

On aesthetics, aisthetics and sensation - reading Baumgarten with Leibniz with Deleuze

Birgit M. Kaiser

The discipline of aesthetics that was founded upon his term had for Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) largely been an *aisthetics*, as recent reconsiderations of Baumgarten's presentation of aesthetics have shown:¹ a theory of *aistheta*, of things perceived (*phenomena*) and of sensate thinking.² Before the rise of transcendental philosophy and philosophical systems, Baumgarten highlighted the epistemological challenges of singular phenomena - of that which appears to the senses and does so as 'individual object' (*individuo*) (Baumgarten 2007, 538), always exceeding or escaping our understanding of it by abstraction and conceptualization. A distinct idea of an object can be achieved by the enumeration of its attributes, or its logical truth be found by subsuming its particularity under general categories, but this comes at the cost of a loss, as Baumgarten notes in the first volume of the *Aesthetica*, in the section entitled *The absolute aesthetic striving for truth*, which discusses the difference between logical and what Baumgarten calls aestheticological truth (§§423-612): 'I believe indeed that it should be completely evident to philosophers that all the specific formal perfection contained in cognition and logical truth had to be bought dearly by a great and significant loss of material perfection. For what else is abstraction than a loss?'³ (ibidem) The example Baumgarten gives is that of the loss of material substance when carving a marble ball from an irregular marble block. One pays for the beautiful round shape of the ball, its 'higher value' (ibidem), by losing a significant amount of material. This mutual dependence of the logical transparency of *noeta* and the obscure intransparency of *aistheta* - exemplified in the marble block turning marble ball - comes to bear on all levels of Baumgarten's sketch of aesthetics. Logical clarity comes about only by a decline in material richness or at the cost of dissecting the complex, multidimensional, rich impression of the whole. Aware and appreciative of this complexity as another dimension of cognition (cf. Baumgarten 1983, 15; §530), only at the expense of which logical clarity and conceptual distinctness can be achieved, Baumgarten lists, in the prolegomena of the *Aesthetica*, as one of the tasks of aesthetics to 'enhance the perfection of cognition beyond the limits of the distinctly cognizable' (idem, 13). Aesthetics was to improve what he calls 'beautiful thinking' (idem, 11) as a way to cognize and know phenomena, as a way to arrive at an aestheticological truth that differs from 'that abstract truth about the most general things' (idem, 455). This was to be one of the four aspects of his new discipline, which §1 of the prolegomena lists as follows: '§1 AESTHETICS (as theory of the liberal arts, as gnoseology of the lower faculties, as the art of beautiful thinking, and as the art of thinking analogous to reason) is the science of sensate cognition'. (idem, 11)⁴

This double - if not quadruple - agenda of Baumgarten's project has led to much confusion and, up to the recent reappearance of Baumgarten on the radar of aesthetic theories, to the general reading of him as a mere precursor of Kant and as superseded by the latter. At the opening of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant himself had praised Baumgarten as 'an eminent analyst' (Kant 1990, 22), but dismissed his project of making aesthetics a science, of making *aistheta* analysable, because it was, according to Kant, erroneously based on merely empirical sources. Baumgarten did indeed want to consider *aistheta* and sensitive cognition as objects of philosophical scrutiny, analogous to the actions of reason. As Christoph Menke's recent account of Baumgarten's aesthetics notes, it claimed that sensibility, phenomena and sensitive cognition *can* be philosophically analyzed (2008, 26), and Baumgarten pointed in two main directions in which such a project would need to be undertaken. On the one hand, as we saw in §1 above, aesthetics was to be *theoria liberalium artium* and *ars pulcre cogitandi* and consider the ways in which the material richness and the singular phenomena of art - as noted in the example of the marble block - can be assessed by sensate thinking. On the other hand, aesthetics was to be *gnoseologia inferior* and *ars analogi rationis* and provide the analysis of (what Christian Wolff had called) the lower faculties and

their representations below the threshold of distinctness and consciousness.⁵ Their operations should be analyzed as *analogous* to those of reason.

One of the difficulties, which the reception has had with Baumgarten, resides in this claim of analogy. Kant had understood it as 'subjecting the criticism of the beautiful to principles of reason' (Kant 1990, 22), and hence judged the project of the *Aesthetica* to be hopeless, since it committed the category error of applying the rules of reason to merely empirical data. But Baumgarten argued not so much for an application of the rules of one realm to another. He rather, as I hope to make evident by tracing his indebtedness to Leibniz' notion of small perceptions, considered sensibility and reason to be continuous, yet different dimensions of cognition, that operate (and can be analyzed) analogous to each other, without forfeiting neither their difference, nor their analogous importance in thinking. The assertion of continuity between confused and distinct ideas, between perceptions and apperceptions, allows us to see that Kant's contention of a category error might not be just.⁶ But Kant was right that it is difficult to reconcile the assertion of continuity with the task of an *ars analogi rationis*, as the coupling of continuity and analogy (hence a difference) does indeed have paradoxical implications: On the one hand, aesthetics as the study of sensate cognition treats an analogous, specific and different, *kind* of thinking, other than distinct ideas and conceptual thinking. It accounts for 'the sense of the whole' (Barnouw 1995, 31). On the other hand, its 'confused' mode and pregnancy (*Vielsagendheit*) (Baumgarten 1983, 9) - which precisely vouches for the sense of the whole - is understood as continuous with distinct ideas, which could be abstracted from this whole. How can it be continuous (as *gnoseologia inferior* and *ars analogi rationis* claim), and different (for which an *ars pulcre cogitandi* is needed)?

In what follows, I attempt to unravel this paradoxical analogy of logic and aesthetic thinking, by focusing on the second couple in the two-fold aesthetics of Baumgarten - *gnoseologia inferior* and *ars analogi rationis* - and by way of connecting Baumgarten to his own precursor Leibniz. When we read Leibniz in turn through the lens of Gilles Deleuze's proposition of Leibniz as a thinker of the Baroque fold, it becomes evident that Baumgarten and Leibniz share the assumption of a continuity, yet difference between sensibility and reason. On the basis of Leibniz' small perceptions, Baumgarten develops aesthetics as the analysis and practice of a specific and analogous form of cognition that operates on the basis of 'confused' ideas and inexplicitness. While it works differently from the 'distinct clarity' of conceptual-logical thinking, it is a mode of thinking that can be, and has to be, operated with.

Echoing Kant's charge of applying the rules of one realm to another for which they are not operative, receptions of Baumgarten's aesthetics have generally seen his main goal to have been the emancipation of sensibility, to rescue sensate cognition from its expulsion from thinking by a too narrowly framed philosophy (cf. Naumann-Beyer; Ritter 1971, 556f). The idea of emancipation repeats - although perhaps affirmatively - the assumption that Baumgarten treated the two as separate realms, and that he wished to correct their hierarchical relation and 'integrate aesthetics into the realm of rational thought' (L. Haverkamp 2010, 64).⁷ By tracing Baumgarten's notion of sensate thinking, we will see, however, that instead of striving to merely rehabilitate what he called the lower faculties and their potential for thinking, it is the very relation between sensibility and reason, sensation and thinking that is questioned in the *Aesthetica*. In distinction to Wolff's pejorative treatment of the lower faculties as unruly, unenlightened, and of no epistemological relevance, Baumgarten argued for their careful analysis and sketched a science and art of the *aisthetic* that claims the epistemological relevance and force of sensate perception and cognition. In the philosophical weekly *Philosophische Briefe von Aletheophilus*, which Baumgarten published throughout 1741 and which were his only texts written and published in German, the letters' fictive author Aletheophilus laments the reductive equation of philosophy with logic. The second letter notes that although philosophy is to be the science of the enhancement of thinking (*Erkenntnis*), its restriction to logic seems unjustified, since logic 'only critiques (*habe zu ihrem Vorwurf*) the understanding in the narrow sense and reason [...] but we possess far more faculties of the soul, which serve thinking than those attributed solely to the understanding or reason' (Baumgarten 1983, 69). It thus appears, the letter continues, that 'logic promises more than it keeps, when it claims to improve our thinking (*Erkenntnis*) as such, and in the end only attends to distinct

comprehension (*Einsicht*) [...]’ (ibidem). In order to account for a wider approach of faculties, the friend of truth Aletheophilus directs the reader’s attention to a work by a supposedly unknown author (Baumgarten himself), whose project is said to stand in line with that of the ‘baron Leibniz, whose comprehensive and thorough insight I have always admired the most’ (idem, 68). Both Leibniz and Baumgarten, the letter suggests, welcome the revision of a too narrowly conceived philosophy, and wish to broaden it by considering other forms of thinking than only those we could call ‘distinct’. The letter notes that, consequentially, Baumgarten imagines logic in the narrow sense to be

a science of the cognition (*Erkenntnis*) of reason or of distinct comprehension, and reserves the laws of sensate and vivid thinking, even if it should not rise to distinctness, in its most precise sense, for a different science. This latter he names aesthetics [...]. The author divides this science of the enhancement of sensate cognition into the arts that attend to cognition itself and those that attend mainly to vivid presentation. (idem, 69)⁸

Such a project questioned ultimately the scholastic and rationalist philosophical frames of reference (cf. Solms 1990, 25). Baumgarten leaned in such a revision on Leibniz and drew support in particular from the latter’s work on perception.⁹ Beyond the verbal reverence paid to the baron Leibniz in the letters, we find this crucially at work throughout the *Aesthetica*, and in what follows I would like to pursue their correspondences in revising the narrow frames of cognition as conceptual thinking and the formation of ‘distinct’ ideas.

At the beginning of the *Aesthetica*, after the initial definition of aesthetics as *scientia cognitionis sensitivae* (§1), Baumgarten refutes several potential charges against such a new science. One of these refutations reads as follows:

§7 Confusion is the mother of errors. My response: a) But it is an indispensable prerequisite for the discovery of truth, since nature does not leap from darkness into the clarity of thinking. From night only twilight leads to noon. b) For this reason one has to see to confusion so that no errors arise from it, as they do plentifully and in abundance with those who do not attend to it. c) This does not recommend confusion, but improve cognition in general, insofar as something of confusion is necessarily admixed to it. (Baumgarten 2007, 15)

What Baumgarten here calls confusion refers to the realm of ‘confused’ ideas. Descartes had introduced it as one among his fourfold categorization of ideas as ‘obscure’, ‘confused’, ‘clear’, and ‘distinct’ ideas. This categorization was taken up, but also significantly modified by Leibniz, and later again by Wolff. Descartes had requested clarity and distinctness of ideas in order for them to be true. As long as there is ‘something confused and obscure about them’, they contain some falsity, ‘because in this they participate in nothing’ (Descartes 1994, 59). Descartes’ influential identification of rational thought with clarity and distinctness and of sensation with confusion and nothingness provoked Leibniz to revise this categorization and to claim not only the positive status of ‘confusion’ and ‘obscurity’, but also a continuation between the different kinds of ideas. In his *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas* of 1684, Leibniz notes that an idea is ‘obscure’ if it ‘does not suffice for recognizing the thing represented’ (Leibniz 1956, 448), and it is ‘clear’ ‘when it makes it possible for me to recognize the thing represented’ (idem, 449). Obscure ideas do neither allow the recollection of an object, nor its recognition as something that I have seen or known before. An obscure idea of something does not permit to relate the object to anything else; while clear ideas allow the recognition of an object. However, as such, and herein lies Leibniz’ important revision, *clarity* pertains to both ‘confused’ and ‘distinct’ ideas. ‘Clear knowledge, in turn,’ Leibniz continues, ‘is either confused or distinct’ (ibidem). Our ideas are *clear-confused* (or short: confused), if we (re)cognize or know something, but are unable to enumerate the differences or marks of this object in respect to others. ‘Thus we know colors, odors, flavors, and other particular

objects of the senses clearly enough and discern them from each other but only by the simple evidence of the senses and not by marks that can be expressed'. (ibidem) On the contrary, ideas are *clear-distinct* (or short: distinct), if we know something *and* such an enumeration is possible. [x] [1] Baumgarten summarizes this succinctly in §510 of his *Metaphysica* (1739) (cf. Baumgarten 1983, 5) and concludes: '§512 We can understand why I perceive some things obscurely, others clearly, yet others distinctly from the position of my body in this universe, which means: My representations depend on my body's position in this universe'. (ibidem) In addition to this affirmation of the body's implication in thinking, the crucial point for Baumgarten's sketch of aesthetics as *ars analogi rationis* is that the different kinds of ideas are not opposed to or severed from each other. As Leibniz demonstrates – and as Deleuze has made apparent and accessible in *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque* – they are part of a continuum and a continuous transformation from the perception of confused wholes to the enumeration of more distinct, but fewer marks. In delineation from the Cartesian distinction of two separate realms – that of reason, the mind and thinking, and that of sensation, the senses and the passions – Leibniz speaks of perception and apperception and intertwines the two already on a terminological level. The beginning of §14 of the *Monadology* states:

The passing condition, which involves [*enveloppe*] and represents a multiplicity in the unit or in the simple substance, is nothing but what is called *Perception*, which is to be distinguished from Apperception or Consciousness [...] In this matter the Cartesian view is extremely defective, for it treats as non-existent those perceptions of which we are not consciously aware (Leibniz 1965, 224).

Every apperception, or clear-distinct idea, is the conscious enumeration of an object's marks. These marks can, however, again be differentiated into an infinite number of confused ideas so that 'no concept is ever wholly free of a residual confusion from its sensuous origin' (Barnouw 1995, 31). The status of such an 'origin', or – as I said above – the status of the emancipation of sensation in Baumgarten is the crucial question at stake and amounts to the question of the relation between perception and apperception, or between sensibility and reason. Whereas Descartes (or Cartesianism) had posited this relation as one of opposition and hierarchy – and Christian Wolff was to follow Descartes in this – Leibniz, and after him Baumgarten, argued for their relation as one of endless folding. As Deleuze notes, Leibniz counters Descartes' supposition of separable minima with his notion of the fold. Understanding matter as 'an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture without emptiness, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns' (Deleuze 1993, 5), Leibniz could argue that the distinction between parts (difference) does not entail their separation. For Leibniz, 'no matter how small, each body contains a world pierced with irregular passages, surrounded and penetrated by an increasingly vaporous fluid, the totality of the universe resembling a 'pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves'' (ibidem). Contrary to the atomistic conception of separate entities, Leibniz affirms elasticity and continuation, and Deleuze quotes him as follows: 'The division of the continuous must not be taken as of sand dividing into grains, but as that of a sheet of paper or of a tunic in folds, in such a way that an infinite number of folds can be produced, some smaller than others, but without the body ever dissolving into points or minima' (ibidem). What is phrased here as an elasticity of bodies which have degrees of hardness and degrees of fluidity, Leibniz also thinks – necessarily so, to make the fold plausible – on the level of minute perceptions and apperceptions. The passing condition, as we heard above, involves (*enveloppe*) a multiplicity, which as small perceptions remain unnoticed, but from among whose multiplicity can also surge a noticed apperception – thought according to the logic of folding: 'A fold is always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern' (ibidem).

In order to see the significant points of Baumgarten's indebtedness to Leibniz, Deleuze's consideration of the Leibnizian fold is crucial. Let us then – in order to unravel the 'confusion' of which §7 of the *Aesthetica* speaks – look at what Leibniz calls minute or small perceptions. If we follow Deleuze, for Leibniz these small perceptions are

[...] minute, obscure, confused perceptions that make up our macroperceptions, our conscious, clear, and distinct apperceptions. Had it failed to bring together an infinite sum of minute perceptions that destabilize the preceding macroperception while preparing the following one, a conscious perception would never happen. How could a pain follow a pleasure if a thousand tiny pains or, rather, half-pains were not already dispersed in pleasure, which will then be united in conscious pain? (idem, 86).

The generation of a conscious perception, or apperception, is prepared by a myriad of small and smallest perceptions, which also means that we find a permanent swarming of (unconscious, 'confused') small perceptions throughout every (conscious, 'distinct') apperception. Based on the affirmation of folds and of matter as folded, the relation of confusion and distinction is of a very specific kind: it is a continuous relation, which by means of permanent transformation differentiates perceptions and apperception, a differentiation that occurs or surfaces at and as a threshold. For Leibniz, Deleuze notes, '[a]ll consciousness is a matter of threshold' (idem, 88), the threshold of the excitement of attention, and for Baumgarten, as noted earlier, *cognitio sensitiva* concerns the 'totality of representations that remain below the threshold of distinctness' (Baumgarten 2007, 21). This does not imply that by crossing the threshold confused perceptions become cognizable or conceptual. This were only possible if their relation was one of individual parts to a whole; then, the small(est) perceptions could add up and become conceptual and cognizable parts of a (whole) distinct idea. And then we could speak of an emancipation of the senses, or charge Baumgarten with applying the rules of reason to the merely empirical. As it is, however, for Leibniz '[i]nconspicuous perceptions are [...] not parts of conscious perception, but requisites or genetic elements, 'differentials of consciousness'' (Deleuze 1993, 89). The transformation occurring at the threshold implies that once an apperception forms itself, once its requisites are cognized, they have already become distinct apperception, and are no longer inconspicuous perceptions. It is, as Baumgarten noted already in the *Metaphysica*, a question of the dark ground of the soul and its import on our thinking. 'There are dark perceptions in the soul (§510). Their totality is called the soul's ground (*fundus animae*)'. (Baumgarten 1983, 4; cf. Adler 1988) Against the dark ground, the light of distinctness can be seen. As such, the minute perceptions are of import: to the light (Leibniz), and - in so far as a specific clarity pertains to them - analyzable as analogous form of thinking (Baumgarten).

In the above quote from the *Monadology*, Leibniz notes - in passages - the crucial aspects of said transformation, when he describes perception as '[t]he passing condition, which involves [*enveloppe*] and represents a multiplicity in the unit or in the simple substance' (Leibniz 1965, 224). If the problem is one of transformation at a threshold, the question is how the couple *multiplicity-unit* that Leibniz works with differs from the relation of parts and whole. The simple substance, which envelops a multiplicity is the monad (cf. §1, §6, §7). The question Leibniz poses then is, how, if monads are simple, and can neither be made nor undone, neither begin nor end, *change* can occur. His answer is that the potential for change has to lie in inner operations. Since no outer influence can enter the monad, the simple has to be endowed with an internal complexity (*detail* (§12)) that permits it to change, an internal condition that allows for transformation. Leibniz calls this also the monad's passing condition (*l'état passager*), which the subsequent paragraph unravels as 'the activity of the internal principle which produces change or passage from one perception to another may be called *Appetition*' (Leibniz 1965, 226). Appetition as the activity of the internal principal is not a question of conscious reflection or logical reasoning, but rather one of attention: Attention as a striving, a being drawn toward, according to the disposition of one's body in the universe, we might add with Baumgarten.

Leibniz notes this as the significant difference between confused and distinct ideas:

[i]t does not cease to be true that at bottom confused thoughts are nothing else than a multitude of thoughts which are in themselves like the distinct, but which are so small that each separately does not excite our attention and cause itself to be distinguished. We can even say

that there is all at once a virtually infinite number of them contained in our sensations. It is in this that the great difference between confused and distinct thought really consists. (Leibniz 1976, 574f, cited in Barnouw 1995, 32)

The moment our attention is excited, the small perceptions *cause themselves* to be distinguished. As part of this moment of excitement of attention, the passing condition, which Leibniz called perception in §14 of the *Monadology*, becomes evident as peculiarly passively-active, or actively-passive condition. It is the 'activity of the inner principle', rather than that of any conscious mind. It is a quasi-automatism that Deleuze calls 'the psychic mechanism of perception' (Deleuze 1993, 90), and by means of this 'mechanism' the transition between confused and distinct ideas occurs as the excitement of attention. It is, thus, not the activity of the mind that cause an apperception to emerge, or that select and integrate small perceptions into apperception, although we might be used to such 'cerebral' ways of phrasing this transition. Both Leibniz and Baumgarten stress – as we saw for Baumgarten already – the corporeality of this excitement. Like Baumgarten after him, Leibniz explicitly links the small perceptions to impressions, which the body receives. In §33 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz states that 'since all the bodies of the universe are in sympathy with each other, ours receives impressions from all the rest, and, though our senses are in response to all of them, it is impossible for our soul to pay attention to every particular impression' (Leibniz 1956, 501). Because of this impossibility, due to an infinity of impressions, perception is a passing condition – a time-space, which our body finds itself in, and in which attention causes only a fraction of them to surface. Baumgarten stresses this already in the *Metaphysica*, when he writes in opposition to Descartes, and in lineage with Leibniz:

I think my present condition (*statum*). Thus, I represent my present condition to myself, i.e. I have a sensation. The representations of my present condition or the sensations (appearances) are representations of the present condition of the world. Thus, my sensation becomes effective through my soul's representative force according to the position of my body. (Baumgarten 1983, 17)

The point here is not that these impressions on the body are immediately accessible or that they would in any way give immediate access to the senses. Rather, to the extent that they are *represented*, as Baumgarten emphasizes, they express 'a spirituality of the body' (Deleuze 2003, 41) or an incorporeality, a 'geistige Sinnlichkeit' (Groß 2001, 63). Instead of resulting from any linear progression – from perception to cognition to action – or from the additive accumulation of perceptions into a distinct idea, this incessantly changing condition operates on the condition of my body's position and the fact that '§510 I think some things distinctly, others confusedly' (Baumgarten 1983, 5). As Leibniz noted, *clarity* pertains to both of them, and on that basis Baumgarten proclaims the task of aesthetics to be not only the analysis of this analogy, but also the practice to operate with confused thinking, to train ourselves in the *ars pulcre cogitandi*:[\[xi\]](#) [2]

The determination of the sensate as non-definable ('confused') clear cognition is only the starting point of aesthetics. In the aesthetic practices, this confused clarity of the sensate then has to be perfected in such a way that in apprehending the object it becomes capable of grasping the 'richness' of its 'individual' determinateness (*Aesthetica* §440) and its 'aesthetic truth' (§423). Precisely because the sensate is at the same time confused and clear, it is capable of what reason is not: to grasp the object as individual. (Menke 2008, 40)

Baumgarten could claim this specific quality of sensate thinking as *analogous* to rational, conceptual thinking – as different from reason, and yet in continuation with it and of import to it – and the specific task of aesthetics that resulted from this on the basis of his (ultimately Leibnizian) *gnoseologia inferior*, which does not give the privilege of agency, or activity, or synthesis to reason and consciousness. It is not consciousness that selects the perceptions, but – as we heard –

consciousness itself 'is a matter of threshold' (Deleuze 1993, 88). The production of consciousness, of apperception is rather, according to Leibniz and Deleuze, performed by a differential relation (something like an auto-selection): '*Differential relations always select minute perceptions that play a role in each case, and bring to light or clarify the conscious perception that comes forth*'. (idem, 90) We find an example for this in Leibniz' *Discourse on Metaphysics* (§33):

[...] our confused sensations result from a really infinite variety of perceptions. This is somewhat like the confused murmur heard by those who approach the seashore, which comes from the accumulation of innumerable breaking waves. For if out of several perceptions, which do not harmonize so as to make one, there is no single one which surpasses the others, and if these perceptions make impressions that are about equally strong and equally capable of holding the attention of the soul, it can perceive them only confusedly (Leibniz 1956, 501).

As long as none of the many small perceptions differ from each other, as long as none stands out from among the others, all are given equal (that is no) attention and are of equal effect or power. Their perception is confused. However, as soon as at least two waves are perceived as 'heterogeneous enough to become part of a relation that can allow the perception of a third, one that "excels" over the others and comes to consciousness' (Deleuze 1993, 88), the differential relation between them allows the third to pass the threshold of attention. The obscure, small perceptions *cause themselves* to be distinguished by way of such a differential relation, and bring forth a distinct apperception. As was said earlier, in the process small or inconspicuous perceptions do not become visible (or audible). What becomes visible (or audible) is already an apperception. But they are also not nothing. Rather, they constitute 'the obscure dust of the world, the dark depths [*fond*] every monad contains' (idem, 90), or, as Baumgarten notes, they are 'an indispensable prerequisite' for the discovery of truth, since - and this returns us to §7 of the *Aesthetica* - 'nature does not leap from darkness into the clarity of thinking'. In explicit lineage with Leibniz, Baumgarten insists on the continuity of confusion and distinctness, sensibility and reason, and in his careful reading of the slight transitions of Baumgarten's definitions of aesthetics over the course of his work, Howard Caygill repeatedly emphasizes that throughout his work Baumgarten put particular stress on continuity: 'The founding principle which Baumgarten elaborated between 1737 and 1750 was continuity - between sensibility and reason, intuition and concept, sensate and rational perfection' (Caygill 2001, 240). As Caygill also notes this principle of continuity was under permanent attack at the time from both Wolffians and pietists, the two major, fiercely opposed voices of the time (cf. also Groß 2001, 32ff). In his insistence on continuity, and the analogy between different, yet not separate modes of thinking, Baumgarten was 'rather Leibnizian than Wolffian (or Kantian)' (Caygill 2001, 239). Kant's aesthetics later resolves Baumgarten's difficult proposal and 'posits a transcendental difference between sensation and understanding in the first Critique' - even if only 'in order to bridge it in the third Critique under the guise of harmony between imagination and understanding' - but it 'marks the victory of those tendencies' (idem, 240). With Baumgarten and Leibniz, aesthetics and sensate thinking was to account rather for the irresolvable *chiaroscuro* in which we operate, both in art and in life. It was to account for the power and vivacity of this twilight, on whose ground things can be seen, and on the basis of which clarity can be wrung from darkness. And it affirmed, at the same time, that any distinct clarity will permanently flee and fade again.

Clarity emerges from obscurity by way of a genetic process, and so too clarity plunges into darkness, and continues to plunge deeper and deeper: it is natural *chiaroscuro*, a development out of obscurity, and it is *more or less* clear to the degree that sensibility reveals it as such (Deleuze 1993, 90).

If we read Baumgarten's twilight (*aurora*) as inferior and confused, yet as a crack of dawn that promises the sun's zenith and subscribes to its privilege or rule (cf. eg. Naumann-Beyer 2003, 554), we miss the complexity of Baumgarten's aesthetics. We might be tempted to do so by Baumgarten's own terminology, in which he follows Wolff: what aesthetics attends to are the

facultates (cognoscitivas) inferiores (§2, §12) – the *lower* faculties. This is, however, as we saw, a merely terminological continuity with Wolff. The *logic* of his aesthetics Baumgarten takes from Leibniz, and elaborates on that basis the epistemological import and specificity of sensation. As Anselm Haverkamp suggests, Baumgarten's aesthetics implies 'no dawn of the senses, but a twilight of the senses before any history' (Haverkamp 2004, 111). Their perceptions are the passing condition, the giving – not the given – ground, the 'methodical, modeling, structuring ground' (*Grund-Lage*), or more precisely: the underlying of ground (*Grund-Gelegtheit*) of the senses for "sensate" perception' (idem, 103). In this sense Baumgarten speaks of a *fundus animae*, which is, according to Haverkamp, neither the origin, nor of lesser value than distinct ideas and conceptual thinking, but 'basic, the opposite of inferior [...] the ground-laying structural moment' (idem, 101). On this very basis of a *gnoseologia inferior*, §7 of the *Aesthetica* holds – as we heard – that the task is to 'improve cognition in general, insofar as something of confusion is necessarily admixed to it'. Their 'conceptual irresolvability' (Solms 1990, 39) is no defect of small perceptions, as Wolff had it, but the engendering element of their representation, *and* the condition of any sensation of the whole. Were we to pursue the aesthetic project of Baumgarten (refracted through Leibniz (refracted through Deleuze)), we would draw aesthetics toward *aisthetics* – an account of thinking in a new, *chiaroscuro*, light.

Birgit M. Kaiser is Assistant Professor at the Department of Comparative Literature at Utrecht University.

B.M.Kaiser@uu.nl [3]

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1. [1.](#) The past decade has seen an increasing appreciation of Baumgarten's work, marked by the first full translation of the *Aesthetica* into German (Baumgarten 2007), the special issue of *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* (49/2001) on the contemporary relevance of Baumgarten's thinking edited by Christoph Menke, but also Adler 2002; Caygill 2001; Groß 2001; A. Haverkamp 2004; L. Haverkamp 2010; Menke 2008; Solms 1990. In contrast to the concern of aesthetic theory – from Kant's transcendental aesthetics and aesthetics of judgment to Adorno's aesthetics of art – with the aesthetic object and its particularities, Baumgarten is reread from the vantage point of aesthetic perception (cf. Barck 2000, 313) and sensation as a mode of cognition (esp. Caygill and L. Haverkamp), which Baumgarten saw as a central concern of aesthetics.
2. [2.](#) Baumgarten's Latin term *cognitio sensitiva* is translated here according to context as "sensate cognition", "sensate thinking", or "sensate knowledge". Kant later explicitly distinguished between *Erkenntnis* (cognition as "objective perception" by means of intuitions and concepts), *Denken* (thinking as the unifications of representations in a consciousness), and *Wissen* (knowledge as the sufficiency of a judgement) (cf. Caygill 1995, 113). For Baumgarten, *cognitio sensitiva* addresses all three in as much as they pertain to the "totality of representations that remain below the threshold of distinctness" (Baumgarten 2007, 21).
3. [3.](#) All translations into English are my own.
4. [4.](#) This first paragraph of the *Aesthetica* contains all four main directions of the discipline and as their Latin phrasing returns in this essay, the Latin original is helpful: "AESTHETICA (theoria liberalium artium, gnoseologia inferior, ars pulcre cogitandi, ars analogi rationis) est scientia cognitionis sensitivae."
5. [5.](#) In his scholastically inspired and rationalist treatises *Psychologia empirica* (1732) and *Psychologia rationis* (1734) Wolff took recourse to Leibniz's categories of perception (clear, obscure, confused and distinct ideas), but introduced the distinction between inferior and superior faculties. Only distinct ideas can be clear and only those belong to the superior faculties of the intellect. All other categories of ideas are subsumed under the *facultatis cognoscendi parte inferior*, which Wolff lists as *sensus*, *imaginatio*, *memoria*, *oblivio*, and *reminiscentia*. For Baumgarten's continuation of Wolff's terminology, but departure from the latter's philosophical framework, cf. Solms 1990, 25.
6. [6.](#) For a more detailed reading of Kant's reading of Baumgarten, cf. Kaiser 2011, ch. 1.
7. [7.](#) When speaking of emancipation or integration, we must take care not to remain within the Cartesian logic of a hierarchy and dichotomy between the two realms of thinking. Only if we separate sensation and reason, can we either discriminate one against the other, or claim the necessary emancipation of aesthetics. Leibniz and Baumgarten rethink this very framework. For

a discussion of the misunderstandings of Baumgarten's reception in this regard, cf. A. Haverkamp 2004, 115ff.

8. [8](#). Baumgarten here refers to his own earlier coining of the term aesthetics in his dissertation *Meditationes Philosophicae de Nonnullis ad Poema Pertinentibus* (1735), where §116 notes: "The Greek philosophers and the Church fathers have already carefully distinguished between things perceived [αἰσθητά] and things known [νοητά] [...] Therefore, 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." (Baumgarten 1954, 78)
9. [9](#). Tracing the Leibnizian heritage in Baumgarten does not contradict Baumgarten's indebtedness to the rhetorical tradition (cf. Linn 1967, A. Haverkamp 2004). The rhetorical is crucially at work in the mode of operation of the aesthetic as *ars pulcre cogitandi*. For a discussion of his *ars analogi rationis*, however, the lineage with Leibniz is pertinent, as it unravels the entanglement of affective and intellectual dimensions in *sensate cognition*.

redactie: Sybrandt van Keulen en Aukje van Rooden

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