uexküll, Humberto Maturana, and Gregory Bateson. Mandoki goes on to focus on the thought of Friedrich S. Rothschild who appealed to and developed a “theological perspective of evolution as inner adaptation within transcendental subjectivity to an omnipotent and omniscient God. This particular perspective would not have theoretical relevance for biosemiotics except for the fact of focusing upon two aspects that evolutionary theory has paid little attention to, *namely the question of directionality and of subjectivity.*” Emphasis mine. Cf. Cassirer, 18-23.

divorce an evolutionary aesthetic approach from various reductive-materialist accounts on this score betray her view that *appropriate* aesthetic openness (i.e., its positive/normative direction) can be recognized by interminable variation, and the fact that it relationally *enlivens* rather than *deadens* us to the world (which includes our embodied selves, others, and the material-temporal conditions in which we live). Furthermore, she considers this discernible and absorbing abundance of life as evidence that aesthetic attunement to the world reveals how it moves in the direction of a dynamic other than lawful predictability. As she (somewhat playfully) suggests:

Such splurging throughout a variety of species and prodigious forms seems to violate the law of entropy, because instead of tending to homogeneity and disorder, evolution tends to diversify and differentiate. One suspects that what is at stake in nature is a perspicacity to integrate and blend the simple into greater complexity and to peek into the unknown.... *All seem to point to the possibility of a God who would create the world out of mere curiosity. And God saw that it was so interesting... and got excited.* (IEA 8)¹³⁴

It is important that the play she outlines here is marked by absorption and curious attention, rather than competitive mastery.¹³⁵ In a playful twist on *imago Dei* aesthetic arguments, she uses this origin story to subsequently argue: “We need to trust the reality of excess, to feel that we can

¹³⁴ Emphasis mine. Cf. Calvin Seerveld, “Christian Aesthetic Bread for the World,” in *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2014), 152; Seerveld makes a similarly playful suggestion when he asks: “What happens when one revamps the aesthetic/artistic norm and dares to posit that in the beginning God said, ‘Be allusive!’ rather than ‘Be beautiful!’?” A little later in the text quoted above, Mandoki begins her second chapter with a compounded “almost delusional interpretation” of the Big Bang and the story of creation in Genesis 1, wherein: “[God] played out of curiosity and combined [quarks, electrons, and radiation] into neutrons, protons, and all the existing elements like a LEGO game...” Mandoki draws out this train of thought by musing: “Perhaps God has continued working secretly on the eighth, ninth, and tenth [days] until today, but since we are creatures of the sixth, we are unable to conceive [God’s] subsequent creations, just as creatures of the fifth day may be unable to acknowledge the singularity of humans” (IEA 40-2).

¹³⁵ Casey, *Imagining*, 14-19, 140-1, 178. Casey identifies a main problem with philosophical descriptions of imagination is that they are “truncated from below and thus top-heavy” (p.14) leading to the relegation of imagination to a secondary role. Casey continues: “To adopt such a model is to presume that imagination must occupy some particular position within its stratified structure; and it is also to imply that there is some inherent competition between various mental activities for the honor of being accorded the topmost position” (p.18). Given the continuity of perception and imagination in aesthetic experience, he argues instead that imagination ought to be considered part (rather than entirely characteristic) of aesthetic experience more broadly construed (pp.140-1). Acknowledging his stricter focus than on aesthetics more broadly, it is worth noting his characterization of what arguing for the distinctiveness of imagination entails. “Imagination’s autonomy,” he concludes, “does not entitle it to a position of predominance. This autonomy is indeed distinctive, but to be distinctive is not *eo ipso* to be preeminent” (pp.178-9).

lose without remorse, that there is a margin for vagary and play, that life gives more than we can take” (IEA 208).¹³⁶ Although Mandoki builds a more direct connection from aesthesis to religion than Seerveld would necessarily agree with, putting her suggestions into closer conversation with Seerveld’s proposals helps highlight their shared impulse to find a language other than the traditional understanding of “normativity” with which to describe the kind of guidance or direction that aesthetic life manifests and provides. For the sake of consistency, I will continue to use the term “normativity,” but I wish to make the point that this need to find alternative terminology is an important consideration worth taking up beyond the scope of this thesis, and is actually a key takeaway from putting Seerveld into conversation with these interlocutors.

To take a cue from Mandoki’s arguments above, a major concern that often arises once anyone tries to question aesthetic normativity in this manner is that any alternative proposals become too vague. However, Seerveld contends that *allusivity* actually allows us to consider aesthetic normativity with greater “relative specificity” (RFW 117). The following are just a few more concrete characterizations of what this opened up “relative specificity” looks like for Mandoki and Kearney as well as Seerveld. For Mandoki, aesthetically normative activity (“positive aesthetic direction,” in her words) manifests in abundance, differentiation, porousness, and growth; while aesthetically un-normative or harmful activity desensitizes, consumes, creates dependence, closes down, and alienates. For Kearney, “proper” aesthetic and imaginative activity is an ongoing act of “em-plotment,” or constantly renegotiated, dialogical self-situating in an open relation to the Other; while “improper” aesthetic and imaginative activity promotes

¹³⁶ Given contemporary ecological concerns around a reckless overuse of natural resources—what could also be taken as a form of assurance that “life gives more than we can take”—it is important to note her preceding arguments: that this assurance stems from playful curiosity, from the recognition that the earth itself demands recognition as an ethical ‘subject’ of a kind, and from an extensive exploration of our interrelation with our environments, etc. Context makes clear that her claim should *not* be taken as license for remorseless *consumption*.

mastery-over, denies being in conversation with others and the world, and is perceived as either timeless, disembodied, or meaningless. Seerveld likewise considers a variety of “anti-normative” aesthetic and artistic activities, but, he says:

not to obtain a complete roster of offences so one can mete out exact penalties, but to honor the relativity of anti-normative human activity so as to avoid relativism or the curse of treating every human error with a *fatwa* (sacred prescription to destroy), while at the same time knowing clearly what is wholesome aesthetic/artistic bread for the world, and not pseudo-beautiful stones.¹³⁷

The various “subaesthetic,” “para-esthetic,” and “anaesthetic” activities he outlines err on a number of fronts like dullness, unimaginativity, eccentricity, and banality. Things like kitsch and various “anti-aesthetic” activities take the error a step further in their capacity to “kill” playful imaginativity, surprise, wonder, and aesthetic activity itself. Although he outlines all of these examples as variations on the “anti-normative,” he nonetheless differentiates the maliciousness of intent in these latter two realms (on the basis of their instantiating various violent, deceptive, and ‘bad faith’ reductions) from other ways of aesthetically missing the mark without ill intent. While this list raises a number of difficult issues around the question of determining *artistic quality* when the field of aesthetic normativity is opened up so, that is a much more narrow concern than an opened up everyday aesthetic normativity is attempting to address.¹³⁸ Seerveld, Mandoki, and Kearney all push the stakes of identifying a distinctly aesthetic normativity far beyond the question of “How do we make and recognize good art?” For Seerveld, the question might instead be put: “How does any aesthetic activity in which I engage increasingly open me

¹³⁷ Seerveld, “Christian Aesthetic Bread for the World,” 159-66.

¹³⁸ The question, for example, of what takes precedence—artistic quality or aesthetic openness—is a notorious dilemma. If a work of art occasions increased openness and understanding on the part of its audience but is poor in technique, is it aesthetically normative? Alternatively, if a work of art is technically masterful but deviant in some way, made in bad faith, or propagandistic (to name a few options) can it, too, still be aesthetically normative? These are questions worth raising, but, unfortunately, are not the focus of this thesis.

up to the world and my neighbor?” This is a question Mandoki is also guided by in her characterization of aesthesis as fundamentally a developmental openness to one’s environment, as is Kearney in his coupling of ethicality and play and his prioritization of the face-to-face relation. Any more practical questions around art-making would fall under the direction provided by this broader framework.

To return to the implications of this broader framework, some examples of ways in which Seerveld’s ideas of aesthetic normativity have already been expanded in this more open direction can be seen in the work of Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin and Carroll Guen Hart. Chaplin, a former student of Seerveld who has studied phenomenologists like Ernst Cassirer, Susanne K. Langer, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, seems to pick up on this element of intent and to go on to characterize the normative character of aesthetic activity as an increasingly aware “intentionality.” While discussing Merleau-Ponty in particular, she describes intentionality as going “all the way down,” as one ‘being-towards-the-thing’ in which the “body-subject stands in an ongoing living dialogue and reciprocal relation with her existential environment of which the symbols of science are merely ‘a second-order expression’.”¹³⁹ Given Seerveld’s differentiation of intent in how one acts either in tune with or against the grain of aesthetic normativity just outlined, Chaplin’s recognition of the role of intentionality is key. Guen Hart, another of Seerveld’s students, discusses the “bi-directionality” of the embodied mind that emerges from her reading of Dewey and Seerveld in terms of “grounding” and “emergence.”¹⁴⁰ She contends that the direction of grounding becomes more constrained while the ‘opening up’ process of

¹³⁹ Chaplin, “Art and Embodiment,” n.p.; Gadamer, 439-43; Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 15-25, 42-4. Taylor’s work shares a similar impulse to ‘re-order’ our perceived priority of scientific and unscientific language and modes of thought in favor of considering poetic, embodied modes more primary (which is why he explicitly takes up the “constitutive language theorists” he does).

¹⁴⁰ Guen Hart, “Poetry and Poeming,” 132.

emergence becomes less constrained and more open to imaginative play and new articulations. I have already described both Mandoki's and Kearney's work as moving in two directions. In light of the comparisons I have made of their work to Seerveld's, I think Guen Hart's use of the term "bi-directionality" to describe Seerveld's view of aesthetic normativity is apt. In these terms, I think Seerveld is especially attentive to the side of "grounding," the significance of which Guen Hart describes in the following way: "[the] direction of grounding reminds us that we come out of an organic and communal 'matrix' to be honored and respected as the source of our own life. It also reminds us that the communal undergirds all of our individual qualities... [and] helps us to respect the distinct normativity of process."¹⁴¹

All of these descriptions of aesthetic normativity/directionality (and in particular Chaplin's ongoing dialogue with one's environment and Guen Hart's bi-directional normativity of process) help focus the picture of what Seerveld is trying to designate as distinctly aesthetic normativity. For example, when outlining the quality of everyday allusive activity, he maintains:

[A] human being's grasping for acquaintance, one's learning and appropriating knowledge of concrete things and events takes place directly, casually, in an ontically given involvement of subject and objects and other subjects. There is no studied distance between knower and know-able. And this ordinary *habitus* of perception is unproblematic, *i.e.*, not that you do not have problems, meet resistance, make mistakes, but that your feeling and judgment and speech and forming is carried on, albeit intelligently and self-*sub*consciously, carried on without the estrangement of abstraction. You deal naïvely in "wholes," however complex. Even when naïve cognition is opened up, developed... such enstatic perceptive action is still uncomplicated by scientific epistemic structuration. (CCAL 79-84)

There are a number of things worth noting about this quote. First, I think Seerveld's insistence that everyday allusive activity means we "deal naïvely in 'wholes,'" is his way of arguing both that such allusive activity is not simply either mental, emotional, or sensory; and that allusive

¹⁴¹ Guen Hart, "Poetry and Poeming," 132.

activity is such that it leads you to treat your object as a “fully modal” agent of its own—as a kind of active dialogue partner that can direct the conversation rather than just be acted upon or studied.¹⁴² In other words, you *as a whole* deal with objects of experience *as wholes*. Second, by labelling this allusive activity “enstatic,” Seerveld further emphasizes this activity’s embedded character, arguing that you *act fully* in this way by pushing more deeply into connections-to-be-made rather than increasing your distance through abstraction. He is advocating for a discipline of fascination with objects and events as they present themselves to you, rather than considering aesthetic activity primarily a mode of reflection. Finally, by contending that allusive activity is uncomplicated by “scientific structuration” (i.e., rationality), he is not saying it is devoid of *any* structuration. He simply wishes to be clear that even when such allusive activity can lead to “higher” cognitive activity like abstraction or positing of moral principles, that does not rob it of its originary aesthetic character, nor does it mean that its originary aesthetic character is latently rational.¹⁴³

Another key component of Seerveld’s description of allusive activity that is relevant to this discussion of aesthetic normativity is his characterization of it as “unproblematic”—that is, not immune to being abused or requiring no effort of discernment, but as *trustworthy*. I have already mentioned that a compelling aspect of Mandoki’s and Kearney’s theories is how they

¹⁴² This is a key reason why Seerveld begins so many of his aesthetic writings with reflections on the Psalms (most notably, Psalms 19 and 104) wherein the earth and various creatures are often poetically characterized as “speaking for themselves” (RFW 10-41). He makes this choice over and against the choice of most other Christian writers in aesthetics and the arts who generally look for ‘Biblical justifications of the arts/aesthetics’ in the Genesis 1 account of creation and the making of humanity in *imago Dei*, or with the scattered praises of tabernacle artisans in Exodus and temple finery in 1 Kings (RFW 123-4n.10). Seerveld’s starting in the Psalms allows him to also start from a committedly creational standpoint (significant within his religious tradition): in poetic attention to the way the world bears witness to its own suggestivity. This is not completely divorced from *imago Dei* arguments, but does insist a bit more strongly on the creational framework and human-perspectival starting point.

¹⁴³ RFW 130-1. Here, Seerveld mentions “activities which are opened up in structural dimensions that supersede the allusive” that have also “absorbed the aesthetic element into their more complex range of functioning.”

outline a primary condition of being human creatures as our capacity to be directed, and their characterization of this capacity as aesthetic. In fact, Mandoki, Kearney—and Seerveld as well—all go slightly further to recognize that this primary condition is not simply an abstract capacity to be directed, but that our primary creaturely condition is such that we are always already moving somewhere (i.e., acting in and on the world, existing in time and space, etc.) and being moved by something (i.e., are enmeshed in a web of cultural, historical, linguistic, social, etc. relations) whether we are aware of it or not. Aesthetically normative actions, moments, and objects, then, would develop an increasing *trust in* and *alertness to* your embedded relation to the world, as well as a constant willingness to re-evaluate where you are and where you are going. Aesthetic normativity, when discussed in this way, is both necessary *and* gratuitous—it can never be wholly either one or the other. It opens up a safe—but not predictable, reductive, or predetermined—space for allusive activity.¹⁴⁴

Both interpretations of Seerveld’s proposals for *allusivity* as the guiding characteristic of aesthetic normativity do important deconstructive and constructive work. What outlining them both allows us to see is that finding a viable way forward for aesthetic normativity is not simply a matter of finding a more fitting candidate to play the role of ‘aesthetic legislator.’ This is why it is key to recognize Seerveld’s impulses toward openness in how he describes the ontic primacy of *allusivity* as providing a more expansive understanding of the deeply creaturely value of metaphoric suggestivity. The excessive and connective, historically developed, and materially embedded dynamics of Seerveld’s *allusivity* push us into ever deepening constructive contact with the world, and allow us to consider ways of engaging with the world that are meaningful,

¹⁴⁴ EA 130; Chaplin, “Art and Embodiment,” n.p.

expansive, neighborly—but that are not prescriptive or deterministic. Instead, *allusivity* is a constant invitation to accept life as a gift.

CONCLUSION | Through a Glass Darkly or Face to Face

Over the course of this thesis, I have introduced the main tenets of Seerveld's aesthetic project—in particular, outlining his Reformational influences and the various definitions of his ideas of *allusivity* and *imaginativity*. I also expanded these definitions in a limit-case comparison with Mandoki's and Kearney's consonant understandings of *metaphor* and *imagination*. In this comparison, Mandoki's porous-poetic aesthetic and Kearney's poetic-ethical imagination helped paint a clearer picture of the aesthetic dimension as a space of excess and connection. In the final chapter, I explored the normative stakes of the claims made in the previous chapters, and highlighted the various contours of a distinctly aesthetic normativity based in *allusive* suggestivity.

Throughout these chapters, the ideas of openness and normativity have remained in close contact rather than being set at odds with each other. What is notable about Mandoki, Kearney, and Seerveld, both individually and altogether, is that this 'normative openness' and 'openness of normativity' is the means by which they dismantle various bifurcations often set up by both traditional aesthetic discourse and contemporary post-metaphysical aesthetic discourse. That is, even granting their differences, they do not choose sides in a losing battle, and (to a degree of equal importance) also do not sidestep the problem of aesthetic normativity by either shrouding the issue in mystery or pessimistically declaring the kind of undecidability being explored in this aesthetic realm as also therefore paralyzing. They recognize that the realm of their discourse requires nuance, patience, a fresh set of eyes, and a capacity for wonder. They also thereby contend that providing structure to aesthetic activity is not *first and foremost* a matter of making

judgments, but rather of adopting a whole-self stance of openness: living in an ever-deepening face-to-face encounter with others and with the world.

It can therefore admittedly be difficult to delineate where the ‘self-evident’ quality of each of their theories ends and where the element of discernment begins. Mandoki and Kearney would be quick to point out, though, that this kind of aesthetic attention and discernment run side-by-side all the way down. That is, we are always *interpreting* objects, experiences, and events—we are always making sense of them and being made sense of in them—even at the immediate level of sensory intake. Likewise, Seerveld consciously advocates for the importance of this ‘self-evident’ space and its bodily, relatively specific, “pre-theoretical” mode of attention and interconnection as key to having a proper perspective on any of our subsequent modes of human discernment. By making the aesthetic dimension so foundational to life, *allusivity* thereby has the potential to open up discussions of normativity beyond the relationship of obeying and “issuing imperatives” into a fuller rainbow of possible modes of human relation.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ “Seerveld, “Imaginativity,” 38-9.

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