

# Aesthetic Investigations

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A modal ontology of imagination: New conversations in neo-Kantian and everyday aesthetics

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**Abstract:** Everyday aesthetics has been accused of being ontologically and systematically juvenile for a variety of reasons, such as the rejection of some major claims of Kantian aesthetics, its relative newness, its disparate methodologies, and the theoretical and ethical difficulties of outlining a systematic apparatus without reimposing rationalist and colonial perspectives. While it is untrue that everyday aesthetics as a new sub-discipline lacks systematic rigour, another ontology of the everyday will be introduced here. Calvin Seerveld's aesthetic theory will be outlined and then offered as a resource for understanding the constitutive role imagination plays in analytical and other kinds of thinking. His notion of 'allusivity' as the common quality of all aesthetic expression suggests that art, craft, design, and everyday aesthetic appreciation all emerge from the same subjective function of imaginative 'nuance'. Additionally, his thought comes from within an established tradition of modal ontology begun by 20th century Dutch Continental philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd.

## I. INTRODUCTION

It has been claimed that everyday aesthetics, as a new field of study, lacks philosophical rigour due to the departure of many theorists from central tenets of Kantian aesthetics and their use of diverse, often phenomenological, methodology. I will defend against the claim that everyday aesthetics represents any substantial rupture with that tradition by highlighting thinkers who explicitly adapt Kantian and other Continental ontologies to account for everyday experience. In this context, I would like to present the work of aesthetician Calvin Seerveld as an instantiation of quality-ontological investigation into the shape of everyday aesthetic experience. He offers his theory of ‘allusivity’ or ‘symbolification’ from within an already established tradition of ontology initiated by Dutch Continental philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. Not only does Dooyeweerd’s ontology legitimate the aesthetic as a ubiquitous and perennial part of human subjectivity, Seerveld’s adaptation of that ontology gives an account of imagination which does not create a binary between the imaginary (the so-called ‘unreal’) and the factive (the ‘real’), but rather highlights the interactive and combinatorial effect of imagination with other kinds of thinking or knowing. To these ends, I will first situate the discussion in regards to concerns about method and disciplinary tradition before providing a wide perspectival view of the aesthetic theory of Dooyeweerd and Seerveld. Seerveld’s impetus for suggesting a rearrangement of Dooyeweerd’s ‘modal aspects’ relates to their respective understandings of imagination, the significance of which will be the final point of discussion in this paper. By way of these topics, I hope to demonstrate that their work holds potential as an ontology for everyday aesthetics since it assumes there is an aesthetic modality in all human activity and thus does not limit its account to our relationship with fine arts, and that this modal ontology can be used secondarily as a heuristic device to compare theories across disciplinary and sub-disciplinary boundaries.

## II. MODAL ONTOLOGY IN EVERYDAY AESTHETICS

In her 2013 book, *The Aesthetics of Design*, Jane Forsey bemoans that everyday aesthetics as a new field of inquiry has limited usefulness for establishing a theory of design (despite its focus on our interaction with everyday objects and events) because, in her estimation, it lacks a coherent ontology:

At heart, we can see that these core problems stem from a lack of any theoretical structure or clear methodology to guide the movement — that is, a lack of any synchronic framework within which these theorists can defend their particular claims. Yet without such a strong grounding, Everyday Aesthetics devolves into a series of broad gestures that fail to cohere and fail to amount to a substantial theory that can stand up to analysis and critique.<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere in the book she says everyday aesthetics lacks ‘philosophical rigour’

due to ‘its dismissal of a great deal of aesthetic tradition.’<sup>2</sup> Forsey maintains that the Kantian theory of dependent beauty is still the most equipped to produce a metaphysics of designed objects because it is an account of aesthetic *judgement* that explain how we can articulate seemingly instantaneous preferences between designed objects with equal functionality.<sup>3</sup> Forsey also wants to understand the aesthetic without the mediation of ‘moral or existential theory’ because of the risk of describing the moment of aesthetic judgement by anything external to that moment.<sup>4</sup> Despite agreeing with Yuriko Saito about traditional aesthetics’ ignorance of the proximal senses in favour of sight, she says ‘there is a danger in this move: it threatens to collapse aesthetic experience into bodily pleasure in general, a distinction that I have argued is important to maintain.’<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, everyday aesthetics is not without methodology; it is simply that many theorists, like Saito, reject Kantian aesthetics because of Kant’s emphasis on disinterested judgements. Everyday aesthetic experiences are not typified by disinterestedness or detachment, but rather by ‘familiarity’ or ‘engagement’.<sup>6</sup> Adrián Kverka argued that ‘disinterestedness’ has been an easy ‘leitmotif’ of criticism for everyday aestheticians, including Saito, and that a better reading of Kant shows the possibility of developing an everyday aesthetics on the basis of judgements of the agreeable rather than those of dependent beauty.<sup>7</sup> Of course, it may be the case that Kant is misread on this point. But Kantian aesthetics will still seem like a non-starter for someone who disputes the possibility of a conception of the aesthetic that applies universally. Responding to Forsey, Saito writes:

There are several responses to [this] challenge. I agree that *if* the aim of everyday aesthetics is to make a judgement on the aesthetic merit/demerit of an object, there needs to be agreement on what constitutes the object of judgement. Otherwise, we discuss and debate cross-purposely. . . . However, I do not want to limit the scope of everyday aesthetics to only such a judgement-oriented discourse.<sup>8</sup>

Saito also disagrees with Forsey’s characterisation of her work as ‘dismissing the tradition so completely. . . . I am not sure whether a proposal for expansion and addition would count as a total dismissal of the existing discourse.’<sup>9</sup> Other theorists are concerned that the hunt for a universal aesthetic category outside beauty aesthetics just reinforces the (largely western) belief that vernacular aesthetics are all inherently the same despite extremely different histories and origins.<sup>10</sup>

While we may wish to argue that Forsey’s characterisation (alongside others)<sup>11</sup> of the field of everyday aesthetic theory as abandoning the Kantian project is unfounded, and that she is quick to dismiss the concerns of non-western aestheticians, there are more ontologies of everyday experience developed in explicit continuity with traditional aesthetics that predate Forsey’s

concerns. Even though Forsey rigourously works through issues of functionality and purpose in her book, she is also unfair in her characterisation that everyday aesthetics lacks a ‘synchronic view’ on account of its diachronic focus.

Forsey mentions that she does not like Arto Haapala’s dual aesthetics of strangeness and familiarity, which is expressly modelled on Martin Heidegger’s ontology of tools, of objects being present-at-hand or unready-to-hand.<sup>12</sup> But it is hardly a lack of continuation with the Continental tradition of aesthetics. More recently, Haapala suggested that there are four interacting modalities to everyday aesthetic experience:

These four are all aspects of the aesthetic: immediate sensory pleasures, historically and theoretically informed satisfaction, enjoying the functionality of an object, and the unnoticed smoothness and rhythms of our daily existence.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, in 2007, Katya Mandoki argued for using ‘prosaics’ and not ‘poetics’ to describe the aesthetic character of everyday life, since ‘poetics always involves a finite and consummated character of enunciation that contrasts to the intermittent, continuous, and unfinished character of prosaics.’<sup>14</sup> The aesthetic prosaic is the way in which human sensibility is ‘involved and expressed’, with attention to its ‘sensible effects.’<sup>15</sup> The prosaic faculty is irreducible to other faculties and gets ‘enunciated’ simultaneously in all human ‘matrixes’, such as the juridical, religious, and the familial.<sup>16</sup> She notes that philosophical aesthetics often suffers from an inability to describe aspects of aesthetic experience without lapsing into an objectivist, or formalist aesthetics where the qualities identified are taken as characteristic of what is perceived rather than characteristic of human behaviour, a part of Mandoki’s account that still overlaps with Kant’s notion of aesthetic judgement:

Aspects, like percepts and concepts, are not things in themselves or entities objectively existing in the world, but a linguistic conversion of verbs into nouns, namely, of the action of ‘aspecting’... Equally, a ‘quality’ is the substantivization of the act of qualifying. This action performed by the subject upon the object has gradually been reified, creating the illusion that the naive realists mistake for reality; namely the existence of aspects, concepts and percepts (or qualities) independently from the subject. As time goes by, reified terms seem ‘to create’ a strange effect of authority and independent existence... That is why Kant sought universal consensus to the judgement of beauty, in order to render its objective existence despite its incurable subjective origin.<sup>17</sup>

It is a danger of language, in other words, that the description of processes or faculties come to be associated with the objects that they relate the subject to. Any ontology that recognises the aesthetic as a subjective affair must be careful to avoid describing functions as qualities of things.

### III. SEERVELD'S AESTHETICS OF SYMBOL AND NUANCE

Calvin Seerveld's work is neo-Kantian in several respects, including its firm agreement that the aesthetic is a subjective phenomenon and its focus on the interacting processes which occur between sensation and the subject's aesthetic judgement, both of which help characterise his thought as a 'reflective aesthetics'. He called 'allusiveness' the qualifying characteristic of the aesthetic, an idea heavily prefigured by the 'expressivist' aesthetics of Susanne Langer and the idea that humans have a drive to objectify their experience in symbol which she in turn inherited from Ernst Cassirer (I will review Seerveld's disagreement with her formalism in the next section). In their view, signs are constitutive of other cultural forms, and thought itself has a symbolic dimension. As Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin has observed:

Both Langer and Cassirer conceived of sense-perception itself as a form of 'symbolization' or 'ideation'. For Cassirer, symbolic ideation ... constitutes vision.' As Langer was to express it later, 'The material furnished by the senses is constantly wrought into *symbols*, which are our elementary ideas.' For both of them, symbolization is the core of the free functioning of the human mind: the mind not only orders and categorizes reality, but also *transforms and constitutes* it.<sup>18</sup>

In some works, Seerveld describes the aesthetic function as the 'symbolification' of meaning.<sup>19</sup> He emphasises that symbols are never a creation without a perspective, without a *stylistic* presentation, since

Every rock and rill, letter of the alphabet, human nose, or perpendicular line is always seen *as*, perceived contextually and conditioned by the historically developed assumptions and expectations of the seeing person.<sup>20</sup>

No two people walk, paint, cook, or argue identically: all their activities express a style coextensively with what they express. This is not 'stylishness', or: an elitist refinement of taste or the identification of universal features of stylish things. It rather refers to the historically and culturally constituted patterns that are found in one's activities.<sup>21</sup> He describes everyday aesthetic activities in the same terms as Mandoki, as the way in which everyday activities are done, not simply their poetic quality.<sup>22</sup>

Any number of stylistic references can be shown in *how* something is symbolified, and usually many meanings are conveyed simultaneously, such that the aesthetic expression is 'allusive', 'nuanceful', or 'suggestive'. In the background is the distinction he adopts from Langer between aesthetic symbols and linguistic signs:

Langer assigns the same logically referential form to symbol and sign but carefully distinguishes their possible referent: a 'sign'

indicates or represents a thing, event, or condition to somebody, she says; but ‘symbols’ characteristically refer to objects *in absentia*, i.e. not to things but only to conceptions of things; symbols act as ‘vehicles for the conceptions of objects’... But she nudges the crucial point I am fumbling to establish, the fact that there is a structural modal difference between lingual signification and pre-lingual symbolification.<sup>23</sup>

Though Seerveld distinguishes the aesthetic from the linguistic, we can compare this to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s understanding of ‘family resemblances’: semantic expressions do not have definite borders but bring to mind multiple meanings simultaneously.<sup>24</sup> He differentiates the linguistic function as an intensification and new directionality of the aesthetic, the juxtaposition of words, gestures, or symbols such that a primary meaning emerges before others, giving the illusion that signs are univocal, even though they are not.<sup>25</sup> Seerveld was influenced by Benedetto Croce, who insisted that linguistic and aesthetic kinds of expression could not be differentiated and were the same faculty.<sup>26</sup>

‘Allusivity’ as a term is meant to express that the symbolic signification is of meanings (plural, not meaning in the singular), which may be hard to precisely identify even though we feel the effects of them. For Seerveld, the aesthetic function is constitutive of all human activity, not just fine arts, though art is a more heavily layered form of symbolism. He remarks:

How is a photograph by Ernst Haas different from a standard passport photo made to identify yourself to the police? How is my perception of a Henry Moore sculpture different than my seeing it simply as a large physical obstruction?... After years of careful, examining observation, my tentative answer goes like this: the decisive feature that turns photographic duplication of a face into art is allusiveness. When the reproduced lines, shadows and lighting subtly nudge into visibility character flaws or subterranean strengths of the person, for example, and portray by a quality of disciplined suggestiveness fine matters in the face that are simply neglected in photographic reproductions... then the result is an Ernst Haas. And the modifying focus that heightens human sense-perception which recognizes a large piece of metal to be sculptural art rather than a heavy obstacle is allusiveness.<sup>27</sup>

Seerveld believes both unfamiliarity and familiarity can typify everyday aesthetic experience:

A surprise is a typically aesthetic event where several suggestion-rich acts, laden with hints, suddenly interlock, and a surprise happens. ‘Practical jokes’ too, often vulgar and mean-spirited,

are exercises, it seems to me, in the neighbourhood of activity characterized by allusiveness.<sup>28</sup>

Surprise demonstrates an inherent playfulness in human activity which can be present in aesthetic moments qualified by familiarity as well:

On my messy work desk, strewn with foreign language books, untold years of scribbled notes, folders, journals, correspondence, minutes and manuscripts, sometimes my wife puts a tiny green vase filled with sweetpeas from the garden, my favourite flower. Their fragile, delicate, almost water-coloured hues and tissues gentle the papers, busyness, and hard work with a restful, untoiling glory. Perhaps on your desk. . . is a little something too, a pipe and tobacco pouch set, a photograph of your marriage, or a pen holder for winning the church league bowling championship — that subtle element in life is what we need to consider, as a *normative* problem.<sup>29</sup>

Familiarity and unfamiliarity, predictability and unpredictability *both* generate playfulness and catharsis, as context-specific expressions of a general capacity for the playful or imaginative layering of meaning.<sup>30</sup> The allusive is also seen in levity or humour.

More normally the aesthetic life moment is submerged in human action and can be fleetingly fetched, for example, in a fanciful remark made during breakfast conversation as one puts jam on his butterless toast, or in the wry grimace of a guest as he wipes spilled coffee off his paunch.<sup>31</sup>

As these examples illustrate, the aesthetic function may be subtle or secondary to other modalities; Seerveld places art, craft, design, and the everyday on a spectrum of intensity, of the degree to which our experience of the event, activity, or object is qualified by our aesthetic function of symbolifying. Ultimately, any meaning can be allusively suggested, not only playful or cheerful ones. Three people might paint a woman very differently: one's image could be stylistically filled with lust and the reductionism of the male gaze, another might paint her gracefully with a 'Modigliani neck', while another paints her in a way that does not forefront her sexuality.<sup>32</sup> This is where normativity reappears in Seerveld's account: we recognise symbolic representations in which the quality of the allusive suggestions is cheap or the layers of reference few, which differentiates a successful work of art from a poor one. This felt lack or surplus of referential depth is what we are responding to when we make an aesthetic judgement of something.

Seerveld insists that allusivity would be more serviceable to aestheticians, because it offered a universal descriptor without the culture or religion-specific

baggage of ideas like Kant's *beauty* or Jacques Maritain's *grace*, and it describes a function of human activity rather than a paradigm for value.<sup>33</sup> He strikes a middle ground between Dewey's emphasis on sensory events and Kant's rationalism, because his theory of the aesthetic offers a singular modality for the aesthetic appreciation of fine art and the quotidian which outlines its relationship to sensation, but which does not recreate beauty aesthetics under a new moniker. Although the moral implications of his aesthetics are often well articulated by Seerveld himself,<sup>34</sup> his description of the aesthetic as a function and not a quality puts him into unexpected alliance with Michel Foucault, since they both emphasise the ethical implications of the *stylization* of one's existence and not just objects. As Foucault puts it:

What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?<sup>35</sup>

For both Seerveld and Foucault, the aesthetic is an enduring element of what makes one human rather than an optional mode of artistic expression, though Seerveld additionally believes we should consider how our capacity for imagination shapes our conversations about ethics.

#### IV. THE MODAL ONTOLOGY OF THE REFORMATIONAL PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

Forsey and Mandoki are in agreement that Langer returns aesthetics to an objectivist or formalist territory despite her emphasis on human expression, because she once again begins to identify commonalities in art or experience. As Mandoki describes,

Even if what [Langer] says sounds reasonable, art, however, does not 'express' any human feeling but it is the artist's feelings and thoughts that are interpreted by the spectator through the work of art, and who lets herself be emotionally aroused by it. Allow me once more to insist that it is not art, artworks or forms that express; it is artists who do.<sup>36</sup>

In Forsey's telling, Langer shifts

... the focus of the theory from act to property, compounding rather than ameliorating its problems, for it returns us to the difficulties facing object-centred theories and brings us no closer to being able to identify expressiveness or pick it out.<sup>37</sup>



Dooyeweerd's original order	Type of functioning	Seerveld's reordered modes	Type of functioning
Numeric	Discrete amount	Numeric	Ibid. (in agreement with Dooyeweerd)
Spatial	Continuity	Spatial	Ibid.
Kinematic	Movement	Kinematic	Ibid.
Physical	Force	Physical	Ibid.
Biotic/organic	Organic process	Biotic/organic	Ibid.
Sensitive/psychic	Sense, feeling	Sensitive/psychic	Ibid.
Formative/historic	Cultural development, deliberate shaping	Techno-formative	Skill, development, making
Analytic	Conceptualisation, distinction, logic	Aesthetic, symbolic	Allusivity, nuance, suggestivity
Lingual	Symbolic signification	Linguistic	So-called 'univocal' signs
Social	Intersubjective relationship	Analytic	Reflection, critical distance, logic
Economic	Management of resources	Social	Ibid.
Aesthetic	Harmony	Economic	Ibid.
Juridical	Responsibilities and rights	Juridical	Ibid.
Ethical	Love, formation of bonded relationships like family, friendship	Ethical	Ibid.
Pistic	Beliefs, 'ultimate' concerns	Pistic	Ibid.

**Table 1:** Modalities of human subjectivity

Despite Langer's influence, Seerveld never wavers in his insistence that it is because of our human subjective capacity for symbolifying that we are able to be allusive in our meanings and interpret them in other people's aesthetic expressions. His emphasis on aesthetic *subjectivity* comes from the other large philosophical background to his work, the 'cosmomic' ontology of Dutch Continental philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd, who suggested that human subjectivity is composed of fifteen distinct but interrelated 'functions' or 'aspects', that is, interacting modalities of human subjectivity rather than modalities of things or formal states of being.<sup>38</sup> (See Table 1)

It is not easy to compare this modal ontology to the work of another philosopher, but there is a basic parallel to the 'theory of levels' proposed by Nicolai Hartmann, a scholar of the Marburg Neo-Kantian school who, like Dooyeweerd, worked at the intersection of phenomenology and the transcendental tradition.<sup>39</sup> As Seerveld explains it, the search for modalities is not a positivist move of identification, nor an act of sifting between differences in form, but rather a search for levels of metaphysical existence that are irreducible to lower levels. These modes should not be considered static entities:

Philosophical idealists normally recognize, rightly so I think,

the legitimacy of delimiting, in an open-ended way, certain irreducible features of things that cannot be conceptually determined. . . Idealism goes wrong, however, in ascribing entitary reality to what is essentially an abstraction from modal structuration. As if *modes* be *things* — which they are not.<sup>40</sup>

Dooyeweerd's modes are ontologically ordered and irreducible to one another. He emphasised the atemporal order each mode must have in order to constitute the next, but argued that temporally we experience them simultaneously. For example, the 'lingual' and 'sensory' modes are not reducible to one another, but the sensory must be ontologically prior since language requires a prior awareness about which we are speaking, thinking, or gesturing:

An indissoluble inner coherence binds the numerical to the spatial aspect, the latter to the aspect of mathematical movement, the aspect of movement to that of physical energy, which itself is the necessary basis of the aspect of organic life. The aspect of organic life has an inner connection with that of psychical feeling, the latter refers in its logical anticipation (the feeling of logical correctness or incorrectness) to the analytical-logical aspect. This in turn is connected with the historical, the linguistic, the aspect of social intercourse, the economic, the aesthetic, the jurial, the moral aspects, and that of faith. In this inter-modal cosmic coherence no single aspect stands by itself; every-one refers within and beyond itself to all the others.<sup>41</sup>

Seerveld reordered these modes, but agreed with and positioned his aesthetic theory within this idea of interrelated modes.

In a subtle response to Heidegger's idea that *being* is *being*, Dooyeweerd suggested that being is *meaning*.<sup>42</sup> In other words, being *expresses* its own meaning, something akin to an extrapolation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's maxim that the gesture bears its own significance.<sup>43</sup> Dooyeweerd heavily disputed the belief that human theoretical thinking stands neutrally and independent of cultural or religious formation.<sup>44</sup> In Dooyeweerd's view, all philosophies emerge from certain prior and non-commensurable commitments (which he called 'ground-motives'), such as a modernist 'belief' in the ultimate tension between one's nature and 'freedom' (like Kant), a 'Catholic' or pre-Enlightenment belief in the relieving power of 'grace' in the face of 'sinful nature', or a Neo-Calvinist belief that the goodness of created reality and its current 'brokenness' are not in an ultimate tension together, but rather that future redemption is possible.<sup>45</sup> Despite the strong Neo-Calvinism in his writing, Dooyeweerd's idea of ground-motives finds consonance with Karl Polanyi's 'framework of commitment', Thomas Kuhn's notion of 'paradigm', Wittgenstein's 'scaffolding', and to a certain extent functions similarly to the idea of 'grid of intelligibility' in Foucault's work in as much as there are always

exterior commitments which bind discourse to certain ideological features for a period of time.<sup>46</sup>

Dooyeweerd sought a non-rationalist and non-empiricist model of subjectivity which could account for the interacting social, historic, and sensory faculties that coalesce in different types of thought or judgement, lacking Kant's tension between nature and freedom. Dooyeweerd is sometimes regarded as being suspicious of phenomenology. However, Neal DeRoo argues that Dooyeweerd's critique of phenomenology...

... merely follows from his transcendental critique of theoretical thought, which has sought to demonstrate that every philosophy necessarily has extra-philosophical (what he calls 'religious') suppositions that shape and influence it, and hence no philosophy can be its own foundation. All philosophy is rejected as a true *foundation* for philosophy; phenomenology is not unique in this regard.<sup>47</sup>

DeRoo also argues that Dooyeweerd's ontology is better understood as a response to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology than a form of Neo-Kantianism because Dooyeweerd emphasises a coherent rather than fragmented view of experience, given that he understands all functional aspects to be simultaneously present in all human phenomena.<sup>48</sup>

Danielle Yett has compared the non-reductive tendencies in Mandoki's own theory of matrixes to modal ontology, drawing the comparison with the help of the following quote from Mandoki:<sup>49</sup>

The separate analysis of each matrix here performed runs the risk of being misunderstood as if these would actually exist as discreet, 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...<sup>50</sup>

We may temporally isolate a modal aspect, but to discuss the aesthetic is also to discuss perception (the psychic function), other non-analytic ways of knowing (like the intuitive and technical 'know-how' of the techno-formative function), and may initiate ethical considerations. That any aspect of life, including everyday aesthetic life, has an ethical dimension is typical of Reformational philosophy. All the modes are present in any human subjective act but might be 'anticipated' or 'retroicipated' rather than being the qualifying characteristic of that phenomenon. The social function is 'anticipated' by the development of a linguistic function. Discourse is a social function and not a strictly linguistic one, because it presupposes socially situated forms of

language use. The linguistic function is ‘retroicipated’ in discourse, that is, the social phenomenon is constituted and dependent on linguistic, as well as aesthetic, sensory, physical functions etc.<sup>51</sup>

Functionality may be at the forefront in craft or design, but we can account for the aesthetic preference between equally functional objects by recognizing that human creativity always has a stylistic presentation. Each mode contributes to every activity, so designing has both aesthetic and technoformative elements that do not ‘compete’ with each other for priority. What we may wish to call an allusiveness in designed objects is simply the result of its being a product of a human person with a ‘symbolifying’ faculty. An object may be designed in an art deco style just because it has qualities that cohere with ideas and ideologies of the 1920s, such as for instance simplicity, symmetry, or even the proposed perfection of machine-made objects and a zeitgeist desire for predictability. A svelt tea-kettle with ‘clean lines’ might make us feel industrious, as a result of our capacity to interpret stylistically expressed symbols of meaning from others in our material culture. Similarly, the success of one’s attempt to knit a sweater might hinge on their technical skill, but even a failed sweater (the sleeves are different lengths) can still indicate to us the stylistically signified meanings the knitter intended (its raglan shoulder construction and close-fit convey the vintage vibes the knitter hopes for her outfit). If the aesthetic dimension is forefronted, she may knit something with so many layers of symbolised meaning it is considered worthy of museum display and preservation status, which is a consideration irreducible to concerns over whether or not the sweater fits or stands up to wear. Beyond the problems associated with maintaining a beauty aesthetics, a neo-Kantian account of design is faced with three choices: dismiss the possibility of beautiful *design* by arguing that function is contradictory to beauty, subsume functionality as just one requirement for dependent beauty or agreeability, or inversely subordinate the aesthetic moment as a mere element of function. In modal ontology, all these functions are concurrent in every human action.

## V. IMAGINATION: THE REAL?

So far, I have discussed Seerveld’s view of the aesthetic function of human subjectivity as a part of human existence that cannot be reduced to more primary biological functionings. I will now turn our attention to the type of thinking the aesthetic opens up: the imagination. And I will examine imagination’s relationship to the analytic function, which is sometimes called the ‘logical’ function, or the aspect of reasoning.<sup>52</sup> In Dooyeweerd’s ordering of the modes, the aesthetic was dependent on the analytical and the linguistic modes, as Dooyeweerd believed aesthetic symbols were inherently propositional and therefore an extension of the linguistic function into an aesthetic language of symbols.<sup>53</sup> Seerveld considered Dooyeweerd’s definition of ‘aesthetic’ as ‘fitting harmony’ to be too resplendent with ideas of ‘propor-

tionality' and a 'beautiful fittingness' to represent any real departure from the beauty tradition, of which both were sceptical.<sup>54</sup> Following Langer and Cassirer's perspective of the symbolic or metaphorical character of perception itself, Seerveld also moved the aesthetic modality to much 'earlier' in the scale to highlight the role of imagination in analytical thinking, as well as the aesthetic dimension that underlies ethical, juridical, and social functions. If we recall that each function is a necessary foundation for those coming after, we then get the following ordering of the functions of consciousness: psychic (sensation, perception), techno-formative (skills, cultural development), aesthetic (allusivity, nuancing, symbols, imaginativity), the linguistic (signs, gestures), and analytic (logical, abstracted, or directed thought), social, etc.

Dooyeweerd insisted that theoretical thinking could never completely examine itself without presupposition, and he believed that theoretical thinking has a tendency to treat the object of thought one-dimensionally instead of as a multi-modal phenomenon. He therefore reached the conclusion that analytical thought is a kind of abstraction.<sup>55</sup> Often, he suggested, it was a necessary abstraction of pulling the object of thought forward against the background of its other ways of being, for the purpose of focusing attention to only some of its modal features, seen on a grand scale in differentiated social sciences. Although sociology, psychology, and anthropology may all offer insights into linguistics, they cannot replace the linguistic project of seeking to understand the universal conditions of language. Similarly, theology has to be differentiated from science, or one risks scientific discovery being slowed or eclipsed by theological questions about its religious meaning. Linguistics and sociology may be interesting, valid, and unbreakably related domains of thought about how things are, but the basis of theoretical thinking about language or biology necessitates some intentional eclipse of what is not relevant to their own internal processes of discovery. This is a macro-level example of the more common functions of the analytic mode, which include analysing, conceptualising, reasoning, and inferring.<sup>56</sup> Despite Seerveld's criticisms of Dooyeweerd's aesthetic theory, he lauds Dooyeweerd for recognising our aesthetic functionality as being an equally 'real' part of our rationality and intersubjectivity. Dooyeweerd also dismissed the suggestion that our logical faculties are primarily responsible for our relationship with reality when he argued that all the modes are real ways of being and offered an atemporal order but not a temporal hierarchy.

Dooyeweerd did not have a well-articulated account of imagination in his systematic ontology. He considered it must be either a kind of intuition or a kind of analytic thought.<sup>57</sup> Seerveld argued on the contrary that imagination needs to be properly understood as a third kind of thinking:

Imagination is a mode of human consciousness distinct from the act of scientific conception, it seems to me, and from the perceptive action of naive experience. The act of imaginative knowing rests in the same bed of intuition, shall we say, as theoretical

knowledge and everyday knowledge (whatever that deep dimensional continuum of humanity actually be), and like scientific analyzing, imaginative gathering of meaning starts from the *habitus* of ordinary perception. Whatever of reality is being met perceptually, whatever Gestalt is being casually discovered by human consciousness, instead of an individual's shifting into an operating *Gegenstandverhältnis*, where thinking artificially affects telescopic or microscopic distance from the object, characteristic of scientific analysis, an individual may also shift into what I shall call the *Hineinlebenshaltung* [coinage meaning: 'a living-into-it attitude']. Then an individual holds oneself still in 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.<sup>58</sup>

Imagination does not abstract, but rather, holds the object or object of thought within its constellation of presenting factors. Elsewhere, Seerveld compares imagination to 'mimicry' since it produces a stylised presentation of something rather than its copy:

[T]he fictions of whimsical tomfoolery embody unheard of and invisible subtleties that images (*Bilder*) lack and retinal images (*Abbilder*) may be incapable of. Pretended bears are not bear images. Playing bears opens up a world of virtuality that goes beyond the creation of images. 'Imagining' is like mimicry: 'imagining' is like making an imitation.<sup>59</sup>

In this way, imagination is differentiated from sensation. But Seerveld also differentiates the imagination from concept formation:

But 'imagining' is not argumentative, 'making a case.' Imaginative functioning has the nature of oblique presentation (*Vorstellung*) and works on human consciousness with the hidden surprises that are characteristic of metaphor.<sup>60</sup>

In this developmental ontology, analytical thought depends on the astute arrangement of features that imagination brings to our attention by how this arrangement is stylised. Just as two stagings of a play differ as they draw out different features of a script, imagining something is an interpretative activity. We can draw together multiple meanings, of which one may come to the fore as a result of this juxtaposition (a 'sign' or 'linguistic' gesturing), which in turn allows us to 'grasp' specific features for analytic consideration. In this conceptualisation, theoretical thinking is an intensification of imagination and can never contravene that which makes it possible. We might posit, further, that strong analytical thought is supported by active imagination, by a deep attentiveness to the multi-faced presentations and stylisations of

phenomena with which we come into contact. If analytic thinking is of high quality, it takes more factors into account, because it contains this trace of an imaginative capacity to recognise and reflect multiple senses.

Scholars of the Reformational tradition often propose alternative orderings of the modes (of which Seerveld's is the most well-known and contentious). This activity goes some distance toward removing linguistic confusions by forcing one to define in a loose way what one considers to be the core function of a mode and to account for how they use their words (i.e. 'I believe it is beauty, by which I mean \_\_\_\_\_' or 'The incommensurability of our accounts lies in your use of the term 'beauty' and your placement of it before the linguistic', etc.). Seerveld's most common critics have been those who disagree with his placement of the aesthetic before the linguistic aspect.<sup>61</sup> While I agree that his distinction between an 'aesthetic symbol' and a 'lingual sign' is an underdeveloped area of this thought, modal ontology can be a useful heuristic device for comparing treatments of the aesthetic function across disciplinary boundaries: 'So and so share this modal order, but one person is highlighting the retrocipatory structure of the aesthetic in the act of perception while the other focuses on the way the aesthetic is implicated in discourse, so they differ in their emphasis but not their overall ontology'.<sup>62</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION

The theory of 'allusivity' has been offered here as an ontology of everyday aesthetic appreciation which does not create two apparatuses of aesthetic evaluation for everyday and traditional aesthetics, while yet remaining sympathetic to the duality of aesthetic experiences which can sometimes be typified by 'familiarity' and other times 'unfamiliarity'. It also avoids recreating a formalist aesthetic or a universalizing description of the aesthetic by a criterion that is specific to a single culture or religion. Herman Dooyeweerd's suggestion that there are fifteen concurrent modes operative in a person's subjectivity goes some distance in providing an interactive account of the aesthetic with other aspects of cognition suggested by Kant's ambiguous idea of 'free play'. This ontology is primed to discuss how aesthetic aspects inhere in every other aspect of human experience. Seerveld and Dooyeweerd both insisted the aesthetic is an irreducible aspect of human subjectivity. This makes their ontology latent with potential for everyday aesthetics because of the implication that humans interact aesthetically with their environment and other people all the time. I also contend that this ontology can be used as a comparative tool, providing a vocabulary for categorizing the thought and approach of thinkers working on the same topic from within different disciplines.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Forsey 2016, 219.
2. 6.
3. 5.
4. 7, 226.
5. 209.
6. Saito 2017, 39.
7. Kvokačka 2023, 36.
8. Saito 2017, 48.
9. 60.
10. Higgins 2005, 680.
11. Parsons and Carlson 2012, 177.
12. Haapala 2005.
13. Haapala 2018, 150.
14. Mandoki 2016, 79.
15. 77.
16. 187.
17. 25.
18. Dengerink Chaplin 2019, 80.
19. Seerveld 1995, 93.
20. Seerveld 2005, 46.
21. Seerveld 2014, 131.
22. Mandoki 2016, 77.
23. Seerveld 1995, 88–89.
24. Wittgenstein 2009, §§66–67.
25. Seerveld 1995, 102.
26. Croce 1909, 234–235.
27. Seerveld 2005, 128.
28. 49.
29. 44–45.
30. For the role of predictability, see Andrzejewski 2023, 89–100; See also Vollenhoven’s suggestion that it is the pole of *unpredictability* which initiates linguistic expression. ‘When we get up in the morning, we expect that everything will be in the same place as last night. But we hardly ever put that expectation into words except when it is not fulfilled.’, Vollenhoven 2005, 121–122.
31. Seerveld 2005, 45.
32. Seerveld 1995, 36–37.
33. Seerveld 2014, 156.
34. Seerveld 1995, 90.
35. Foucault 1998, 261.
36. Mandoki 2016, 9.
37. Forsey 2016, 46.
38. Dooyeweerd 1969, 3.
39. Wolters 1985, 14.
40. Seerveld 2005, 106.
41. Dooyeweerd 1969, 3.
42. DeRoo 2016, 83.
43. Merleau-Ponty 2012, §226.
44. Dooyeweerd 1979.
45. 12.
46. See Hart 1985, 143–166, for the comparison of Dooyeweerd with Polanyi and Kuhn; See also Wittgenstein, Anscombe, and Wright 1969; And Foucault 1990, 93.
47. DeRoo 2016, 78.
48. 78.
49. See Yett 2019, 42. She also mentions Mandoki’s idea of ‘meaning exchanges’ which are characterised by biotic ‘movement’, which is more complexly expressed in humans as ‘action’, another point of contact between Mandoki and Dooyeweerd’s ‘physical’ and ‘kinematic’ modes, 43.
50. Mandoki 2016, 299.
51. De Boer 2023.
52. Dooyeweerd 1969, 3.
53. Seerveld 2014, 77.
54. 75.
55. Hart 1985, 143.
56. Hart 2002, 194.
57. Seerveld 1995, 78.
58. 84.
59. Seerveld 2014, 32.
60. 32.
61. Strauss 2011, 22.
62. I am writing a dissertation to this effect, which reads Seerveld alongside Owen Barfield, Charles Taylor, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty on metaphor, language, and thought.

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