

The Founding of Aesthetics in the German Enlightenment

The Art of Invention and the Invention of Art



Stefanie Buchenau

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*To Philippe. Remembering a break in the clouds on a
rainy road in Belgium.*

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Introduction

The modern history of art and aesthetics has produced a number of philosophical arguments that for various reasons have fallen into oblivion, often because they deviated too much from later views. But the fact that they have been discarded does not mean that they were philosophical dead-ends, doomed to be supplanted by better solutions. My conviction that the German Enlightenment produced a valid and productive, though not fully actualized, conception of art and aesthetics has been the main motivation for this book, which is an attempt to reconstruct historically the German Enlightenment argument regarding literature, art, and aesthetics. The argument emerges in the first half of the eighteenth century in the writings of Christian Wolff (1679–1754) and his pupils, the most famous of whom is probably Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762), who owes his reputation to the fact that he was the first to name the discipline that we today call aesthetics. Wolff's pupils also include such authors as Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698–1783), Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701–1776), Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766), and others. Their aesthetic argument vanishes toward the end of the eighteenth century, eclipsed by other approaches, such as Kantian aesthetics. The Wolffians' style, choice of language, and attachment to a particular philosophical school have probably contributed to the historical lack of interest in their work. In this study, I propose a philosophical reassessment of their contribution to modern aesthetics and reconstruct an argument that I believe to be not only modern but also original and productive. Insofar as it shows that eighteenth-century Germany produced more than one conception of art and aesthetics, it may also provide new historical support for thinking about contemporary options in aesthetics.

THE INVENTION OF ART AND AESTHETICS

Generally, historians of aesthetics view the founding of German aesthetics as part of a larger geographic and historic aesthetic movement. They note that the German Enlightenment participated in a transnational, European reflection on art and aesthetics that gives rise to a new and intrinsically modern perspective on art and aesthetics. The changes in perspective are above all reflected in the Enlightenment quest for alternatives to the traditional classifications of the arts, specifically to the division of the arts into liberal and mechanical arts, which was established in antiquity but achieved its standard form during the medieval period in the work of Martianus Capella. In its medieval form, the liberal arts comprised the three *artes disserendi*, or the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). At times, poetry accompanied the *trivium*. The visual arts were excluded from the liberal arts, but during the Renaissance they were emancipated from the manual crafts. The new classifications that emerged in the course of the eighteenth century¹ supplanted all the earlier divisions, and signal the constitution of a domain of Art with a capital 'A', that is, an area clearly separated from the crafts, the sciences, and other human activities; and comprising, in their 'ideal form', the five major arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry.

As interpreters have recognized, authors in the Wolffian School contributed to this line of thinking. Under the influence of French thinkers such as the Abbé Dubos, who in 1719 published his *Réflexions sur la poésie et la peinture*, they pursued a comparative line of reflection that has its origins in antiquity, and sought to establish common principles for various arts, such as poetry, painting, and music. These discussions led to new and original attempts to classify the arts in Germany. Bodmer and Breitinger developed interest in poetry and painting; Baumgarten includes music and the plastic arts.

The proliferation of new classificatory schemes in Germany attests to more profound changes in the philosophical conception of art. According to many commentators, the eighteenth century witnesses the emancipation of art from the crafts,² and from the traditional views that the liberal

¹ Paul-Oskar Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics (I)', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951), 496–527, repr. in *Essays on the History of Aesthetics*, ed. Peter Kivy, Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1992, pp. 3–34.

² Joachim Ritter, 'Ästhetik, ästhetisch', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 13 vols., Vol. 1, Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1971, pp. 555–581, here p. 556.

arts (poetry, rhetoric) are forms of imitation that place eloquent expression above the pursuit of truth. In particular, philosophers begin to treat the arts as 'beautiful' or as fine arts, *schöne Künste*; they discover 'beauty' as a wider and more comprehensive principle for uniting the arts or 'Art'.

This discovery in turn appears to signal an 'ontological' rehabilitation of the arts. In antiquity, philosophers were highly suspicious of the beauty of the arts (and in particular of poetry); according to Platonic thought, poetry mirrors appearances and can be a dangerous tool for manipulating the public. Plato and the ancient tradition did not as yet bring together the reflection on the beauty of being and the beauty of the arts. In contrast, eighteenth-century philosophers begin to question or even to abandon the idea that the poet could be a liar; they believe that the beauty of art and poetry signals the fact that they express a specific, that is, pleasant kind of *truth*. In parallel, the emergence of art signals a discovery of the modern soul: the experience of art reveals a special and not as yet recognized cognitive faculty of man, namely a faculty of judging beauty, a faculty of taste.

Related to the circumscription of the Art Object with a capital 'A' was the constitution of a new philosophical field: the philosophy of art, or philosophical aesthetics. As interpreters have pointed out, philosophical aesthetics is a particular German tradition, involving authors such as Baumgarten, Herder, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling.³ Baumgarten initiates this tradition in his 1735 *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*.⁴ He not only baptizes the discipline but also assigns the philosophy of art a particular place within the system, thereby making art criticism a philosophical science.

THE STANDARD LINE OF INTERPRETATION AND ITS PROBLEMS

Despite the significance that the history of aesthetics assigns to the Wolffian School and Baumgarten, commentators have only manifested

³ See Elisabeth Décultot, 'Esthétique': *Histoire d'un transfert franco-allemand*, Revue de métaphysique et de morale, 2002 (2), Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002; and Karlheinz Barck, 'Ästhetik, ästhetisch. Einleitung: Zur Aktualität des Ästhetischen', in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in 7 Bänden*, ed. K. Barck, M. Fontius, D. Schlenstedt, B. Steinwachs, and F. Wolfzettel, Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2000, pp. 308–317. Décultot and Barck both point out that the German tradition of philosophical aesthetics had little success in France and England.

⁴ A. G. Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus: Philosophische Betrachtungen über einige Bedingungen des Gedichtes* (1735), trans. Heinz Paetzold, Hamburg: Meiner, 1983.

a very formal interest in Wolffian studies. Strangely enough, they have often adopted a very distant view toward Wolffian aesthetics, and have often shrunk back from commenting on these sources. The standard interpretations appear to present obstacles rather than provide access to the authors; instead of animating the discussion, they have either silenced interpreters who, feeling uncomfortable with Baumgarten, decided to leave him aside, or they have given rise to somewhat standardized descriptions that complement references to the 'authoritative' studies with rhetorical glossing about whether or not Baumgarten is the 'true' founder of modern aesthetics. It appears that commentators encounter genuine difficulties in trying to make the standard discourse match the sources and in using the sources to enrich and discuss the general argument. The editorial situation has certainly exacerbated the problem: for more than thirty years, readers have relied on very incomplete German (and French) editions of Baumgarten.⁵ The situation in the English-speaking world has been even worse, for anglophone historians of aesthetics have probably paid the least attention to the pre-Kantian German tradition. To my knowledge, only one text by Wolff, and Baumgarten's first treatise, *Meditationes*, have been published.⁶

The main hermeneutic obstacle seems to come from the fact that, from the nineteenth century until today, commentators have generally judged themselves entitled to adopt a somewhat retrospective, Kantian, neo-Kantian, or post-Kantian perspective. Because they are convinced that the eighteenth century *so entirely* shaped the nineteenth- and the twentieth-century view on art and aesthetics, they tend to project later categories onto the eighteenth century that mask rather than reveal the nature of pre-Kantian aesthetics. From their post-Kantian perspective, they have contended that the Wolffians prepared the path to true aesthetics but remain entangled in a pre-modern framework. From the second half of the nineteenth century – when national historiography began to flourish in Germany – until the present, commentators have agreed on this line of interpretation. They have identified Baumgarten and the Wolffians as

⁵ See A. G. Baumgarten, *Theoretische Ästhetik: Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der Aesthetica (1750/58)*, 2nd edn, trans. Hans Rudolf Schweizer, Hamburg: Meiner, 1988. The same editor has published two further volumes containing texts on aesthetics: Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae*; and A. G. Baumgarten, *Texte zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, trans. Hans Rudolf Schweizer, Hamburg: Meiner, 1983. For translations into French, see the bibliography at the end of the present volume.

⁶ A. G. Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954.

transitory authors in a *linear* evolution extending from Leibniz to Kant, Herder, and Hegel. The beginning of Hermann Lotze's 1868 *Geschichte der Ästhetik in Deutschland* illustrates this still common perspective:

It is never an insignificant event in the evolution of science, when questions that had for a long time attracted our attention individually are, for the first time, united under a common name and come to be regarded as a particular element in the system of human inquiries. However humble the view from which the new area had first struck the eye, and however incomplete therefore the global view on its nature, it remains important that such a provisional occupation has irreversibly shifted the indistinct region into the horizon of science.⁷

On the one hand, Lotze allows Baumgarten's work a certain significance: Baumgarten, he notes, discovers a principle or faculty in the human mind concerned with the judgment of art and beauty, and thus introduces a new unified perspective on art, thereby laying the groundwork for the institution of the new discipline. On the other hand, he observes that Baumgarten sets out from 'humble' beginnings and leaves the completion of his project to his successors, who 'progressively disclose the inner richness that had escaped the eye of the discoverer'.⁸ Similarly, Robert Zimmermann, in his *Geschichte der Ästhetik als philosophische Wissenschaft*, presents his history as an attempt to sketch the 'ways and wrong-ways' ('Pfade and Irrpfade') of the new discipline.⁹ In Wilhelm Dilthey's view, the core of Wolffian aesthetics still waits to be discovered and cleansed of the errors surrounding it.¹⁰

The nineteenth-century reading of Wolffian aesthetics and Baumgarten tended to be perpetuated by later commentators. While the early twentieth century produced a number of highly interesting, learned, and still classical studies by Alfred Baeumler¹¹, Ernst Cassirer,¹² and Benedetto

⁷ Hermann Lotze, *Geschichte der Ästhetik in Deutschland*, Munich: Cotta, 1868, p. 3 (my translation).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Robert Zimmermann, *Geschichte der Ästhetik als philosophische Wissenschaft*, Vienna: Braumüller, 1858, preface. For similar comments, see also Robert Sommer, *Grundzüge einer Geschichte der deutschen Psychologie und Ästhetik, von Wolff/Baumgarten bis Kant/Schiller*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1975 [1892].

¹⁰ Wilhelm Dilthey, 'Die drei Epochen der modernen Ästhetik und ihre Aufgabe', *Deutsche Rundschau* 72 (1892), 200–236; repr. in *Die Geistige Welt: Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens. Zweite Hälfte: Abhandlungen zur Poetik, Ethik und Pädagogik*, Gesammelte Schriften 6, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978, pp. 242–287, here p. 253. One of Dilthey's disciples, Heinrich von Stein, realized Dilthey's project and wrote a long history of aesthetics: Heinrich von Stein, *Die Entstehung der neueren Ästhetik*, Stuttgart, 1886.

¹¹ Alfred Baeumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Ästhetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967 [1923], preface.

¹² Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove, Princeton University Press, 1951, p. 356.

Croce,¹³ which certainly refined the perspectives of earlier commentators, these still imposed a standard *linear* view. Although commentators sometimes extenuated the nationalist undertones of the earlier historiographical tradition¹⁴ and introduced a wider and more diverse perspective on the European movement, they continued to posit a European evolution that directly progresses toward an ideal ending point located later in the German tradition, in Herder, Kant, or Hegel. Today's readers perpetuate the line of interpretation proposed by the older studies insofar as they suppose philosophical inconsistencies in Wolffian aesthetics and in Baumgarten. In a recent publication on *The German Aesthetic Tradition*, Kai Hammermeister notes that the 'modest' attempts preceding Kant's foundation 'ultimately failed to establish an aesthetic paradigm to serve as a starting-point for productive elaborations or dissent for future generations'.¹⁵ The commentators globally all subscribe to the same view: the 'Wolffians' perspective remained partial and imperfect. Though they had fundamental and highly original views on art and aesthetics, they encountered formal obstacles that prevented them from expressing them well.

But such a reading is questionable because the commentators assume that they are entitled to discard (as 'pre-modern') any aspect of Wolffian aesthetics that they cannot fit into their picture of the way that this tradition anticipates Kantian and nineteenth-century aesthetic theory. Stock editorial practices best illustrate this common reading. The German and French translation of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* – until very recently the only one available – omits four-fifths of the original text, namely all those chapters that seemed to the translators outdated and too far removed from 'modern' aesthetics. The translation does not even contain the *Aesthetica*'s table of contents. This mutilation has proven to be an almost infallible recipe for preventing readers from grasping the overall argument.

THE ALTERNATIVE HERMENEUTIC APPROACH: AESTHETICS IN CONTEXT

In order to appreciate the heterogeneity of early German Enlightenment arguments about aesthetics, and better to represent the coherence of the

¹³ Benedetto Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General*, trans. C. Lyas, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

¹⁴ See for instance Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 321.

¹⁵ Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 2002. For similar views, see also Luc Ferry, *Homo aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, trans. Robert de Loaiza, University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Wolffians' argument, I will here propose an alternative approach: I intend to take the Wolffians' acknowledged intentions and ambitions seriously. Perhaps the *Frühaufklärer* do not just represent 'transitory authors'. Perhaps they do not just belong to the numerous group of 'links' that prepared the path toward a new era in an evolution reaching from Leibniz to Kant. Perhaps they are not self-contradictory. Instead, they may have pursued a clearly conceived project. My aim is to reconstruct this project.

Such a reconstruction, of course, requires us to make certain concessions. It may reinforce the differences between Baumgarten and Kant (and later traditions), which implies that Wolffian aesthetics has perhaps a more 'local' significance than what commentators have previously thought: embedded within a particular historical context, it may reflect a particular project of the early German Enlightenment that therefore needs to be understood within the particular ideological context of this period. Instead of taking Baumgarten as some kind of *tabula rasa* and ground zero of a linear and homogeneous aesthetic tradition reaching from Baumgarten via Kant to Hegel, we will have to inquire into the precedents of his aesthetics and the debates in which Baumgarten chooses to engage. In particular, we will have to reconstruct the missing subtext of the *Wolffian* philosophy.

Earlier commentators held Wolff in deep suspicion, and generally assumed that it was possible to bypass the off-putting bulk of Wolff's writings (comprising more than forty volumes in Latin and German), which they believed to be some form of diluted and popular Leibnizianism. In their view, the conceptual armour of Wolff's philosophy is precisely what immobilized Baumgarten and kept his aesthetic thought from taking wing.¹⁶ As Cassirer put it, 'the new conception which Baumgarten advocates ... must submit to being laced up in Spanish boots of formal paragraphs until this confinement sometimes seems to rob it of all flexibility'.¹⁷ The truth about modern art and aesthetics could not reveal itself unless philosophers had rid themselves of their Wolffian ties. Kant and his followers eventually succeeded in expressing the truth about Baumgarten's aesthetics that Baumgarten himself had failed to express well, because they committed the difficult but necessary parricide and so

¹⁶ See for instance Ernst Cassirer, *Freiheit und Form: Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte*, 6th edn, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994, pp. 80, 82ff.; Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors*, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1969, pp. 278ff.; Katharine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1953, p. 291.

¹⁷ Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 356.

freed themselves from Wolff's philosophical tutelage. Present-day scholars no longer accept these premises. Wolff and his pupils, they believe, are worth studying: this belief has motivated recent editorial and academic activities. Under the direction of Jean Ecole, the German publisher Olms has completed a new re-edition of Wolff's works. Moreover, scholars are beginning to explore Wolff's philosophical originality; in particular, they have begun to acknowledge influences on Wolff other than Leibniz, such as Aristotle, the Scholastics, and the Stoics. Italian¹⁸ and German¹⁹ scholars have published new, complete translations of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*. Recent studies explore its broader philosophical context.²⁰ My reconstruction will have to start with an open and unprejudiced view of Wolff and the Wolffians, which considers new perspectives. In his manuals Baumgarten not only omits the examples and the explanations that he had added in his lectures, but clearly judges explanations of his philosophical premises to be unnecessary in the sections where he does not deviate from the theses of his teachers. He generally relies on the philosophical premises of the Wolffian School without explicating them. The reconstruction of the Wolffian framework may allow for the clarification of the opacity of his pupils' – and in particular Baumgarten's – texts.

Besides, we must accept and try to understand better a number of features that earlier commentators found disturbingly 'pre-modern'. For example, we need first of all to accept that their definition of the arts and art differs from the Kantian conception. Wolff, whose project for a philosophy of the arts comprises both the liberal arts and the mechanical arts, plainly refers to a sphere involving craftsman-work, thus somewhat different from what we now call art.²¹ But even Baumgarten's definition and

¹⁸ A. G. Baumgarten, *L'Estetica*, trans. Francesco Caparrotta, Anna Li Vigni, and Salvatore Tedesco, Palermo: Aesthetica Edizioni, 2000.

¹⁹ A. G. Baumgarten, *Ästhetik*. 2 vols., trans. Dagmar Mirbach, Hamburg: Meiner, 2007.

²⁰ Besides the new translations quoted above, see in particular Frederick Beiser's recent study: *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, Oxford University Press, 2009. This study, which came to my attention as I was submitting the present manuscript, exhibits interesting similarities in perspective to my own work. While I disagree with some of Beiser's conclusions, in particular on Baumgarten, the study is philosophically impressive and original, breaking with numerous clichés still prevailing in the secondary literature. For recent studies on Baumgarten, see also the volume on Baumgarten published by Alexander Aichele and Dagmar Mirbach: *Aufklärung. Interdisziplinäres Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des 18. Jahrhunderts und seiner Wirkungsgeschichte. Band 20. Themenschwerpunkt: A. G. Baumgarten. Sinnliche Erkenntnis in der Philosophie des Rationalismus*, Hamburg: Meiner, 2008.

²¹ Christian Wolff, *Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere: Philosophia rationalis; sive, Logica, methodo scientifica pertractata ...*, 3rd edn, reprint ed. J. Ecole, *Gesammelte Werke* 11. 1–3, Hildesheim: Olms, 1983 [1746], §72. Wolff's complete work generally comprises a (shorter) German version and a (longer) Latin version of each discipline: Wolff himself affirms that he

circumscription of art as *schöne Künste* is not necessarily identical to the Kantian definition. Commentators have pointed out that Baumgarten's almost exclusive focus is on poetry, and that while formally acknowledging the inclusion of music and sculpture, he never includes examples from those disciplines: it is possible that his aesthetics applied more to the representative, the semantic, and the narrative arts than to the a-semantic arts; besides, it is also possible that Baumgarten did not formulate *the one and only* question and discover *the one and only* region of aesthetics; there may be several possible questions and several possible regions for aesthetics.

Besides, we will have to take the Wolffians' aesthetic 'rationalism' seriously: the term refers to their belief that aesthetic judgments can be demonstrated. It also describes the Wolffians' habit of subordinating poetic imagination to reason. We will neither suppose that this rationalism represents a 'problem' for them²² nor consider Baumgarten's main achievement to be his revolt against the earlier Wolffian rationalism.²³ Instead we will assume that this rationalism is philosophically motivated. We will also have to think about and examine the Wolffian conception of aesthetic truth: according to the common view, the *Frühaufklärer* continue to ascribe a *logical* and *objective* dimension to the judgment of beauty. This does not necessarily imply that they missed a point that Kant eventually makes (namely, that the judgment of beauty is not objective, but subjective), but it does imply that the early Enlightenment is in fact far from witnessing the eruption of 'the a-logical' and far from viewing art as exploring a subjective domain of feeling and interiority.²⁴ Art offers no refuge from reality, no inner world, no afterworld; the *Frühaufklärer* seem to cling to (or modernize) the idea that *art represents and imitates the reality we live in*. Besides, we will have to accept that the Wolffians conceived of aesthetics as some kind of method: that they were far from separating art (as the domain of the a-methodical) from science (as the domain of method).

Finally, we will have to accept and reflect upon the 'heteronomy' of the earlier Enlightenment aesthetics, and acknowledge that their quest for a

addresses the Latin version to a more learned public. I will quote from the Latin version whenever it introduces any relevant information not contained in the German versions.

²² Cassirer, *Freiheit und Form*, p. 66.

²³ Baeumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem*, pp. 224–225.

²⁴ See also Ritter, 'Ästhetik, ästhetisch', p. 556; Baeumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem*, introduction; and Ursula Franke, *Kunst als Erkenntnis: Die Rolle der Sinnlichkeit in der Ästhetik des Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten*, *Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa* 9 (1972), pp. 4, 67.

principle unifying the arts rests on the conviction that all the arts (poetry or literature, painting, sculpture, and also music) possess a *rhetorical* and a *practical* dimension. The *Frühaufklärer* do not believe in a purely theoretical and contemplative idea of art; they believe that good art cannot leave us indifferent but, instead, must affect us and influence our actions. To be more specific, they seem to defend the 'conservative' belief that the beautiful or fine arts remain 'liberal' arts contributing to the moral education of humanity toward freedom and happiness.

Paradoxically, it is only in accepting these 'pre-modern' features of early Enlightenment aesthetics that we can hope to open new perspectives on their modernity: the contextualized perspective may above all allow us to see links, if not a certain common originality, between Wolffian aesthetics and the Enlightenment project. Besides, it may lead to the discovery of forgotten arguments about art, aesthetics, and the latter's relationship to neighbouring disciplines.

THE INVENTION OF ART AND THE ART OF INVENTION

What are the conditions for the emergence of Wolffian aesthetics? What philosophical motivations impelled the Wolffians to turn to the arts and institute a new philosophy of the arts? Interpreters have advanced several hypotheses: we have already discarded one of them, namely the idea that the *Frühaufklärer* vaguely sensed that Kantian aesthetics was in the air. Such an interpretative approach conflates cause and effect. Kant's aesthetics depends on theirs, but their aesthetics does not depend on Kant's. The *Frühaufklärer* would have devised their aesthetics even if Kant had never devised his.

According to a second hypothesis, which still enjoys great popularity, the Germans joined a debate or various debates that originated in France, England, and Italy. It is true that the eighteenth century witnessed an impressive European debate that transcended national borders; the 1740s and 1750s produced a great number of major treatises on beauty and art. It will suffice here to mention just a few of many: in France, Jean-Pierre de Crousaz published his *Traité du Beau* (1715), Dubos his *Réflexions sur la poésie et la peinture* (1719), and Charles Batteux *Les Beaux-arts réduits à un même principe* (1746). In Italy, Giambattista Vico published *La scienza nuova* (1744). In the United Kingdom, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury published his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times* (1711); Francis Hutcheson published his *Inquiry into the Origins of Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725); David Hume published his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), and his essay *Of the Standard of*

Taste (1757); Edmund Burke his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757); and Henry Home his *Elements of Criticism* (1762). According to this hypothesis, various European debates influenced the German debate. In addition to citing literary debates on various genres of poetry, commentators retrace a debate on beauty and taste: they posit a lineage – starting with the French debate on beauty as the *je ne sais quoi*, and the English debates on criticism, taste, and genius – that then moves toward the German aesthetic movement.

It is true that the Wolffians seem well versed in the European debates. According to his library catalogue, Baumgarten owned works by Crousaz, Dubos, Le Bossu, and Alexander Pope; he also quotes from Shaftesbury. Bodmer, Breitinger, and Gottsched refer to a number of English, French, and Italian authors' writings on criticism and poetics, such as Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Shaftesbury, Dubos, Voltaire, Pietro dei Conti di Calepio, and others. But besides the fact that commentators sometimes mix up the chronology, by considering references quoted above (such as Batteux, Vico, Hume, etc.) – that actually date from after the Wolffians' writings – as possible influences, they also tend to overstate the importance of European references: as Wolff's pupils themselves acknowledge, they are secondary in comparison to Wolff.

A third hypothesis, one that was already present in the nineteenth century but gained popularity in the twentieth century, through the studies of Baeumler and Cassirer, contends that the German debate was nourished by the European debates, but that it received its impetus from elsewhere. Consequently, the art historian's perspective fails to acknowledge the wider logical and metaphysical context of early German Enlightenment aesthetics. Commentators who defend this hypothesis generally relate early Enlightenment aesthetics back to Cartesian and Leibnizian metaphysics. While Descartes's rationalism remains 'anaesthetic',²⁵ Leibniz, who qualifies sensible cognition as confused, and rational cognition as distinct, begins to work toward the rehabilitation of sense perception. He introduces a consistent and detailed graduated model that emphasizes the continuity between the two types of cognition and faculties. Baumgarten pursues the Leibnizian project,²⁶ finally acknowledging the autonomy of the sensible faculty, and realizes an idea formulated by Bilfinger, another

²⁵ For a presentation of the hypothesis, see Dieter Kliché, 'Ästhetik, ästhetisch', in Barck, Fontius, Schlenstedt, Steinwachs, and Wolfzettel, *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, p. 322.

²⁶ See for example 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 University Press, 1993, pp. 52–95, in particular p. 82.