

Another Way of Knowing

Baumgarten, Aesthetics, and the Concept of Sensuous Cognition

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Why "sensuous knowledge"? From where does this phrase stem as the name of a multifaceted, international project with conferences, publications, and a website as its main manifestations? How come that "sensuous knowledge" can function as a common denominator of results of and reflections on artistic research?¹

The answer is "aesthetics"! And in this essay I shall try to explain how the concept of "sensuous knowledge" is central to the original concept of "aesthetics", and how the concept can be seen as an invitation to go deeper into the epistemology of artistic research and development work. To be able to explain that, I shall however have to go into the discussion about art, aesthetic experience, and logic in 18th Century philosophy – a period not unlike ours in the sense that many old, formerly stable concepts and ideas were thrown into turmoil, and it took some time before they, together with some new ones, fell down into a new, "modern", conceptual pattern. And as a kind of spin-off of the explanation I shall try to exemplify the importance of grasping the historicity of some of the central concepts of modern artistic understanding, and to show how what might quite generally be called "theory", in some cases functions as obstacles to our thinking, in others open up to new vistas.

A PhD-thesis on Poetry

My old one volume encyclopaedia tells me that aesthetics is "the science of beauty and taste". Slightly more advanced encyclopaedias would probably add that aesthetics is also the philosophy of art. And in really knowledgeable encyclopaedias you can read that the philosophical discipline aesthetics – or at least the very term – does not date back to Antiquity, but only to the middle of the 18th Century and to the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-62).

The year of introduction of the term "aesthetics" is normally given as 1750 when the first volume of Baumgarten's great Latin *Aesthetica*² was published. (The second

¹ The first Sensuous Knowledge conference, arranged by the Bergen National Academy of the Arts and with the subtitle "Creating a Tradition", took place at Solstrand outside Bergen, Norway, October 26-28, 2004. The present essay is a thoroughly revised version of my opening keynote speech the first day of the conference. All translations of quotations and titles of books and essays are mine.

² Important excerpts are published with German translation in Hans Rudolf Schweizer, *Ästhetik als philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis* (1973).

volume was published in 1758, and the planned completion of the work was prevented by Baumgarten's illness and death). But actually the word is 15 years older. It was originally introduced by the 21 years old Baumgarten as part of the concluding considerations in what we might call his PhD-thesis – an only 40-page Latin dissertation from 1735. And here aesthetics was not introduced as a science of beauty and taste or a philosophy of art, even though both beauty and art are background features of his original, philosophical concept of aesthetics. To Baumgarten, aesthetics was to be the name of a kind of logic or epistemology for a specific type of knowledge, "cognitio sensitiva" in his 18th century Latin, a kind of intuitive knowledge or what we may render as *sensuous knowledge*.

The dissertation was called *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* ("Philosophical Meditations on a Few Things Concerning the Poem").³ And it is a strange, extraordinarily compact text. It is divided into 117 numbered paragraphs of somewhat varying size, from a few sentences and up to a whole page. Most paragraphs consist of a concise statement plus a short explication, all of it constructed according to the so-called "geometric method", i.e. in such a way that later statements are "proven" logically from combinations of a few of the earlier ones (and I put quotation marks around "proven" to indicate that very few statements are actually strictly proven, but all of them are reasonably based on the ones to which they point back). As a whole the dissertation is a surprisingly successful attempt at formulating a definition of the concept of a poem, and from this definition to derive the classic rules for the art of poetry known from writers from Antiquity, first of all from Horace, rules that Baumgarten also exemplifies with quotations mostly from the classics.

What is original in the dissertation, however, is something else, namely the way in which Baumgarten dissolves a current philosophical paradox concerning the relationship between sensation and thinking, experience and understanding – or as we would probably say: between art and science. It was a paradox caused by the clash between traditional Rationalist logic and the budding new thinking about art of the first decades of the 18th Century. Another way of expressing the situation, using Thomas Kuhn's concepts, would be that a dawning feeling for aesthetic qualities had given rise to more and more anomalies within the current logical-conceptual paradigm, and that Baumgarten solved the problems by creating a new paradigm. And to do that, he had to invent a new concept of knowledge, sensuous knowledge, and a new theoretical discipline, aesthetics. But to be able to explain what was really at stake here, I have to describe the status of the thinking about art and of logic – and the relationship between them – at the beginning of the 18th Century.

³ In the English translation with introduction and notes by Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (and with a facsimile of the original Latin text from 1735), *Reflections on Poetry* (1954), the key concept "sensitivus" is translated as "sensate ", not "sensuous".

The Concept of Art

Not only the concept of aesthetics, also the concept of art (in a modern, recognizable sense) stems from the Enlightenment. Contrary to the very word "aesthetics", the word "art" (and the equivalent ones in other languages, also ancient Greek and Latin) is much older, but we should not let us deceive by that.

What the ancients understood by "art", did only partly overlap with our modern concept, a fact that is often hidden in translations of ancient texts. When we read in Plato's *The Republic* about the important differences in value between the carpenter's "craft" (making a bed) and the painter's "art" (making a picture of the bed), the terminological distinction between craft and art has been made by the translator. Plato used exactly the same word for the efforts of the carpenter and the painter, i.e. *tekné* (obviously the word we have kept in "technique"). Carpentry and painting were both examples of "technical skill", a thought that is not completely foreign to us, even though we use different words for the various "skills". But we tend to wonder when we learn that to Plato the carpenter would rank much higher than the painter because he would know how to make a real bed, whereas the painter would only know how to render its outward appearance. And also the Romans and the Europeans of the Middle Ages had a concept of art very different from ours, and even around the year 1700 the modern concept of art was only slowly in the making.

But what is the modern concept of art, our concept today? I shall not here engage in a broad philosophical discussion to try to answer the question "What is art?", since I only need to point to a few, probably completely uncontroversial banalities of our understanding of what art is or isn't, e.g.:

- "Art" is the common term for a group of diverse, but related "arts" or branches of art amongst which fictional literature, music, and painting are the most prominent, whereas astronomy, say, is not an art – and if we now and then call disciplines like cooking and journalism "arts", we are quite aware that we do not mean exactly the same as when we are talking about Shakespeare, Mozart, and Cézanne.
- The artistic value of a work of art is of an experiential character, engaging feelings and cognition, and is completely independent of the value of the material out of which the works are made, and independent of the objective truth or falsity of the details of statements made by the work; the artistic value of a sculpture is not enhanced simply by its being cast in gold, and the artistic value of even a fairly realistic novel is not seriously weakened just because the author makes a couple of mistakes about the building history of London or the like.
- Artistic creativity presupposes at least concrete inspiration and some kind of native talent, and thus more than purely craftsmanlike or other kinds of skills that you can learn.

The concept of art hidden in these commonplaces, however, did only grow forth during the period between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and only slowly and through lots of – to a modern reader – bewildered discussions.

The Arts before the Modern Concept of Art

Before the middle of the 18th Century, the three modern commonplaces were unknown: "Art" did not cover the arts that we would mention and no other activities or products; the value of paintings did not primarily lie in their sensuous appeal; and there was no clear distinction between learnable craft and activities that presuppose talent and inspiration.

What concerns the question of what the concept of "art" was taken to cover, poetry and painting belonged to completely different areas of life for the practice and theory of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (even though they had been seen as somehow related since Antiquity) – and music belonged to a third one (or rather to two further areas, as I shall show).

Poetry was considered a learned practice, a kind of description of reality, closely related to (or even identical with) scholarship and science. The first Danish newspaper, Anders Bording's *Den Danske Mercurius* ("The Danish Mercury", 1666-77), was actually written in rhymed alexandrines, while the most important criterion of value for "real" poetry was said to be Truth.

Painting, however, was a craft, painters organised in guilds as all other craftsmen, and the guild of painters was not even amongst the finest; in the top of the hierarchy of guilds were goldsmiths because they worked with the most valuable material. In the same way the value of paintings was not least a question of how much gold and other valuable components that had been used (e.g. grated lapis lazuli for the finest blue areas). Even during the Renaissance a painter would argue for a high price for his work not only by referring to his fame, but also to his thorough studies of modern techniques of painting and for his use of gold and valuable colours.

And music, finally, was on the one hand a musical practice (rarely purely instrumental, but more often than not as song) that nobody would theorize (except maybe for church music), and on the other a purely theoretical discipline, one of the "seven liberal arts" of the curriculum of the new seats of learning, the universities. Here you would find music as mathematical harmonics, alongside the other mathematical "arts" (arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, the "geometry" of the sky) and alongside the so-called "sermonical arts" (the "linguistic" ones: grammar, rhetoric, and logic).

Even though both Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance would make systematic comparisons between the various branches of art (first of all between poetry and painting in the so-called "paragons") the very first text in the world that sets out to show that the three basic arts (plus dance as a fourth one) are closely related and rest on the very same principle, is the treatise *Les beaux-arts réduits à un même principe* (roughly: "The Fine Arts Founded on One Common Principle") from 1746 by the French abbey and later member of the French Academy Charles Batteux (1713-80). His only principle, by the way, was Aristotle's good old "mimesis", the rendering of reality, so Batteux had trouble with music and dance.

Poetry, Truth, and a Little Bit More

What interested Baumgarten in connection with his dissertation of 1735 was only poetry. Here the great problem of the period was to find room for the new concepts of artistic creativity, experiential quality, and aesthetic judgment that grew up slowly in connection with a rethinking of the classic concepts of art and beauty.

In his huge didactic poem – a typical genre of the time – *L'art poétique* ("The Art of Poetry") from 1674 Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711) would still insist that reason must be the highest judge even in artistic matters, and although he dutifully mentions native talent as necessary, education and reason have a higher position. "Before you start writing, you must learn to think" he claims (1.150), and "You should love Reason, and always let your writings / borrow from it both splendour and appreciation" (1.37-38). And in his ninth epistle (which is also a poem) we find the plain statement that "Only the True is beautiful, only the True is pleasant, / Truth should rule everywhere, even in the fable."

In his treatise *La manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit* ("How to Think Well in Works of Wit") from 1685 a contemporary of Boileau, Dominique Bouhours (1628-1702), quotes these lines with approval. But he adds that "when it comes to witty thoughts, truth is not enough; something unusual must be added that may move the soul" (p. 85). And he even insists that "when thoughts must be true, they often become trivial" (p. 82).

At best the poet should present something completely new and interesting every time, but that is more than one can expect. More often than not a poet must be satisfied with giving a well-known thought a little new, maybe elegant twist, something "delicate" (as Bouhours calls it). And what is characteristic of this "delicate" detail is that it cannot be defined; the delicate, that which is the truly characteristic feature of an artistic achievement, escapes closer explanation and specification.

In a certain sense it is something we do not really know what is, and therefore it is called exactly that in the different relevant languages: "non so que", "je ne sais quoi", "ich weiss nicht was", "nescio quid", "Jeg ved ej hvad", "I know not what" and so on. Here we have the Enlightenment concept of the inexpressible, what we today might call "this special *something*", and that one might meet in a narrower sense in the jargon of weeklies of the 1960'ies when they wrote about "girls with *it*".

Thanks to the concept of "the delicate" and related concepts like "spirit", "emotion", "genius", "wit" (not so much about funny stories as a term for the ability to make connections), and first of all this "I know not what" Enlightenment thinking was hesitantly approaching the specifically artistic. But the fact that the artistic phenomenon would have this indefinable character, the fact that here was something that could be pointed to and experienced, but not grasped in a definition, had as a consequence that it had to be seen as something nearly without value, something one had to avoid or to escape from as fast as one could. And the reason for this was the rationalist conceptual logic of the period and the hierarchy of values combined with it.

The Enlightenment of Concepts

The cornerstone of conceptual logic of the Enlightenment was Descartes' distinction between "clear" and "distinct" concepts or ideas. This simple dichotomic system had, however, been expanded by Leibniz.

You have a *clear* idea about something that you can distinguish and recognize, but you have a *distinct* idea if you also know the criteria by which you make the distinction and are able to point to the marks or characteristics defining whatever you have the distinct idea about. As an example Leibniz mentions that most people have a clear idea of gold since they are able to recognize a golden object, whereas the goldsmith has a distinct idea of gold since he knows how to analyze the material to make sure that it really is gold, i.e. to establish the defining marks or characteristics. Progress in cognition would be seen as a movement from clear to distinct ideas, and this would be achieved through conceptual analysis. Enlightenment philosophy was a kind of analytical philosophy, and what should be "enlightened" was not primarily humanity, but concepts or ideas.

Like Bouhours adding a delicate "I know not what" to Boileau's true and reasonable ideas in poetry, Leibniz added a deeper, unconscious level to the basic Cartesian distinction between the clear or distinct ones: *les petites perceptions*, the minute ideas. "The Cartesians have been very wrong in considering ideas of which you are not conscious, as nothing," Leibniz wrote in his *Monadologie*, § 14. But these vague perceptions are important because they are the basis from which the analysis towards clear and distinct ideas takes its point of departure.

An unclear or *obscure* idea is what you have about some flower or animal that you have once seen, if you are unable now to recognize it if you should see it again (or unable to distinguish it from some similar flower or animal). Or it may be the idea you have about the sound of each little wave if you are standing on the beach, listening to the roar of the sea; you know that the roar must consist of the fusion of the tiny sounds of all the tiny waves, but you are not able to distinguish the single waves in the roar, so you only have a confused idea of each one. The "I know not what", although being closely related to this "unconscious" level of cognition, must be found just across the borderline into the clear ideas (because you recognize it when you meet it).

Leibniz also enlarged the conceptual system to the opposite side, inspired by some remarks by Spinoza. As I just explained, we have a distinct idea of gold if we know the defining characteristics of gold, e.g. specific gravity, colour, and reaction to acid. The question is, however, if we also have distinct ideas about each of these marks or characteristics, or if we only have clear ideas about them. In the latter case, we do have a distinct idea about gold, yet an "inadequate" one. An *adequate* concept we have if we also have distinct ideas about the marks, and once again distinct ideas about the marks of the marks and so on.

Actually, Leibniz doubted that human beings can ever reach adequate ideas of anything (maybe with mathematical ideas as the only exception), but he saw adequate ideas as a kind of limit, just as the completely obscure ideas at the other end of the continuum that he imagined between the various degrees of enlightened or "purified" ideas. The capacity to have obscure and clear ideas was called the "lower" part of the

cognitive faculty, whereas the capacity to have distinct ideas and to approach adequate ones was called the "higher" part (or the "intellect").

And nobody could doubt the hierarchy of value in this continuum of concepts and cognition. Obviously, man had to strive towards clarity, distinctness, and if possible adequacy in his ideas, and the "only" obscure and clear ideas were seen from the top of the hierarchy as lacking something; therefore they were often negatively defined, as indistinct or *confused* (in the sense that marks were considered to be "mixed up").

The Aesthetic Paradox

On this background it should not be difficult to grasp what in a modern phrase might be called "the aesthetic paradox of enlightenment": What for modern eyes would give a poem *high quality* and make it interesting and aesthetically satisfying, i.e. its "I know not what", had to be taken as a sign of its *inferior value*, since we here meet something about which we have clear ideas at the most (we can recognize it, but not define it), something that is rooted in the lower part of the cognitive faculty. The better your poem, the less valuable!

The paradox may be expressed in various ways (and was in the period). A specifically puzzling one is that it must be impossible for God to have aesthetic experiences. According to this way of thinking, aesthetic experiences are due to a weakness of human cognition; we are unable to have clear and distinct ideas about everything all the time, but fortunately we find a kind of delicate challenge and aesthetic satisfaction in certain forms of obscurity and clearness only. God, however, not only has perpetual adequate cognition of everything; he is even exempt from the task of doing analysis, since his cognition is *intuitive*: With a kind of conceptual Roentgen glance he is able to see the whole and its parts all at once.

But exactly in this kind of reasoning we find the germ of the most common attempt at a solution to the aesthetic paradox of the beginning of the 18th Century. Even though man should not dare compare himself with God when it comes to unmediated insight and comprehensive reason, man does have a capacity of the same type, at least when it comes to aesthetic matters, i.e. *taste*.

The Concept of "Taste" as Attempted Solution

According to standard overviews of the history of aesthetics the metaphorical concept of taste dates from the first half of the 17th Century (and credit for its construction is normally given to the Spanish Jesuit Baltasar Gracian y Morales, 1601-58). It seems, however, that the concept only reached Germany – or rather the German language – in 1727, when it was used by the poet Johann Ulrich König (1688-1744) in a short treatise called "Untersuchung von dem guten Geschmack in der Dicht- und Redekunst" ("An Essay on Good Taste in Poetry and Rhetoric"), published as a postscript to his edition of the collected poems by Friedrich Rudolf Ludwig Canitz. That the concept really was brand new in Germany at the time, can be seen by the fact the König feels obliged to

make it explicitly clear that he is writing about taste "in verblühmter Bedeutung", i.e. metaphorically (literally in "covert" sense), or as he writes: just as when Spaniards, French, and Italians use the words "gusto" or "goût". König is not writing about "the taste of the senses", he notes, i.e. about how food "tastes", but about what he calls "the taste of reason".⁴

For König, as for most other contemporary theoreticians of this field, taste is the special faculty that makes it possible to pass judgment in matters of value, e.g. of a poem, relying on only obscure and at most clear ideas and without making any kind of analysis. What not everybody would agree about was whether taste (and similar faculties) should be seen as appreciating directly and spontaneously what also reason would have appreciated had it had time to make its analysis, or whether taste in a more radical fashion should be seen as the capacity to judge about specific properties of things that reason would never be able to grasp.

The first opinion was by far the most common, and shared not only by König, but also e.g. by Leibniz, by Bouhours, and by the French philosopher Jean-Pierre de Crousaz (1663-1748) in his *Traité du Beau* ("Treatise on Beauty") from 1715. They all presupposed some kind of "pre-established harmony" between taste and reason, implicitly claiming that even though we experience aesthetic qualities only with the lower part of the cognitive faculty (which would strip them of value), the qualities would really be there also for a thorough analysis (and they therefore have value all the same).

The more radical opinion we find in the *Reflexions critiques sur la Poesie & sur la Peinture* ("Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting") from 1719 by the French abbot Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670-1742) who writes e.g. that "what analysis would never find, feeling grasps at once" (II, p. 352), thereby nearly implying that aesthetic qualities have a value of their own. And it is in that kind of thinking that Baumgarten takes his point of departure.

Baumgarten's Solution: Sensuous Knowledge

In his short treatise on the art of poetry Baumgarten cuts straight through the aesthetic paradox and creates a new paradigm for the discussion and understanding of poetry and in extension of this, of art in general. The stroke of genius is actually a very simple step: to give the so far negatively defined indistinct or confused ideas a positive name of their own: *sensuous* ideas. After having defined "a sensuous text" as a text which mostly communicates sensuous ideas (§ 4), Baumgarten is able to inquire about the specific criteria of perfection for that kind of text, implying that these criteria must be different from those of a text mostly communicating distinct ideas. His answer is the simple one that the perfect sensuous text is the one whose different parts all contribute to the cognition of sensitive ideas (§ 7) – and another name for this kind of text is simply a poem (§ 9).

Alongside traditional analysis of concepts or ideas that leads from obscurity

⁴ Even as late as 1790, in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Kant feels obliged to mention that writing about taste, he does not mean "Geschmack der Zunge", "the taste of the tongue".

towards more and more of what Baumgarten now implicitly baptizes *intensive* clarity (and distinctness etc.), he proposes the possibility of growing *extensive* clarity (§ 16). One might say that he elucidates a feature of the traditional analytical scheme where you are supposed to advance "intensively" from obscure to clear to distinct to adequate concepts or ideas: Your understanding gets more and more abstract; you get further and further away from the actual object of interest by digging deeper and deeper into the conceptual system. And as a contrast to this, he points to another possibility of getting on from the only obscure and clear ideas, the "extensive" one that consists in accumulating characteristics on the same level – and its perfection is reached in the complete determination of a specific, individual thing (§ 19).

Let us consider an example: We are approaching a person that we obviously distinguish and recognize as a human being; we have, consequently, a clear concept or idea. Traditionally we would make for a distinct concept from here: A human being is (at least according to Aristotle) defined as "a rational animal", and if we know this clearly, we have a distinct concept or idea. In the further "intensive" analysis we would look for a definition of "rational" and of "animal" and so on. But we may also go in the opposite direction, so to speak, trying to determine the person concretely, i.e. acquiring still more "extensive" clarity: The person in question is not just "a human being", but a specific person, a man with a specific name, with specific looks and in specific clothes, with a specific background etc. If we think about this as a description, this account of feature after feature should make the person appear alive and kicking to our imagination. Of course a simple enumeration of features would be tedious, but a more suggestive rendering (using metaphors etc.) will create a kind of poetic lucidity, Baumgarten would say.

So Baumgarten does not need any concept of taste that thanks to some kind of *ad hoc* pre-established harmony may judge intuitively amongst the obscure and clear ideas with the same result that reason would have reached after an analysis. The quality about which taste should judge, is simply another type of quality than the one that interests reason. Here is no longer just one hierarchy of values; here are two. With a modern, anachronistic phrasing: Art and science should not be measured by the same yardstick – even though they are both forms of cognition. And what Baumgarten in the beginning of the dissertation still calls "the lower part of the cognitive faculty" and "the higher part of the cognitive faculty", emancipate themselves (uncommented!) at the end as two separate faculties: "the lower cognitive faculty" and "the higher cognitive faculty".

Aesthetics as epistemology

The short dissertation gives the conceptual basis for this new way of thinking in the first score of paragraphs. Then follow nearly a hundred paragraphs where Baumgarten point by point "deduces" which kinds of ideas, poetic material (like phantasies, dreams, and prophecies), rhetorical forms etc. are better than others to promote sensuous perfection – as mentioned already a kind of systematization of Horace and the other classic writers. And then Baumgarten closes the dissertation with a couple of paragraphs that throw light back over the whole text and discuss what kind of reasoning we have been drawn through.

In § 115 Baumgarten makes it clear that sensuous knowledge just as well as the abstract scientific one (that Baumgarten calls "philosophical") should be led by logic. However, one has to consider that a specific logic for guiding the lower cognitive faculty in its search for sensuous knowledge has not yet been developed, he claims; the kind of logic that has been known so far, is only concerned with the higher faculty of cognition. Alongside traditional logic there is room for a hitherto undeveloped science (or meta-science, as we would say) that can guide and describe sensuous knowledge, an epistemology for sensuous knowledge, we would say.

And what should this new (meta-)science or epistemology be called? Baumgarten treats this question in § 116. He reminds us of the ancient distinction between what in Greek is called "noeta" and "aistheta", thoughts (or ideas) and perceptions (or sensations), respectively, of which the first (noeta) obviously belong to the higher faculty of cognition and thereby to logic, the latter (aistheta) to the lower – so why not call the new science "aesthetics"? And there is the word, the first time ever, and in accordance with the general layout of the dissertation (where different types of concepts are written in different faces of type), written in capitals only: AESTHETICA!⁵

Concepts and Theories are Historical

What can we learn from this story about how the concept of aesthetics as the epistemology of sensuous knowledge grew up during the first half of the 18th Century?

One important lesson of the story is that even what we consider the most basic and banal concepts and theories are really historical and subjected to historical change. In this case the most clear example is on the one hand the general concept of art, on the other our ways of conceiving of the various arts, their mutual relations, and their relations to social institutions and phenomena.

A modern example that is relevant to this lesson is the discussion that pops up now and then about the relationship between the visual arts in a narrow sense and arts and craft. In this connection we may hear arguments that presuppose that concepts like these are timeless – often in an attempt to "prove" that painting, say, and ceramics are fundamentally different activities, not least of completely different artistic value, and that they always have been, and therefore have to remain different in all future. Looking at the concepts in a historical perspective, we have to realize that the two concepts of "art" and "arts and craft" have had various contents at various times. What we may tend to see as two different phenomena, have had various mutual relationships to one another (and to other phenomena) at various points in time.

And another example relevant to the general lesson is the current discussion about the relationship between art and science. Actually, Baumgarten's introduction of the concept of aesthetic, sensuous cognition as a sibling to what might be called scientific, rational cognition a couple of centuries later had grown into the sharp and unsurpassable

⁵ Let me admit that the exclamation mark is mine and not from the original text, and that Baumgarten's phrase unfortunately does not render the word in the nominative, but in the genitive case ("aestheticae" – as part of the phrase "'aistheta' . . . are the object of aesthetics").

distinction between art and science – and between emotion and cognition – in most 20th Century thought. Also in this connection we may meet the claim that this distinction has always been the way we know it, and therefore has to remain that way. Acquaintance with the conceptual history behind the modern way of thinking is a good antidote here. Things – and not least cultural phenomena like the aesthetic and scientific ones – are not given once and for all.

Considerations of this kind, however, are not in themselves arguments either for a fusion of the two phenomena in question or for keeping them apart (even though the considerations constitute an argument against using the fictional "eternal" difference as an argument for segregation). The function of the considerations should rather be to open up for a more flexible understanding and discussion of how art on the one hand and arts and craft on the other, or art and science, respectively, actually are related today, and which consequences should be drawn from this, e.g. in building up new institutions for teaching in the aesthetic field – or for the discussion of research in the arts.

Theory that Opens Up, and Theory that Closes

Another lesson may be that theory does not always function fruitfully for thinking and praxis, but that it may also block the road for certain ways of thinking and understanding of praxis, especially when established theory puts obstacles in the way for new conceptual breakthroughs.

It is, however, important to remember both sides of this lesson. Maybe the Baumgarten example most clearly shows how Rationalist conceptual logic opposes a modern sensibility by making it next to impossible to talk about it: Concepts, theories, ways of thinking may really be an obstacle. And this does not only go for traditional concepts (even though that probably is the more common), but may also be true for new ones. But this does not imply that theoretical understanding in general is harmful and should be avoided. What the example also shows is just as much the opposite, i.e. the necessity of a conceptual scheme and a theoretical understanding for being able to formulate important insights.

Baumgarten's achievement did not primarily consist in his refusal to accept the old conceptual scheme, but to a much higher degree in formulating a new theoretical framework for thinking in the aesthetic field. And actually, the example shows one more thing, i.e. that it was only thanks to his thorough knowledge of Rationalist conceptual logic that Baumgarten managed to make his pioneering contribution to the philosophy of art. New thinking is often not created by neglecting existing thinking, but by knowing existing thinking so well that one may turn it upside down.

Sensuous Knowledge

But how about Baumgarten's concept of "sensuous knowledge"? How can we use it today? And what should we expect from conferences and publications that use this expression as a catchword?

In modern terms we may say that Baumgarten claims that not only the sciences, but also the arts are cognitive cultural phenomena. In a certain sense, both works of art and scientific treatises convey knowledge. In collaboration with the French photographer Jean Mohr, the British writer John Berger demonstrated *Another Way of Telling* (in the book of this name from 1982). In a certain sense, through his concept of sensuous cognition Baumgarten argues that art offers another way of knowing.

However, letting ourselves be inspired by Baumgarten's thinking does not compel us to claim that any kind of display of artistic creativity in itself constitutes a kind of research. Sensuous knowledge does not necessarily originate in activities of the systematic and theoretically founded kind that can reasonably be called research. But it may be, and more important, many works of art may be discussed in such a way that it becomes clear that they do not only convey knowledge, but that they are based on investigative intentions and methodical and theoretical reflections.

And this is where we meet what I would consider the most important inspiration to draw from Baumgarten: He makes it clear that we must be able to discuss not only scientific knowledge, but also the one that is created and formulated through the arts. And since the sensuous or artistic knowledge is of another type than the scientific, we have to develop another way of discussing it. We have to develop an epistemology for the arts – an aesthetics, Baumgarten would say – new concepts and theories with which we can grasp that other way of knowing that we meet in the arts, and the methods and practices that go into its creation.

We have to create a tradition for the evaluation of cognitive creativity in the arts, have to consider the relationship between aesthetic practice and aesthetic insight, have to develop a discourse in which the results of artistic research and development work may be discussed and appreciated – to paraphrase the subtitles of the three first Sensuous Knowledge conferences. And to do that, we need not only conferences and seminars with their important, yet also transient contributions by and for the participants, but also a more stable forum for printed texts that may reach a broader audience, and to which we may return to check up on examples, ideas, theories etc., a publication series, say – like the one of which you are now having the first issue in your hands.

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