

# *The Invention of Modern Aesthetics: From Leibniz to Kant*

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*Things known* are to be known by the superior faculty as the object of logic; *things perceived* [are to be known by the inferior faculty, as the object] of the science of perception, or **aesthetic**.  
– Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1735)

Beauty ... is sensuously given perfection. That is why the theory of this sensuously given form-perfection has been called aesthetics.  
– Per Daniel Amadeus Atterbom (1837)

We can know more than we can tell.  
– Michael Polanyi (1967)

## I

Modern aesthetics as the philosophical and critical study of the arts arose in 18th-century Europe, and is to a large extent a stepchild of the Enlightenment. The middle and second half of the eighteenth century saw the publication of a number of influential works dealing with different aspects of the arts, the perception and evaluation of works of art, and the principles of criticism. »The theoretical endeavours of the European Enlightenment in regard to taste, the concept of genius, imagination, the criticism of taste, the analysis of the sublime as well as the continued reflexion on the old formula ‘*je ne sais quoi*’ form the background against which aesthetics establishes itself as an independent discipline«, we read in the entry on aesthetics in the encyclopaedia *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the term

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<sup>1</sup> »Ästhetik/ästhetisch«, in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden* 1, Hrsg. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000–), p. 321, my transl. Dieter Kliche, the author of sections I to IV of this comprehensive article, refers to the publication of Vico’s *La Scienza Nuova* (1744), Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) and his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), as well as Abbé Batteux’s *Les Beaux Arts réduits à un même principe* (1746), Hogarth’s *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), Condillac’s *Traité des sensations* (1754), Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and Henry Home’s *Elements of Criticism* (1762), p. 317.

»aesthetics« was coined only in the eighteenth century to refer to the philosophical analysis of perception and of art does of course not mean that there was no aesthetics or philosophy of art before the eighteenth century; questions concerning the relationship between art and reality, the nature of beauty, the nature of representation in tragedy, music, sculpture and painting, and the principles of criticism were discussed by philosophers and writers already in ancient Greece, but the establishment of »The Modern System of the Arts« is arguably a necessary precondition for the development of a systematic philosophical aesthetics or philosophy of art.<sup>2</sup> The concept of art was unknown in Greek and Roman antiquity, or, rather, what we consider to be an art form (painting and sculpture, for example) and works of art was categorized differently in antiquity, was brought under concepts different from ours. Painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry, which constitute the core of the modern system of the arts, were not regarded as fine arts but – with the exception of poetry (and drama) – as sciences or crafts. The Greek word *techné* (τέχνη) and the Latin *ars* are usually translated as »art«, which is inaccurate and somewhat anachronistic, since *techné* and *ars* included much that is not categorized as art today and excluded much that belongs to the category of art today. In contrast to the other »arts«, poetry (and literature in general) was not regarded as a craft since inspiration and genius was required for creating poetry, whereas the crafts demanded scientific and practical knowledge. »The medieval system of the arts« distinguished between

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<sup>2</sup> »Aesthetics« has often been considered to be synonymous or more or less synonymous with »philosophy of art«. In the introduction to his *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel says that »these lectures are devoted to *aesthetics*, their subject [Gegenstand] is the vast kingdom of beauty [...] and more specifically the realm of fine art«. Hegel is not entirely satisfied with the term »aesthetics« since it means »the science of the senses« or »the science of sensation«, but because the term »aesthetics« is an established one Hegel uses it although »the real name of our science is *the philosophy of art* and more specifically *the philosophy of fine art*« [italics in the original] (G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* I, 1835, Hrsg. Eva Moldenhauer & Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 13, my transl.). Cf. the following contemporary definition of aesthetics: »In its modern meaning aesthetics is most frequently understood as a philosophical discipline which is either a philosophy of aesthetic phenomena (objects, qualities, experiences and values), or a philosophy of art (of creativity, of artwork, and its perception) or a philosophy of art criticism taken broadly (metacriticism), or, finally, a discipline which is concerned philosophically with all three realms jointly« (Bohdan Dziemidok, »Aesthetics«, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought*, eds. William Outhwaite & Tom Bottomore, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 4), and Malcolm Budd claims that »[a]s the subject [aesthetics] is now understood, it consists of two parts: the philosophy of art, and the philosophy of aesthetic experience and character of objects or phenomena that are not art« (Malcolm Budd, »Aesthetics«, *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. Edward Craig, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 59).

the seven liberal arts (*artes liberales*) and the mechanical arts. The liberal arts consisted of two parts, *trivium* (rhetoric, grammar and dialectics or logic) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music). This division of the liberal arts originates with Martianus Capella (5th century), who was inspired by the catalogue of the arts of the Roman author, Terentius Varro (1st century BC), who, in addition to the seven arts mentioned, included medicine as well as architecture among the liberal arts. Only music, which was regarded as an art and a science because harmony could be understood in mathematical terms, was regarded as a liberal art whereas architecture, painting and sculpture were categorized with the non-liberal mechanical arts.

The publication of Abbé Batteux's *Les Beaux Arts réduits à un même principe* in 1746 symbolizes the end of the ancient and medieval system of the arts, and the fine arts are finally separated from craft and science.<sup>3</sup> As Paul Oskar Kristeller points out the development of a systematic philosophy of art presupposes a consistent categorization of certain human activities and artefacts as art.<sup>4</sup> The philosophy of art as a systematic inquiry into the nature of Art and its functions emerges. In Batteux's classification of the arts, poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and dance are treated as autonomous arts having pleasure as their purpose achieved through the imitation of nature, while rhetoric and architecture were »mixed« arts combining pleasure with utility. But it is with D'Alembert's introduction, the *Discours préliminaire*, to the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751) that, according to Kristeller, the modern system of the arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, music) is set forth in its final form.<sup>5</sup> The *Encyclopédie* and its famous introduction, says Kristeller, »codified the system of the fine arts after and beyond Batteux and through its prestige and authority gave it the widest possible currency all over Europe.«<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that the English words »artisan« as well as »artist« derive from the Latin »artista«, which referred to a craftsman or to someone engaged in the study of the liberal arts.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, »The Modern System of the Arts«, 1951/52, in P. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought II: Papers on Humanism and the Arts* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 163–227.

<sup>5</sup> »Parmi les arts libéraux qu'on a réduit à des principes, ceux qui se proposent l'imitation de la nature ont été appelés beaux-arts, parce qu'ils ont principalement l'agrément pour objet«, D'Alembert writes (quoted from Kristeller, p. 202, n. 196). The common principle which distinguishes the fine arts from the sciences and from craft is the imitation of nature.

<sup>6</sup> Kristeller, »The Modern System of the Arts«, p. 202.

## II

The dichotomy and antithesis between *aisthesis* (αἴσθησις, perception, sensation) and *noesis* (νόησις, reason, knowledge) has had a pervasive influence on the development of Western thinking, the contrast and conflict between reason and knowledge on the one hand and perception and opinion on the other forms the background of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline. Aesthetics as a philosophical discipline inaugurated by Alexander Baumgarten is a child of the Enlightenment, and implies at the same time somewhat paradoxically a critique of Enlightenment rationalism, since there is no room for the cognitive value of *aisthesis* in Enlightenment rationalism. As Wolfgang Iser points out, Baumgarten saw aesthetics as a complement and correction of a one-sided rationalism,<sup>7</sup> and some writers emphasize the continued relevance of aesthetics as a philosophy of culture and as a critique of culture; in Brigitte Scheer's view, for example, aesthetics »repudiates the central paradigm of Western philosophy, the traditional logocentric conception of rationality and the absolutification of that conception«.<sup>8</sup>

None of the great rationalist philosophers Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza were much interested in the arts, nor did any of them show any philosophical interest in the theoretical analysis of art and its functions, i.e. in aesthetics. Nevertheless, Leibniz's scattered reflexions and remarks concerning the relationship between clear and confused ideas and perceptions as contrasted with distinct (theoretical) ideas were of the utmost importance for Alexander Baumgarten's conception of the new science of aesthetics, the science of the lower cognitive faculty (*gnoseologia inferior*). As Jeffrey Barnouw remarks, Baumgarten's »launching of aesthetics as a formal discipline was important because it provided a frame for a rich group of ideas that had been diffused throughout Leibniz's writings«.<sup>9</sup> I shall therefore first discuss Leibniz's

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<sup>7</sup> »Baumgarten hat die Ästhetik als Korrekturdisziplin des einseitigen Rationalismus konzipiert und begründet«, Iser says (Wolfgang Iser, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, 4. Aufl., Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993, p. 88).

<sup>8</sup> Brigitte Scheer, *Einführung in die philosophische Ästhetik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), p. 1, my transl. Cf. Michael Kelly's claim to the effect that »aesthetics is uniquely situated to serve as a meeting place for numerous academic disciplines and cultural traditions «, aesthetics is »the critical reflection on art, culture, and nature« (Michael Kelly, »Introduction«, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 4 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, xi). I have discussed some of these issues in my article »Aesthetics, Philosophy of Culture and 'The Aesthetic Turn'«, *Filozofski vestnik* 2001, vol. 22, No. 2, »Aesthetics and Philosophy of Culture«, pp. 21–42.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Barnouw, »The Beginnings of 'Aesthetics' and the Leibnizian Conception of Sensation«, in *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*, ed. Paul Mattick, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 82.

distinctions between clear and confused ideas and perceptions and their relationship to what Leibniz regarded as distinct ideas before moving on in the third section to Baumgarten's foundation of aesthetics.

Leibniz's analysis of obscure, clear and distinct ideas and concepts is a further development and modification of a similar distinction we find in Descartes' philosophy. In his most comprehensive work, the *Principia philosophiae* (1644), Descartes distinguished between clear ideas and distinct ideas, although the phrase »clear and distinct ideas« occurs frequently in his other writings and is even employed as a criterion of truth. Something is clear, he says, »which is present and apparent to an attentive mind«, and something is distinct »which is so precise and different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear«. <sup>10</sup> For a judgment to be incontrovertible, Descartes claims, it must be based on ideas which are both clear and distinct. It is possible to have clear ideas (perceptions) of pain, for example, without any real knowledge of the causes of the pain. <sup>11</sup> Similarly we can have clear ideas (perceptions) of colours without any real (distinct) knowledge of the causes of our perceptions. <sup>12</sup> Leibniz's discussion of clear and distinct ideas, is, however of greater importance for Baumgarten's endeavour to establish aesthetics as an autonomous philosophical discipline. In his short treatise »Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis« (1684) Leibniz distinguishes between different kinds of and different degrees of knowledge, »[k]nowledge«, he says, »is either obscure or *clear*; clear knowledge is either confused or *distinct*; distinct knowledge is either inadequate or *adequate*, and also either symbolic or *intuitive*«, the most perfect knowledge being both adequate and intuitive. <sup>13</sup> Knowledge is obscure, he contends, when it does »not suffice for recognizing the thing represented, as when I merely remember some flower or animal which I have once seen but not well enough to recognize it when it is placed before me and to distinguish it from similar ones«. <sup>14</sup> When we recognize a thing

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<sup>10</sup> René Descartes, *The Essential Descartes*, 1976, ed. with an Introduction by Margaret D. Wilson (New York: Meridian, 1993), § 45, pp. 320–321.

<sup>11</sup> »When, for instance, a severe pain is felt, the perception of this pain may be very clear, and yet for all that not distinct, because it is usually confused by the sufferers with the obscure judgment that they form upon its nature«, Descartes says (ibid., § 46, p. 321). When we were young we »knew nothing distinctly, although [our minds] perceived much sufficiently clearly« (ibid., § 47, p. 321).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., § 70, p. 332. Having distinct knowledge of colours presumably presupposes knowledge of the laws of the refraction of light and the wavelengths of particular colours, for example that red has the wavelength of 780–622 nanometers.

<sup>13</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, »Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas«, in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, A Selection translated and edited with an introduction by Leroy E. Loemker, 2nd ed. (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969), p. 291.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

for what it is, when we are able to identify it as a thing of a certain kind, we have clear knowledge. This clear knowledge can, however, be either confused or distinct. »It is *confused*«, Leibniz says, »when I cannot enumerate one by one the marks [i.e. definitional properties] which are sufficient to distinguish the thing from others, even though the thing may in truth have such marks and constituents into which its concept can be resolved«. <sup>15</sup> Leibniz offers our knowledge of colours, odours, flavours and other particular objects perceived by the senses as examples of this clear but confused kind of knowledge, since we do not know them by their »marks« and cannot express our perceptual knowledge of them by formulating adequate definitions although we are able to distinguish clearly between different colours and flavours. This clear but confused perceptual knowledge, »knowledge by acquaintance« in Russellian idiom, <sup>16</sup> cannot be taught, it can only be gained by experience: »we cannot explain to a blind man what red is, nor can we explain such a quality to others except by bringing them into the presence of the thing and making them see, smell, or taste it, or at least by reminding them of some similar perception they have had in the past«. <sup>17</sup> And then Leibniz makes one of his very few, and important, references to the arts, when he compares this clear but confused perceptual knowledge of colours and flavours with our perception and judgments of paintings, »we sometimes see painters«, Leibniz says, »and other artists correctly judge what has been done well or done badly«, although they »are often unable to give a reason for their judgment but tell the inquirer that the work which displeases them lacks ‘something, I know not what’«. <sup>18</sup> Leibniz thus draws attention to the parallel between our perception of and judgments about colours and our perception of and judgments about the »correctness« of artistic representations.

Leibniz’s use of the phrase »something, I know not what« (*je ne sais quoi*), which was a commonplace in the discussion of taste in the seventeenth century, is of special interest here. The phrase refers to the apprehension of qualities, which are clearly perceived although we cannot account for them adequately nor express our perception of them distinctly, i.e. by means of concepts. The phrase »*je ne sais quoi*« was invoked in order to »suggest a gap between what can be felt and what can be formulated in words«. <sup>19</sup> As Barnouw remarks, this phrase could mean different things, it was used in situations where the with-

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 1912 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), ch. V.

<sup>17</sup> Leibniz, »Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas«, p. 291.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Barnouw, »The Beginnings of ‘Aesthetics’ and the Leibnizian Conception of Sensation«, p. 64.

holding of explicit judgment was deemed appropriate and allusion and suggestion was more apposite; it was thus connected with *l'esprit de finesse* as contrasted with *l'esprit de géométrie*, but it was also used to refer to situations when certain phenomena were perceived to be »beyond words«, to be ineffable.<sup>20</sup> The expression »*je ne sais quoi*«, has two sources, one »in an urbane *nescio quid* of Cicero«, the other one in »the *nescio quid* of mystical ineffability going back to Augustine«, Barnouw maintains referring to the work of the historian of ideas, Erich Köhler.<sup>21</sup> The interest in the present context of *l'esprit de finesse* and the apprehension of qualities difficult to discern, those that elicit the »*je ne sais quoi*« lies in the fact that the exercise of the *l'esprit de finesse* requires personal qualities similar to the ones characteristic of Baumgarten's *felix aestheticus*, a matter I will return to in a while.

The senses provide us, according to Leibniz, with acquaintance of colours, flavours, and the qualities of touch, but the senses »do not make us know what these sensible qualities are or in what they consist«, as he puts it in a letter to Queen Charlotte of Prussia in 1702.<sup>22</sup> We do not actually perceive what a colour such as red is in reality although we are able to recognize red, since red may well be »the revolving of certain small globules«, which are imperceptible.<sup>23</sup> Perceived colours cannot be defined, or, to put it in Leibniz's language, we cannot account for the marks of the colour blue, for example, since »marks to recognize blue [...] could not be given if we had never seen it«. <sup>24</sup> Blue is its own mark, Leibniz claims, »[i]t is an *I know not what* of which we are conscious, but for which we cannot account«. <sup>25</sup> Our knowledge of sensible qualities such as blue is clear *and* at the same time confused, the concept of the sensible quality blue is clear but not distinct since it cannot be defined by means of necessary and sufficient properties (marks). In his posthumously published treatise, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, a systematic, critical commentary on Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690),<sup>26</sup> Leib-

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 61–62. The distinction between *l'esprit de finesse* and *l'esprit de géométrie* was famously formulated by Blaise Pascal in the *Pensées sur la religion*, posthumously published in 1670. The former meant apprehending things without rules and judgment, the latter judging things according to explicit rules and criteria.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 63–64.

<sup>22</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *Selections*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 355.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 357.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* was composed in 1704–1705 but remained unpublished until 1765. One reason for the delay was Locke's death in 1704, since one of Leibniz's purposes in writing the work was to elicit a response from Locke.

niz illustrates the difference between distinct, precise knowledge and practical, »tacit« knowledge invoking the example of a mathematician, who »may have precise knowledge of the nature of nine- and ten-sided figures, because he has means for constructing and studying them, yet not be able to tell one from the other on sight«, whereas »a labourer or an engineer, perhaps knowing little enough of the nature of the figures, may have an advantage over a great geometrician in being able to tell them apart just by looking and without counting«. <sup>27</sup>

Barnouw concludes his analysis of Leibniz's views on the relationship between clear but confused knowledge and distinct knowledge by maintaining that all knowledge according to Leibniz »relies at some points on factors that are felt but not focused on, a tacit or aesthetic dimension«. <sup>28</sup> It is noteworthy that Barnouw speaks of the tacit *or* the aesthetic dimension, implying that aesthetic knowledge and tacit knowledge, at least in this context, are the same. »Aesthetic« here presumably means »that which pertains to perception and sensation« or »knowledge based on immediate apprehension of sensuous qualities« or something similar. The identification of the aesthetic dimension with the tacit dimension of knowledge obviously trades on the original Greek meaning of »aesthetic«, viz. that which pertains to perception and sensation. <sup>29</sup> This sense of »aesthetic«, however,

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<sup>27</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, translated and edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 262. The following passage brings out very clearly Leibniz's idea of practical, or tacit knowledge as opposed to theoretical knowledge: »just as there are porters and pedlars who will say what that their loads weigh, to within a pound – the world's ablest expert in statics could not do as well. It is true that this empiric's kind of knowledge, gained through long practice, can greatly facilitate swift action such as the engineer often needs in emergencies where any delay would put him in danger. Still, this *clear image* that one may have of a regular ten-sided figure or of a 99-pound weight – this accurate sense that one may have of them – consists merely in a *confused idea*: it does not serve to reveal the nature and properties of the figure or the weight; that requires a *distinct idea*« (ibid.).

<sup>28</sup> Barnouw, »The Beginnings of 'Aesthetics' and the Leibnizian Conception of Sensation«, p. 87.

<sup>29</sup> The physicist and philosopher Michael Polanyi claims in his major work, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958) that knowledge is not exclusively based on observation, concepts and explicit reasoning, but also on »tacit knowing«, complementing and integrating explicit knowledge. The distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge can also be found, albeit in a different form and with a different emphasis, in Gilbert Ryle's seminal discussion of »knowing-that« and knowing-how« (G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 1949, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, ch. II). See also M. Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 1966 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967). Wittgenstein's remarks about the difference between *knowing* and *saying* are also highly relevant here (cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953, 2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, transl. G. E. M. Anscombe, § 78, p. 36).

has nothing to do with art or the philosophy of art as such, a matter I will return to in my discussion of Baumgarten's aesthetics. The tacit dimension, or, tacit knowledge, on the other hand, plays an important role in what is perhaps somewhat misleadingly called »aesthetic appreciation« of art.

As we have seen Leibniz distinguishes between two forms of confused ideas and two kinds of confused knowledge, obscure and clear respectively, which in their turn are contrasted with distinct concepts and distinct knowledge. A concept is distinct, he says, when we are in the possession of a nominal definition of the concept, a definition which is »the enumeration of sufficient marks«,<sup>30</sup> in virtue of which we are able to distinguish clearly those things that fall under the concept from those that don't. As an example of a distinct concept Leibniz offers »the kind of notion which assayers have of gold«, a notion, »which enables them to distinguish gold from all other bodies by sufficient marks and observations«. <sup>31</sup> We possess, Leibniz argues, such distinct concepts of mathematical phenomena such as number and magnitude, but also of mental phenomena such as hope and fear. The ability to offer a nominal definition of a concept is usually the criterion of distinct knowledge of the concept in question, the exception being primitive concepts which are irreducible and lacking in requisite marks; but in spite of this we can nevertheless have »distinct knowledge of an indefinable concept« Leibniz claims.<sup>32</sup> Even if the concept is distinct and our knowledge of the phenomena designated by the concept in question is *a fortiori* distinct, some of the components entering the definition of the concept may not be distinct. In such cases knowledge is distinct but inadequate, since it cannot be fully articulated. Only »when every ingredient that enters into a distinct concept is itself known distinctly, or when an analysis is carried through to the end, knowledge is adequate«, Leibniz claims.<sup>33</sup> Leibniz's ideal of knowledge is thus extremely demanding, a complete (and correct) analysis of a concept is the precondition for distinct knowledge, his ideal is the ideal of complete and crystalline clarity, it is not for nothing that Leibniz is regarded as the »arch-rationalist«. Leibniz realizes, however, that this austere ideal of knowledge is rarely attained, for he doubts »that a perfect example of this [sc. adequate knowledge] can be given by man«, adding that »our concept of numbers approaches it closely«. <sup>34</sup>

In his »Discours de métaphysique«, written two years after the

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<sup>30</sup> Leibniz, »Mediations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas«, p. 292.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

»Meditationes« Leibniz again broaches the theme of confused versus distinct concepts and knowledge, and illustrates the distinction with an example from art: »[w]e sometimes know *clearly*, and without having a doubt of any kind, if a poem or a picture is well done or badly, because it has a certain ‘something, I know not what’ which either satisfies or repels us.«<sup>35</sup> Our judgment that a poem or a picture is well done is apparently not based on distinct concepts and distinct knowledge, since there do not seem to be any criteria for judging a poem or a painting to be good or bad, and criteria, Leibniz thinks, are necessary for rational judgment. When the criteria used can be explained, Leibniz says, my knowledge is distinct, and he again adduces the example of the assayer »who distinguishes the true gold from the false by means of certain tests and marks which make up the definition of gold.«<sup>36</sup> Nothing similar is envisaged by him in regard to art, apparently there are no criteria for judging a work to be good or bad although he believes that »we sometimes know *clearly*, and without having a doubt of any kind« that a work is good or bad.<sup>37</sup> Leibniz’s succinct discussion of confused and distinct knowledge in the »Discourse on Metaphysics« is even clearer and more precise than his disquisition in »Mediations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas«. The following quotation gives Leibniz’s whole discussion of the difference between confused and distinct knowledge in a nutshell:

Of this kind [sc. distinct knowledge] is the knowledge of an assayer who distinguishes the true gold from the false by means of certain tests and marks which make up the definition of gold. But distinct knowledge has degrees, for usually the concepts which enter into the definition would themselves need definition and are known only confusedly. But when everything which enters into a definition or distinct knowledge is known distinctly, down to the primitive concepts [i.e. the indefinables], I call such knowledge *adequate*. And when my mind grasps all the primitive ingredients of a concept at once and distinctly, it possesses an *intuitive* knowledge. This is very rare, since for the most part human knowledge is merely either confused or *suppositive*.<sup>38</sup>

It is clear that when it comes to matters of taste and of art there are according to Leibniz no rational principles one can adduce in support of our judgments. We can have no adequate, let alone, intuitive

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<sup>35</sup> G. W. Leibniz, »Discourse on Metaphysics«, in Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, pp. 318–319.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

knowledge (in Leibniz's sense of adequate and intuitive) of works of art as perceptible objects. Nevertheless Leibniz does think that art and judgments of taste play an important and ineliminable role in human life, in his review of Shaftesbury's influential treatise *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) Leibniz remarks that »[t]aste as distinguished from understanding consists of confused perceptions for which one cannot give an adequate reason«, taste is akin to »an instinct« that is formed by »nature and habit«. <sup>39</sup> Leibniz shares Shaftesbury's criticisms of those »who seek demonstrations everywhere, and are incapable of seeing anything in everyday light«, they are like »people who are called moon-blind because they can see only by moonlight«. <sup>40</sup> There is thus, in Leibniz's opinion more to knowledge than has been dreamt of in rationalist philosophy. The kind of knowledge afforded by sensuous experience and which relies on »assessment by feeling« has, as Barnouw remarks, been little studied because of the reason-blindness of so many prominent thinkers. <sup>41</sup>

One more aspect of Leibniz's thinking is worth mentioning here, his contention that there is a multitude of *petites perceptions* in every sensuous experience. Every sensation is a composite of small imperceptible sensations constituting an *assemblage confus*, grasped by consciousness. Leibniz says that »at every moment there is in us an infinity of perceptions, unaccompanied by awareness or reflection«, this is so, he argues, because »these impressions are either too minute or too numerous, or else too unvarying, so that they are not sufficiently distinctive on their own«. <sup>42</sup> Their effects, or, rather, the conjoined effect of these minute perceptions, is, however, perceptible. Leibniz offers the roaring of the sea as an example of a perception which consists of numerous minute imperceptible perceptions, although »we must hear the parts which make up this whole, that is the noise of each wave, although each of these little noises makes itself known only when combined confusedly with all the others«. <sup>43</sup> These minute perceptions are fused together into a perceptible whole. »These minute perceptions«, says Leibniz, »constitute that *je ne sais quoi*, those flavours, those images of sensible qualities, vivid in the

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<sup>39</sup> G. W. Leibniz, »Remarks on the Three Volumes Entitled Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ... 1711«, 1712, in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, p. 634.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Barnouw, »The Beginnings of 'Aesthetics' and the Leibnizian Conception of Sensation«, p. 95. Barnouw mentions Gracián, Pascal, Bouhours, Leibniz and Baumgarten among seventeenth and eighteenth century thinkers as exceptions to the prevalent »reason-blindness« of the age.

<sup>42</sup> Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

aggregate but confused as to the parts«. <sup>44</sup> These confused perceptions and sensations are the objects of Baumgarten's aesthetics, the *gnoseologia inferior*, that is, the theory of knowledge of the lower faculty, the *analogon rationis*, the analogy of reason. Leibniz has been called »the grandfather of 'aesthetics'«, <sup>45</sup> an exaggeration perhaps, for although some of his views on sensation and perception foreshadow Baumgarten's *gnoseologia inferior* and one remark on the delight in beauty has a Kantian ring, <sup>46</sup> he does not bring his analysis of knowledge and perception to bear on our understanding of art in any systematic way, which is unsurprising since Leibniz did not, and indeed could not, distinguish clearly between art and craft since he did not have the requisite conceptual resources at his disposal. <sup>47</sup>

### III

Baumgarten was only twenty-one years of age when his dissertation, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (1735), which has been called »the charter of modern philosophical aesthetics«, <sup>48</sup> was published. Among his later works, the *Metaphysica* (1739), which saw no less than seven editions between 1739 and

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 54–55.

<sup>45</sup> Barnouw, »The Beginnings of 'Aesthetics' and the Leibnizian Conception of Sensation«, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> In the »Praefatio codicis juris gentium diplomatici« (1693) there is a beautiful passage where Leibniz speaks of the contemplation of beauty which is delightful in itself, adding that »a painting by Raphael is regarded with delight by those who understand it and keep it before their eyes even if it brings no profit (riches), it is like a symbol of love« (»Et uti pulchrorum Contemplatio ipsa jucunda est, pictaque tabula Raphaelis intelligentem afficit, etsi nullos census ferat, adeo ut in oculis delitiisque feratur, quodam simulacro amoris«), *Leibniz-Edition-Arbeitsstelle Potsdam* (Vorausedition des Bandes IV, 5: Politische Schriften ab 1693 ad usum collegialem), p. 47, [www.bbaw.de/vh/leibniz/potsdam/bin/biv5.pdf](http://www.bbaw.de/vh/leibniz/potsdam/bin/biv5.pdf), my transl.

<sup>47</sup> He speaks of art in the sense of techniques, skills and practical knowledge as contrasted to science, and sometimes »les arts« refer to crafts such as carpentry and agriculture (Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, xlviiii, note on »art«).

<sup>48</sup> Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther, »Introduction«, *Reflections on Poetry: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, translated, with the Original Text, an Introduction, and Notes by Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p. 4. I henceforth refer to the English translation as »Meditations«, there is no reason to translate the Latin »Meditationes« differently; when referring to Baumgarten's Latin original I write »Meditationes«. The Danish edition of Baumgarten's *Meditationes* includes a long introductory essay by Søren Kjørup, »Baumgarten og æstetikens grundlæggelse« [Baumgarten and the foundation of aesthetics] (A. G. Baumgarten, *Filosofiske betragtninger over digtet*, translated by Per Aage Brandt in cooperation with Søren Kjørup, Copenhagen: Arena, 1968). I have benefited greatly from Kjørup's excellent essay (ibid., pp. 7–84).

1779,<sup>49</sup> is an important source for our knowledge of his general philosophy and in particular of his views regarding the role of sensuous knowledge in the fabric of human knowledge, but his major work on aesthetics, the *Aesthetica* (1750, 1758) remained unfinished. His views became known primarily through the work of his pupil, Georg Friedrich Meier, who presented and to a certain extent misrepresented Baumgarten's views in *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* (1748).<sup>50</sup>

The purpose of Baumgarten's *Meditations* is to give an outline of his new science of aesthetics, which investigates sensation and perception with the purpose of formulating the special form of perfection proper to them. Baumgarten presents his reflections on aesthetics and on poetry in axiomatic form, i.e. he uses the deductive method of presentation and argument favoured by his teacher Christian Wolff,<sup>51</sup> who in his turn was influenced by Leibniz, although Leibniz rarely formulated his thoughts in a systematic and axiomatic fashion.

More than one-fourth of the text of the *Meditations* consists of definitions, which are the axioms of his »system«, from these definitions the other propositions (theorems) are deduced. Baumgarten's language is, of course, informal, which means that he cannot escape the vagueness and imprecision inherent in natural languages, in this case, Latin. Consequently, it is not always easy to see that the conclusions Baumgarten draws from his premisses (the definitions) actually follow. Baumgarten's work is – with Spinoza's *Ethics*, some of Leibniz's writings and Wolff's Latin works – »among the most determined efforts ever put forth to think consecutively and rigorously on nonmathematical subject matters in an unformalized language«,<sup>52</sup> Aschenbrenner and Holther emphasize in their »Introduction« to the English translation of the *Meditations*. But their use of »the deductive method [...] gives only an illusion of clarity«, on closer inspection there is »a profusion of unclarified notions and a tangle of non sequiturs«, they conclude.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Hans Rudolf Schweizer, »Einführung«, in A. G. Baumgarten, *Texte zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, übersetzt und herausgegeben von Hans Rudolf Schweizer (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1983), xiv. Kant lectured regularly on Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, and regarded it as the most useful and thorough handbook of its kind (*ibid.*, x).

<sup>50</sup> Meier's work was inspired by, and based on Baumgarten's lectures on aesthetics in 1742.

<sup>51</sup> Wolff »is compared with thinkers such as Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz [...] a minor figure in the history of philosophy«, says Frederick Copelston, nevertheless he is important in the German context, because »he acted as a kind of philosophical educator of his nation«, in spite of the »aridity, dogmatism and formalism« of his philosophy »his system was able to provide a school-philosophy for the German universities until the rise of the Kantian criticism« (Frederick Copelston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 6: *Wolff to Kant*, London: Burns & Oates, 1961, p. 114).

<sup>52</sup> Aschenbrenner & Holther, »Introduction«, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Yet harping on the limitations of Baumgarten's method, which was soon abandoned in philosophy and the human sciences, blinds us to the historical importance of his work and to the insights expressed.

Baumgarten takes over Leibniz's and Wolff's analysis of confused and distinct ideas and perceptions, but modifies the analysis for his own purposes. Poetic ideas and poetic discourse are, according to Baumgarten, clear but confused, or rather, should be clear (i.e. not obscure) and confused; on the other hand, poetic discourse cannot express distinct ideas in the Leibnizian sense, since poetic discourse is not scientific discourse. In § 15 of the *Meditations* he says that »[s]ince poetic representations are clear representations, § 13, and since they will be either distinct or confused, and since they are not distinct, § 14, therefore, they are confused«,<sup>54</sup> a statement that also serves to illustrate his deductive mode of reasoning. Baumgarten then goes on to distinguish between *extensive* and *intensive clarity*, a distinction not to be found in Leibniz or Wolff. A representation (*repraesentatio*)<sup>55</sup> is intensively clear to the extent that it contains clear and distinct determinations, a representation has extensive clarity if it contains many confused (but clear) determinations:

§ 17. In extensively very clear representations more is represented in a sensate way than in those less clear, § 16; therefore, they contribute more to the perfection of a poem, § 7. For this reason extensively clearer representations are especially poetic, § 11.<sup>56</sup>

From this it follows, Baumgarten believes, that

§ 18. The more determinate things are, the more their representations embrace. In fact, the more that is gathered together in a confused representation, the more extensive clarity the representation has, § 16, and the more poetic it is, § 17. Therefore, for things to be determined as far as possible when they are to be represented in a poem is poetic, § 11.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, § 15, p. 42; »§. XV. Quum clarae repraesentationes sunt poeticae §. 13. aut erunt distinctae aut confusae, iam distinctae non sunt §. 14. ergo confusae.« (*Mediationes*, p. 9).

<sup>55</sup> Baumgarten's »representation« is a wide category including images, sense impressions, dreams (§§ 28–29, 37) as well as pictures (§ 39).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, § 17, p. 43; »§. XVII. In extensive clarissimis repraesentationibus plura repraesentantur sensitive, quam in minus claris §. 16 ergo plura faciunt ad perfectionem poematis §. 7. Hinc repraesentationes extensive clariores sunt maxime poeticae §. 11.« (*Mediationes*, p. 10).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, § 18, p. 43; »§. XVIII. Quo magis res determinantur, hoc repraesentationes earum plura complectuntur; quo vero plura in repraesentatione confusa cumulantur, hoc fit extensive clarior §. 16. magisque poetica §. 17. Ergo in poemate res repraesentandas quantum pote, determinari poeticum §. 11.« (*Mediationes*, p. 10).

In the following paragraph, § 19, Baumgarten says that »[i]n-dividuals are determined in every respect«, and that therefore »particular representations are in the highest degree poetic«. <sup>58</sup> The clarity that poetry can achieve, extensive clarity, differs from logical clarity; when poetry is said to be confused, we should keep in mind that »confused« is not synonymous with »obscure«, »nebulous«, »abstruse« and the like; it means rather that the »representations are fused together and [are] not sharply discriminated«. <sup>59</sup> Poetic clarity has to do with vivid details and poetic representations are fused together into a satisfying whole, as Aschenbrenner and Holther explain, »[w]e should say today that the ideal poetic representation is a highly condensed symbol, rich with ambiguity and as complex as the poet can contrive«. <sup>60</sup>

A poem, Baumgarten claims, is »a perfect sensate discourse« (§ 9), where »sensate discourse« means »discourse involving sensate representations« (§ 4), the latter being defined as »representations received through the lower part of the cognitive faculty« (§ 3). Several different intellectual activities concern themselves with poetry (and with the arts in general) in various ways: »a poem«, says Baumgarten, is »a perfect sensate discourse«, »poetics« is »the body of rules to which a poem conforms and by »philosophical poetics« he means »the science of poetics« (§ 9). In the penultimate paragraph of his treatise Baumgarten then gives his definition of aesthetics as »the science of perception«, whose objects are things perceived and which »are to be known by the inferior faculty« (§ 116). Aesthetics is thus concerned with a form of knowledge, albeit of an inferior kind compared to rational (logical) knowledge, but this knowledge is a necessary precondition for the development of rational or logical knowledge as Baumgarten makes clear: logic has often been regarded as an aid for improving our reason, but »since we know that distinct knowledge is based on

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., § 19, p. 43; »§ XIX. Individua sunt omnimode determinata, ergo *repraesentationes singulares sunt admodum poeticae* § 18.« (*Meditationes*, p. 10).

<sup>59</sup> Aschenbrenner & Holther, »Introduction«, p. 21. The distinction between intensive and extensive clarity is also expounded in the *Metaphysica* § 531, where Baumgarten says that »an extensively clearer perception (image) is vivid. The vividness of thought and presentation is brilliance [...] the opposite of which is dryness« (»Extensive clarior perceptio est VIVIDA. Vividitas COGITATIONUM et ORATIONIS NITOR [...] est cuius oppositum est SICCITAS«), *Texte zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, pp. 14–15, my transl.

<sup>60</sup> Aschenbrenner & Holther, »Introduction«, p. 22. Cf. Nelson Goodman's theory of »the five symptoms of the aesthetic«: syntactic density, semantic density, relative repleteness, exemplification and multiple and complex reference, where the three first symptoms have a certain affinity with Baumgarten's »confused poetic discourse« (Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978, pp. 67–79).

sensuous knowledge, logic is in need of assistance from aesthetics if our reason is to be improved.«<sup>61</sup>

Sensuous knowledge and sensuous representations have their own rationality, there is in Baumgarten's system a rational aspect to sensation and perception and to »sensate« thinking, which he calls »*analogon rationis*«, aesthetics is (among other things) the art of thinking in analogy with reason.<sup>62</sup> In the section on psychology (*psychologia empirica*) in the *Metaphysica* Baumgarten offers an analysis of the mental and intellectual powers belonging to the lower cognitive faculty. To the traditional faculties of sense, memory, and imagination, found in Wolff's *Psychologia empirica*, Baumgarten makes several additions, among them: *acumen sensitivum* (the ability to discriminate), *ingenium*, which is the ability to discover similarities, the *facultas fingendi*, i.e. the power to imagine and to create imaginative representations, the *facultas diiudicandi*, which is the faculty of judgment.<sup>63</sup> Some of these »powers« or »faculties« as well as a few others are discussed in Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* in connection with his characterization of the *felix aestheticus*, where »*aestheticus*« can hardly be translated as »aesthetician« nor as »aesthete«, although Baumgarten's *aestheticus* has something of both. Barnouw suggests »man of sensibility« as the best translation,<sup>64</sup> but perhaps we could simply say that the *felix aestheticus* for Baumgarten is the ideal of a cultured man with developed intellectual, social and »aesthetic« sensibilities. In the *Aesthetica* Baumgarten devotes much space to describing the *felix aestheticus*, emphasizing among other things the interplay of the higher and the lower cognitive faculties, which implies that there is no conflict between the ability to think logically (rationally) and »to think beautifully«,<sup>65</sup> in other words logic and »aesthetic« sensibility do not exclude one another.

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<sup>61</sup> A. G. Baumgarten, »Kollegium über die Ästhetik«, in A. G. Baumgarten, *Texte zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, p. 80, my transl. of the German original: »Wir wissen jetzt, daß die sinnliche Erkenntnis der Grund der deutlichen ist; soll also der ganze Verstand gebessert werden, so muß die Ästhetik der Logik zu Hilfe kommen«. This German text consists of student notes of Baumgarten's lectures.

<sup>62</sup> »Aesthetics is the science of sensuous knowledge and presentation« (»Scientia sensitive cognoscendi et proponendi es AESTHETICA«), Baumgarten writes in the *Metaphysica* § 533, characterizing this new »science« as »the logic of the lower faculty of knowing, as the philosophy of the Graces and Muses, as the lower theory of knowledge, as the art of thinking beautifully, as the art of thinking in analogy with reason« (»Logica facultatis cognoscitivae inferioris, Philosophia gratiarum et musarum, gnoseologia inferior, ars pulchre cogitandi, ars analogi rationis«), *Texte zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, p. 16, my transl.

<sup>63</sup> *Metaphysica* §§ 534–623, *Texte zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, pp. 17–65.

<sup>64</sup> Barnouw, »The Beginnings of 'Aesthetics' and the Leibnizian Conception of Sensation«, p. 81, n. 76.

<sup>65</sup> A. G. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, § 41, in A. G. Baumgarten, *Theoretische Ästhetik*.

Although Baumgarten is credited with the introduction of the term »aesthetics« his philosophical achievement has been very differently assessed by different commentators. As Jeanette Emt remarks Baumgarten is rarely mentioned as »the father of modern aesthetics« in »contemporary textbooks on aesthetics particularly in Great Britain and the United States«; if he is mentioned at all, he is only credited with the invention of the word »aesthetics«. <sup>66</sup> And Kristeller points out that »Baumgarten is famous for having coined the term *aesthetics*, but opinions differ as to whether he must be considered the founder of that discipline or what place he occupies in its history and development«, in fact, the »the original meaning of the term aesthetics as coined by Baumgarten [the theory of sensuous knowledge], has been all but forgotten by now«. <sup>67</sup> Baumgarten was concerned exclusively with poetry in his early work, and although he makes occasional references to the visual arts and music in his *Aesthetica*, there is no full-fledged philosophy of art or a theory of the arts in his writings. It is quite obvious, according to Kristeller, that »Baumgarten and Meier develop their actual theories only in terms of poetry and eloquence and take nearly all their examples from literature«. <sup>68</sup> Kristeller considers Shaftesbury's claim to be the founder of modern aesthetics, and argues that there is some reason for considering him to be so, since »Shaftesbury was the first major philosopher in modern Europe in whose writings the discussion of the arts occupied a prominent place«, <sup>69</sup> but neither Baumgarten nor Shaftesbury formulated a systematic philosophy of art covering all art forms.

Monroe Beardsley notes in his history of aesthetics that »[t]he implications of Descartes' philosophy in the field of art (or one possible set of implications) were first worked out by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten«, <sup>70</sup> a somewhat misleading statement since Leibniz's and Wolff's philosophies were a more potent source of inspiration for Baumgarten, <sup>71</sup> but his judgment that »Baumgarten's philosophically refined and sophisticated concept of 'sensate discourse' [...] deserves

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*Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der »Aesthetica« (1750/58), übersetzt und herausg. von Hans Rudolf Schweizer, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988, p. 25.*

<sup>66</sup> Ewa Jeanette Emt, »Baumgarten och den moderna estetikens födelse« [Baumgarten and the Birth of Modern Aesthetics], *Konsten och konstbegreppet* [Art and the Concept of Art] (Stockholm: Raster, 1996), p. 17, my transl.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, »Origins of Aesthetics: Historical and Conceptual Overview«, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 3, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 425.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>70</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 156.

<sup>71</sup> Beardsley's view that »Baumgarten [evidently] is making the most determined effort thus far to distinguish between two fundamentally different types of discourse: the

to be regarded as a forward step toward a fundamental aesthetic theory«,<sup>72</sup> seems apposite. Other commentators view Baumgarten, not as the founder of aesthetics, but as the founder of German aesthetics. Copelston, for example, says that Baumgarten's importance »lies in the fact that he was the real founder of German aesthetic theory«,<sup>73</sup> but he was not »the father of aesthetics«, since »Shaftesbury and Hutcheson [...] had already written on the subject in England«.<sup>74</sup> Baumgarten, nevertheless deserves credit, Copelston thinks, for »he paved the way for a further development of aesthetic theory«, and »he saw that there is a side of human life and activity which is a fit object of philosophical consideration but which cannot be understood by anyone who is determined to bring it into the sphere of abstract logical thinking on pain of exclusion from philosophy altogether«.<sup>75</sup>

Baumgarten's achievement has been well summarized by Luc Ferry as follows: »The *Aesthetica* gave a philosophical formulation to the themes already encountered, in a more literal form, in the French debates between classicism and the aesthetics of sentiment«.<sup>76</sup> The artist's involvement with the individual and particular, has no place in Cartesian philosophy, as Ferry puts it, »we enter a realm Cartesian reason cannot grasp«, with Baumgarten, however, »the mediation between reason and unreason, between the universal and the individual begins to work itself out, thanks [...] mainly to the idea of *analogy*, which [...] permits us to build a bridge between the sensible and the intelligible worlds«.<sup>77</sup> Baumgarten's influence and legacy is, nevertheless,

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clear and distinct, or abstract, discourse of science, and the confused, though more or less clear, discourse of poetry, which exists to render and realize sense experience« (ibid., p. 158–159) is to the point, but Baumgarten's distinction between clear and distinct ideas and concepts is Leibnizian rather than Cartesian.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>73</sup> Copelston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 6, p. 115.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 118–119. Some philosophers and historians of philosophy have belittled Baumgarten's work. The Neo-Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband, for example, makes the following assessment of Baumgarten : »So erwuchs die Ästhetik als philosophischer Wissenszweig nicht aus Interesse an ihrem Gegenstande, sondern mit entschiedener Geringschätzung desselben [...] auch vermochte dieser Rationalismus [...] für die Theorie der Kunst kein anderes Prinzip als das sensualistische der Naturnachahmung aufzustellen und entwickelte dieses wesentlich in eine langweilige Poetik. Allein trotzdem bleibt es Baumgartens großes Verdienst, das Schöne zum erstenmal wieder systematisch aus den allgemeinsten Begriffen der Philosophie behandelt und damit eine Disziplin begründet zu haben, der in der Weiterentwicklung besonders der deutschen Philosophie eine so wichtige Rolle auch für die theoretische Lehren bestimmt war« (Wilhelm Windelband, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Hrsg. Heinz Heimsoeth, 15. Aufl., Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1957, p. 414).

<sup>76</sup> Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, 1990, transl. Robert de Loazia (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 76.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

ambiguous, for his programme for aesthetics has been taken over only in part by later philosophers and theorists. Aesthetics, in Baumgarten's definition, is not only the science of sensible knowledge, but also the theory of the liberal arts, the doctrine of inferior knowledge, the art of beautiful thought and the art of the analogue of reason.<sup>78</sup> Aesthetics has, of course, mostly been conceived of as the philosophy of art, or, as the theory of the arts, whereas Baumgarten's idea of aesthetics as the theory of sensuous knowledge has been all but ignored, moreover, he did not develop a complete philosophy of art or a complete theory of art comprising all the art forms.<sup>79</sup>

With Kant and his third critique, *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (1790), we enter another world, and an entirely new phase in the development of »aesthetic« thought and analysis. Kant's use of the term »aesthetics«, however, is complicated, it is certainly not synonymous with »philosophy of art« and is thus very different from, for example, Schelling's and Hegel's conceptions. In the first part of the »Transzendente Elementarlehre«, the »transcendental aesthetics«, of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1787), »aesthetics« means »sensible« and »that which pertains to the senses«. The transcendental aesthetics is concerned with the analysis of the preconditions of sensuous experience, and has nothing to do with aesthetics in Baumgarten's sense nor with art and aesthetic experience.<sup>80</sup> Kant explicitly rejects »aesthetics« as a synonym for »the critique of taste«, since aesthetics is the fallacious attempt to bring »the critical assessment of beauty under rational principles, and to elevate the principles of beauty into a science«,<sup>81</sup> and Baumgarten, »the excellent analyst«, is singled out as harbouring this illusion.<sup>82</sup> In the *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, Kant's aim is to provide a critique, i.e. an analysis of the conditions for the possibility of aesthetic and teleological judgments. The work is thus divided into two major

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<sup>78</sup> »AESTHETICA (theoria liberalium artium, gnoseologia inferior, ars pulchre cogitandi, ars analogi rationis) est scientia cognitionis sensitivae«, Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, § 1, in Baumgarten, *Theoretische Ästhetik*, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Baumgarten was criticized for privileging poetry and rhetoric in his »aesthetics«; in his encyclopaedic work, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Wissenschaften und Künste* (1771–1774), Johann Georg Sulzer complains that Baumgarten, because of his »limited knowledge of the arts did not by far describe all the expressions of beauty«, aesthetics is in his opinion »still an underdeveloped philosophical science« (quoted from the article »Ästhetik/ästhetisch« in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, p. 332, my transl.).

<sup>80</sup> »Eine Wissenschaft von allen Prinzipien der Sinnlichkeit a priori nenne ich die *transzendente Ästhetik*«, Kant declares (Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1787, Hrsg. Karl Vorländer, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956, p. 64).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65, my transl. The German original reads: »... die kritische Beurteilung des Schönen unter Vernunftprinzipien zu bringen, und die Regeln derselben zur Wissenschaft zu erheben«.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

parts with subdivisions. The first part of the critique of aesthetic judgments is devoted to judgments of taste, in particular to judgments of beauty, whereas the second part is concerned with judgments of the sublime. The philosophical analysis of judgments of taste, which Kant considered calling »The Critique of Taste«, is only to a minor degree concerned with art and aesthetic judgments of art, most of the examples are in fact taken from nature, not from art. There are, however, also reflections on the value of various art forms and about the inter-relationships between the arts, but on no account can Kant's work be considered a philosophy of art. The post-Kantian aesthetics of Schelling and Hegel is another matter. Baumgarten's intriguing and insightful remark to the effect that the abstraction and generality aimed at by scientific and rational thought implies a loss in »material perfection« was largely ignored by most 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers of art,<sup>83</sup> whose aim was to construct a completely general philosophy of art concerned with the essence of Art, which meant that they frequently lost sight of individual works of art and of the particularities of works of art. It is the task of the philosophy of art »to attain philosophical knowledge about the essential and general properties of the phenomenon under study«, therefore »the plurality and heterogeneity of works of art must not be allowed to disturb us«, since »the conceptual essence of the phenomenon is the guiding-star«,<sup>84</sup> says Hegel, and in a similar vein, Schelling claimed that the philosopher is not concerned with *works of art*, since »for the philosopher art is a necessary phenomenon emanating immediately from the absolute.«<sup>85</sup> Baumgarten's and Kant's attention to detail and to the particularities of aesthetic, sensuous perception and to the judgments of taste was replaced by an essentialist philosophy of art which eventually brought aesthetics and the philosophy of art into disrepute. But that is another story.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Baumgarten, *Aesthetica* § 560: »What is abstraction if not a loss« (»Quid enim est abstractio, si iactura non est?«), in Baumgarten, *Theoretische Ästhetik*, p. 144.

<sup>84</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* II, p. 264–265, my transl.

<sup>85</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, 1802/3 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchhandlung, 1976), p. 384, my transl.

<sup>86</sup> The story is told by Jean-Marie Schaeffer in *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*, 1992, transl. Steven Rendall (Princeton University Press, 2000). The Swedish case is perhaps not untypical. Aesthetics was established as an academic subject in 1833, the poet and philosopher P. D. A. Atterbom was appointed to the first chair in aesthetics and poetics in 1835 at Uppsala University. At the turn of the century there was a growing satisfaction with philosophical speculation of the Hegelian stripe and in 1917 aesthetics was abolished and replaced by two new academic disciplines, history of literature and history of art. Aesthetics was re-established at Uppsala University in 1953.

POVZETEK

**Izumljenje moderne estetike  
Od Leibniza do Kanta**

»Estetiko« kot termin je skoval nemški filozof, pripadnik wolffovske šole, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten v svoji razpravi *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poemata pertinentibus* [Filozofska razmišljanja o nekaterih značilnostih pesmi] leta 1735. Baumgarten je razvil svojo koncepcijo estetike kot »teorijo čutnega spoznavanja«, nižjo epistemologijo (*gnoseologia inferior*) na ozadju Leibnizovega razločevanja med jasnimi, nejasnimi in različnimi idejami in precepcijami. Estetika, ki jo je Baumgarten naprej razvijal v svoji obsežni in nedokončani *Aesthetici* (1751, 1758), je otrok razsvetljenstva, obenem pa tudi kritika togega racionalizma wolffovske filozofske šole. V prvem delu prispevka so orisani začetki »modernega sistema umetnosti«, ki je dokazljivo predpogoj za nastanek sistematične estetike; drugi del je posvečen analizi Leibnizovih distinkcij in njegovega nazora, da je v čutnem zaznavanju zaobjeto neke vrste »tiho spoznavanje«; v tretjem delu so obravnavane nekatere izstopajoče poteze Baumgartnove razprave, njegove definicije estetike kot znanosti čutnega spoznavanja in njegov ideal *felix aestheticus*. Na kratko je obravnavana tudi Baumgartnova trditev, da je utemeljitelj filozofske estetike, pa tudi odnos Baumgartnove estetike do Kantovega načrta »kritike okusa« v *Kritiki razsodne moči*. Na koncu se prispevek dotakne kontrasta med Baumgartnovo in Kantovo rabo termina estetika.