2 Methodology

2.1 Ambiguity

By defining aesthetics as the “science of everything that is sensate,” Baumgarten claims that it is autonomous from logic. This entails a revaluation of the abundance (ubertas) of the sensate world and how that abundance is perceived, a revaluation that he undertakes by engaging with the arts in general— and with literature in particular. Baumgarten begins this philosophical project in the first edition of his Metaphysica from 1739, where he defines aesthetics as follows: “The science of knowing and presenting with regard to the senses is AESTHETICS” (MET § 533; Scientia sensitive cognoscendi et proponendi est AESTHETICA). In the fourth edition from 1757, he adds a parenthesis to this definition: “The science of knowing and presenting <proponendi> with regard to the senses is AESTHETICS (the logic of the inferior cognitive faculty, the philosophy of graces and muses, inferior gnoseology, the art of thinking beautifully, the art of the analogue of reason)” (MET § 533; Scientia sensitive cognoscendi & proponendi est AESTHETICA, (Logica facultatis cognoscitivae inferioris, Philosophia gratiarum & musarum, gnoseologia inferior, ars pulcre cogitandi, ars analogi racionis)). What makes this definition so remarkable is the enormous tension between the two poles of aesthetics, two poles that are, from a philosophical perspective, incompatible: the philosophical pole of cognition and the medial pole of presentation, which are connected in the Latin definition by an ampersand. The “fundamental ambiguity” of aesthetics not only consists in its combination of the theory of sensation and the theory of beauty, as Robert E. Norton states, but most of all in its combination of epistemology and media theory. Embedded in this way in the order of knowledge, the new science of aesthetics encompasses sensate cognition, sensate desire, and sensate presentation. This transforms a

---

4. See 3.1.2 Desire.

OpenAccess. © 2020 Frauke Berndt, published by De Gruyter. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 License. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110624519-003
philosophical critique of reason, as epitomized by Kant, into a critique of culture, as later founded by Cassirer.⁵

In light of this definition, one can foresee the problems with this philosophical project. In 1758, seven years after the appearance of the first volume of the *Aesthetica*, Baumgarten published the second volume and quit the project. A monograph of colossal prolixity, the *Aesthetica* has since been treated as an unfinished work. Its abandonment cannot be explained by any biographical event: Baumgarten only died four years later and still managed to publish the *Acroasis logica in Christianum L. B. de Wolff* in 1761. Abandoning the experiment was, rather, a necessity. In the two decades in which he worked on his aesthetics, he encountered something so new that it exceeded what was philosophically thinkable in his time. One can thus find traces of a permanent wrestling with concepts throughout his writings on aesthetics. Johann Gottfried Herder, one of Baumgarten’s first and most careful readers, accused him of an imperfect approach to this “je ne sais quoi”: his “mixing both concepts together [...] naturally results in a monstrosity of aesthetics.”⁶ The fact that “the trains of thought corresponding to the two primary considerations” – epistemology and media theory – “constantly run side by side” is not, however, a “sign of Baumgarten’s lack of methodological awareness”⁷ but rather the heart, the point, the essence of aesthetics. The ambiguity of aesthetics reflects an awareness of a problem that Enlightenment philosophy lacked methods and concepts for. And this awareness applies first and foremost to the problem of the mediality of cognition itself.⁸

In the preface to the *Meditationes* from 1735, this ambiguity is preceded by a reference to the coming amicable marriage between epistemology and media theory. Baumgarten attempts, in fact, to marry an extremely dissimilar pair –

---


theory and art, spirit and matter, truth and method – and the announced marriage of cognition and presentation will have to mediate between all these fundamental opposites. The prolegomena to the Aesthetica from 1750 do not testify, however, to a happy and fertile union but rather to fifteen years of acrimonious bickering, which the first paragraph ends by divorcing the unhappy pair. Since the marriage failed, Baumgarten amends the marriage contract and renounces the ambiguity of aesthetics as the science of both sensate cognition and sensate presentation – the ambiguity openly asserted in his earlier writings: “AESTHETICS (the theory of the liberal arts, inferior gnoseology, the art of thinking beautifully, the art of the analogon of reason) is the science of sensate cognition” (AE § 1; AESTHETICA (theoria liberalium artium, gnoseologia inferior, ars pulcre cogitandi, ars analogi rationis,) est scientia cognitionis sensitivae).

Like the earlier definition in the Metaphysica, this one still bravely combines “the theory of the liberal arts, inferior gnoseology, the art of thinking beautifully,” and “the art of the analogon of reason” into a new superdiscipline.⁹ The “science of sensate cognition” encompasses in parentheses the four subdisciplines of logic, psychology, rhetoric, and metaphysics. Yet the new definition removes the ambiguous relation between epistemology and media theory by making aesthetics only the science of sensate cognition and no longer also the science of sensate presentation. With the new definition, Baumgarten makes a few decisive revisions. While he uses the adverb sensitive to designate the process of knowing and presenting something “sensately” in the Metaphysica, in the Aesthetica he employs the adjective sensitiva to specify cognitio. This transforms the old definition’s dynamic activity of “knowing and presenting with regard to the senses” into a one-sided, static abstraction in the new definition: “sensate cognition.” As the “theory of the liberal arts,” presentation has been relegated to the parentheses, where it appears, like the “philosophy of graces and muses” and the “art of thinking beautifully,” as a mere apposition to aesthetics. As a result of these revisions, the Aesthetica only defines one science – the science of sensate cognition.

Although the price of this disambiguation is high since it fundamentally pares down the new science, Baumgarten seems happy to pay it. He can now qualify sensate cognition, like every other kind of cognition, with the six categories of perfection while ignoring the origin of these categories in the rhetorical qualities of style:¹⁰ “abundance, greatness, truth, clarity, certitude, and life”

---


¹⁰ See 3.2 Rhetoric.
The origin of these categories can be ignored because the amended definition installs a hierarchy among the disciplines that have been combined into a superdiscipline, a hierarchy that subordinates sensate presentation to sensate cognition. In other words, first one cognizes, then one presents; and because this is so, the disciplinary origin of the categories can no longer play any tricks on their new philosophical application.

Disambiguating aesthetics is also the precondition for Baumgarten to be able to convince the republic of letters of the philosophical dignity of aesthetics, allowing it to be put to use in philology, hermeneutics, exegesis, rhetoric, and musicology (see AE § 4). In contrast to these historical disciplines (see AE §§ 5–12), however, the “science of sensate cognition” is worthy of a philosopher because its object is capable of truth. And this would not be the case if he had not disambiguated aesthetics. A medial presentation is not capable of truth in a philosophical sense since it is tied to its materiality and is thus only given in the experience of the medium. Medial presentation thus threatens the philosophical project of aesthetics. This is why Baumgarten has to deny rhetoric its independence and place it in the service of a philosophical principle, which he proposes to do in the relevant paragraphs of the Aesthetica:

Hence, if the mind is to separate true rules from spurious ones, the particular arts require a highest principle from which they can know their own particular rules; and this is so that the art of aesthetics does not have to be established solely through the same unreliable expectation of similar cases in order to be rendered into the form of a science (§ 70).

Indigent hinc artes speciales, si veras a spuriis regulis seiuangere sit animus, ulteriori principio, ex quo speciales suas regulas cognoscere possint, et hoc, ars aesthetica, ne per eandem male fidam expectationem casuum similitum unice stabiliiendum sit, ut in formam scientiae redigatur. § 70. (AE § 73)

---

On this basis, Baumgarten can derive the “laws of sensation” (PHB, 7; Empfindungs-Gesetze), which he also calls the laws of sensate cognition, in the second letter of the *Philosophische Brieffe von Aletheophilus.* These laws claim an a priori validity beyond experience: “Hence there is a need for distinct insight a priori into the truth of the more important rules, and experience may then confirm and illustrate this truth, just as experience was perhaps the first step in discovering it” (AE § 73; Hinc opus est perspicientia veritatis regularum graviorum a priori, quam dein confirmet ac illustret experientia, sicut illius inveniendae forte primum fuit subsidium).

Acting as a medially differentiated theory of presentation, rhetoric only possesses a servile function in this philosophical project. Above all, Baumgarten draws on classical rhetoric as a descriptive inventory. In other words, ars is in the service of scientia; rhetorical presentations are supposed to reveal the principles of sensate cognition. It accordingly makes sense that he actually pays more attention to presentation than to cognition despite his ultimate focus: “Hence that part of aesthetics which treats of such presentation is more extensive than the corresponding part of logic” (MED § 117; hinc aestheticae pars de proponendo prolixior esset, quam logicae). Only by attending to sensate presentation can he articulate the laws of sensate cognition.

Despite the revisions, the ambiguity of combining epistemology and media theory, cognition and presentation, remains rampant. Even though Baumgarten only uses the term *presenting* (proponere) in the *Metaphysica*, this ambiguity reveals its explosiveness in the *Aesthetica*. There, *presenting* is still found in the descriptions of medial practices such as writing and painting, and it is also replaced by the concept of *representation* (repraesentatio), which refers to both ideas and medial presentations and is used at times for both. From here on, I will therefore only use *representation* and not *presentation*. All of this work on concepts of representation makes clear that Baumgarten engaged with them extensively. So if we follow Winfried Menninghaus’s claim that the concept of representation – *Darstellung* in German – “is hardly to be found in philosophy, poetics, and rhetoric before 1774 but [...] becomes omnipresent and a kind of

---

13 See 3.1.1 Cognition.
trademark of every significant theoretical project after 1790,”¹⁴ then Baumgarten must be viewed as one of the most important milestones in the early history of this concept.

Although he lists a series of different kinds of representations in the prolegomena to the Aesthetica – a list that mixes concepts from epistemology and media theory and includes sensory perceptions, fantasies, and inventions (see AE §6) – he understands literature as the prototypical representation. Literary texts are thus the actual epistemic objects of analysis in Baumgarten’s aesthetics. “That is” – as Baumgarten’s late eighteenth-century biographer Abbt explains – “he already saw then, as one does in the twilight, that the rules poets work by must come from basic principles that are perhaps more universal than one imagines now, and that they must be capable of a more precise proof than has so far been given for them.”¹⁵

Facing poetry – this is the action that is responsible for Baumgarten’s philosophical project, the most important epistemological foundation of which is therefore his Meditationes. This master’s thesis is something like an outline for the Aesthetica, but with a focus on literature. It is thus the key to unraveling this aesthetic theory that deduces its laws from literature. As Howard Caygill asserts, “Given the consistency between the fundamental structure of the two texts, the earlier work represents the nearest Baumgarten came to developing a complete philosophical treatment of art, and the development represented by the Aesthetica appears less as an ‘abortive attempt’ than as a nuanced reconsideration of a previous achievement.”¹⁶ This is confirmed by the attention that scholars such as Stefanie Buchenau, Simon Grote, and Ursula Franke – in her study Baumgartens Erfindung der Ästhetik (2018), a revision of her pioneering Kunst als Erkenntnis (1972), she even provides her own “Baumgartian” theory of lyric poetry – have recently given to the role of the poem (poema) in Baumgarten’s aesthetics.¹⁷


But when Baumgarten speaks of *poema* in the *Meditationes*, he is referring to a concept of literature in general. *Poema* thus does not exclusively refer to a lyric text, as Franke claims,⁰¹ and one cannot employ it for a general theory of prose either, though Ralf Simon does note the relation between *poema* and *silva*, which recalls the “old prose genre of poetic forests.”⁰² But such generic considerations do not make much sense here. As stated in the introduction, Baumgarten is not concerned with poetics but rather with the concept of literature as such, and the poetic passages of different genres serve as examples for this concept. And while he tends to cite examples from lyric poetry in the *Meditationes* – which is reflected in Aschenbrenner and Holther’s translation of *poema* as “poem” – in the *Aesthetica* he also draws on dramas and epics.⁰³ *Literature* is thus where Baumgarten comes face to face with sensate cognition. As Brigitte Scheer asserts when she defines the relationship between epistemology and media theory in Baumgarten’s aesthetics: “The cognitive significance of sensate representations first became clear to Baumgarten in the techniques of literature.”⁰⁴ In the poetic passages or aesthetically thick descriptions from literary texts, he finds “an appropriate methodological heuristic for the modalities of [literature’s] techniques”; he derives this heuristic “as an *ars* from the rhetorical repertoire.”⁰⁵ And while the principles he heuristically derives from analyzing literature are different from the principles of logic, they are still principles.

---

⁰¹ Franke, *Baumgartens Erfindung der Ästhetik*, 121.
⁰³ See 5.1 Prose.
It thus makes absolute sense to conclude that Baumgarten’s aesthetics is based on an “internalization” and “individualization” of rhetoric. For where literature as perfect sensate discourse is, there sensate cognition must have been. In both the Meditationes and the Aesthetica, he patiently and confidently analyzes his examples and neatly extracts the structure of literary discourse from them. What underwrites this logic is the simple like of analogy: sensate cognition functions like literature. This method ensures that he can analyze sensate cognition in literature and, vice versa, can legitimize the truth of literature with the “laws of sensation.” But this does not mean that Baumgarten simply equates sensate cognition and literature. The analogy operates, rather, with two objects, that of sensate cognition and that of literary texts, and reflects their literal incompatibility through the binary relation.

2.2 Analogy

Ut poema cognitio sensitiva – this extraordinary analogy makes it possible for Baumgarten to move back and forth between literature and sensate cognition. With a giant leap, it replaces the original analogy between logic and aesthetics, which serves as the foundation of his philosophical project. The first analogy is necessary because it makes it possible to adopt the categories of perfection from logic – abundance, greatness, truth, clarity, certitude, and life – for the great unknowns of the new science. And the second analogy is essential because it enables him to observe and describe the structure and functions of sensate cognition when they are manifested in literary texts’ perceptible forms. In contrast to all the other arts, these structures and functions appear in literature in a way that is analogous to logic because literature is a linguistic medium that can be analyzed using rhetorical and grammatical concepts and so is in a sense logical. For precisely this reason – which he notes in passing – Baumgarten’s philosophical project starts with the Meditationes, in which he reflects on literature, and ends with the Aesthetica, where he does not present a general media theory but instead a genuine theory of literature.

Baumgarten’s propaedeutic deployment of literary examples in his master’s thesis is well known in the scholarship. These examples provide evidence for how sensate cognition and representation function analogously because the two share a mediating element: both operate with the same rhetorical techni-

ques. In using such examples, Baumgarten trusts in the tried and tested method of analogy. Since antiquity, the example has been primarily defined “as a function and not as a genre concept.”\textsuperscript{24} In the tradition of logical and dialectical proofs, the example has three functions in scholarly discourse: it can be used in “grounding induction, introducing a concept, and articulating a concept.”\textsuperscript{25} The example thus serves an important purpose not only in the writing of history but also, as in Baumgarten, in philosophy.\textsuperscript{26}

At the rhetorical origin of the example, this analogical relationship turns out to be a lot more problematic than one would first expect, given the set of functions examples normally serve. Presupposing an intimate relation between dialectics and rhetoric, Aristotle defines the rhetorical example – \textit{paradeigma} in Greek – as inductive evidence (epagoge), but the example is something totally different from a proof since its epistemological foundation is formed by similarity and not by conceptual structures:

- It has been explained that a paradigm is an induction and with what kinds of things it is concerned.\textsuperscript{27}
- It is reasoning neither from part to whole nor from whole to part but from part to part, like to like, when two things fall under the same genus but one is better known than the other.\textsuperscript{28}

With similarity, Aristotle leaves ontologically secure ground and entrusts examples to common sense: similar is what is held to be similar or what qualifies as similar, which is independent of whether the laws of genre allow this similarity or not: “It is an example when the <first> extreme is proved to belong to the middle by means of something similar to the third extreme.”\textsuperscript{29} Precisely this stylistic


\textsuperscript{28} Arist., \textit{Rhet}. 1357b19.

technique of analogy moves the example into the vicinity of the metaphor, a fact that Anselm Haverkamp has brought attention to by drawing a line from Aristotle to Thomas Kuhn and Hans Blumenberg.\textsuperscript{30} Aristotle himself defines the analogical metaphor as its own type of metaphor. Because it is both an argument of comparison and “occasionally for Ornament,”\textsuperscript{31} ancient rhetoric assigns the example both to the canon of invention (inventio) and to the canon of style (elocutio). Stated roughly, this is because similarity (similitudo), which regulates the relation between the substitute and the substituted, can be used to invent arguments or to create figures. Quintilian, Baumgarten’s authoritative source in the \textit{Aesthetica}, therefore also thinks of similarity in a spatial manner when he describes the stylistic technique of the example (exemplum) as the “matching of similar things [adpositio similium].”\textsuperscript{32} This similarity can be of “either Similars or Dissimilars or Contraries [similia, dissimilia, contraria].”\textsuperscript{33} From this it follows that analogy is a technique, and similarity a quality.

Rhetoric thus draws attention to something other than the relationality of the example, namely, to its semiotic quality. Indeed, rhetoric presupposes that the example has more of a linguistic character than an ontological one. This linguistic character consists, in part, in an epistemic function that Gottfried Gabriel ties to a “visually concretizing function (in discourse).”\textsuperscript{34} Evidentia thus results from examples; examples present something to the eyes solely on the basis of their phenomenal particularity. Indeed, the particular, the concrete, the individual makes an example an example. But the evidentia of examples is not really generated by how an example stands for something like a metaphor; instead, one could speak here, with analytical philosophy, of singular terms, and Quintilian uses the concept of the image (eikon).\textsuperscript{35} Similarly, historiography has shown that examples produce evidentia not through metaphorical substitution but through constituting very short stories: “The exemplum as a minimal narrative

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} Quint., \textit{Inst.} 5.11.1.
\textsuperscript{33} Quint., \textit{Inst.} 5.11.5.
\textsuperscript{34} Gabriel, “Logik und Rhetorik der Beispiele,” 241.
\textsuperscript{35} See Quint., \textit{Inst.} 5.11.24.
\end{flushright}
unit relates to the minimal systematic unit of the moral-philosophical precept in such a way that they virtually form a compound.”

Baumgarten’s literary epistemology is based on a reentry of this rhetorical epistemology of exemplarity. On the one hand, the literary text serves as an example of sensate cognition. On the other, the rhetorical figure of the example, which he already attends to in the Meditationes, is itself used as an example of what makes literature literature – or, more precisely, it serves as an example of the literary, which is what he is interested in. That is why he treats the exemplum in the Meditationes as a particularly poetic tool and isolates it – the Latin eximere means to “take out,” “separate,” “sort out” – from other rhetorical figures when analyzing literary texts. Examples are, one could say, the figural islands that Baumgarten focuses on. He differentiates categorically between the epistemology and pragmatics of exemplarity by outsourcing the pragmatics to a footnote in paragraph 22. There he criticizes both the arbitrariness and inexhaustibility of the cultural heritage with reference to Leibniz’s Causa Dei asserta per iustitiam eius (1719), which relies on the evidence of normative examples:

The illustrious Leibniz sees this in that excellent book in which he undertakes to justify the ways of God, where he says, “The chief object of history, as well as of poetry, should be to teach prudence and virtue through examples.” When we look for an example of an example, we are confronted, rather like Tantalus, with such swimming abundance that we scarcely know which draught to take. Let us race off to the sea of the unhappy Ovid: the less determined representation –

Often when one god oppresses, another god brings help – has scarcely escaped from his mouth, which drips with salty streams of tears and sea water, when, behold! the poet suddenly justifies himself, to the extent of six verses, with a gathering flood of examples: Vulcan stood against Troy, for Troy Apollo ..., etc.

Id, quod vidit III. LEIBNITZIUS egregio illo libro, quo caussam Dei defendendam suscipit Part. II. p. 148. quando ait: Le but principal de la Poesie doit etre d’enseigner la prudence & la vertu par des exemples. Exemplum exempli dum quaerimus, paene facti sumus Tantali in tanta affluentia, unde potissimum hauriendum incerti. Decurramus ad mare miser Nasonis Trist. I.I. & II. minus determinata repraesentatio:

Saepe premente deo fert deus alter opem.
vix elapsa erat ex ore falsis lacrumarum & maris imbribus rorande: & ecce repente sequitur 6 versus sibi vindicans exemplorum decumanus fluctus Mulciber in Troiam pro Troia stabant Achilles &c. (MED § 22)

Baumgarten is not actually interested in the normativity of the example here but rather in what is sensate in the example, which is independent of its moral uses. Examples thus wander out of the footnotes and into the paragraphs of the *Meditationes*, allowing Baumgarten to analyze the structure of sensate cognition with the example of the example. There the example functions as the microdouble of sensate cognition such that the relationship between sensate cognition, the literary text, and the rhetorical figure of the example forms a double syllogism: the rhetorical figure of the example is the example of the literary text, which is, in turn, the example of sensate cognition. The third element of both analogies is their sensate nature:

- major term: aesthetics | literature
- middle term: sensate
- minor term: literature | example

Because Baumgarten’s analogy is anchored in the rhetorical epistemology of the example – that is, because he neither draws conclusions a priori about the laws of sensate cognition nor chooses an example for these laws – his philosophical project leads directly to the modern epistemology of exemplarity. While Kant and nineteenth-century philosophical idealism rejected exemplarity, the example later became an “actual agent for creating knowledge.”³⁷ In particular, Ludwig Wittgenstein developed a method of the example,³⁸ in which examples neither precede concepts nor illustrate them after the fact. Instead, they are a necessary epistemic tool that replaces induction or deduction by forming analogies.

What is epistemologically spectacular about the rhetorical example is how it neither moves from the particular to the general nor illustrates the general using the particular but rather operates between a particular and another particular. With regard to Baumgarten’s literary epistemology, this means that cognition is not related to representation like the general to the particular: both operate at the same level of the particular, concrete, and individual. As Stefan Willer convincingly notes, “In view of this, the expicability of rules becomes problematic: they actually appear as a simulacrum produced by examples.”³⁹ Giorgio Agamben refers to exactly this contentious point when he argues that the example and

---

regularity really exclude one another and compares the example with the state of exception:

What the example shows is its belonging to a class, but for this very reason the example steps out of its class in the very moment in which it exhibits and delimits it [...]. If one now asks if the rule applies to the example, the answer is not easy, since the rule applies to the example only as to a normal case and obviously not as to an example. The example is thus excluded from the normal case not because it does not belong to it but, on the contrary, because it exhibits its own belonging to it. The example is truly a paradigm in the etymological sense: it is what is “shown beside,” and a class can contain everything except its own paradigm.⁴⁰

If that is the case, if the example really lacks an anchoring in the general because it balances the particular and the particular, then Alexander Gelley offers a convincing deconstruction of exemplarity: an “example cannot assume a whole on which it draws. Rather, it is oriented to the recovery of a lost whole or the discovery of a new one.”⁴¹ With regard to Baumgarten, one can therefore hardly avoid a topsy-turvy chronology: on the one hand, his rhetoric of analogy belongs to early modernity, “the age of exemplarity”;⁴² on the other, he skips the beginnings of modernity in such a way that his ideas constantly take the reader directly into postmodernism.

Although the scholarship has paid a lot of attention to aesthetics as analogous to logic, Baumgarten’s method of analogy, which helps him establish the new discipline, has been neglected. Instead, the scholarship has contributed to reining in the ambiguity of aesthetics and perpetuating the subordination of ars to scientia, rhetoric to science.⁴³ But in Baumgarten’s analogical method lies the unrecognized and unprecedented potential of this otherwise traditional philosopher, beholden to the Leibniz–Wolffian school. In a manner that is to some extent at odds with the thoroughly metaphysical positions he takes in search of the “laws of sensation,” this method displays his utterly nonmetaphysical thinking. For it is his stylistic technique of drawing analogies that thwarts his self-censorship and the disambiguation of aesthetics. Following these operations might require a lot of patience, but it offers promising possibilities to leave

---

⁴³ See 2.1 Ambiguity.
the beaten tracks of the scholarship and outline Baumgarten’s theory of literature.

2.3 Etymology

With the double analogy of, on the one hand, logic and aesthetics and, on the other, sensate cognition and literature, the literary text moves into the epistemological center of Baumgarten’s philosophical project. He did not intend to become a literary theorist, but his analogical method turned him into one. In addition to the analogy with sensate cognition, literature shapes his philosophical project in another, entirely different way. His theory of literature is a theory made out of literature, a theory in which transtextuality constitutes the “unique characteristic” of his writings. While transtextuality is often a criterion for distinguishing literary texts from nonliterary ones, Baumgarten’s transtextuality is rooted in early modern scholarly practices. All such relationships between texts and pretexts can be described well with Gérard Genette’s typology, which groups together quotes and paraphrases in the first type of transtextuality, called intertextuality.

With intertextuality, Genette refers to “a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another.” Within intertextuality, Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister further differentiate between three forms, which I find very useful for typologizing Baumgarten’s scholarly practices:

1. Intertextuality: the Aesthetica refers to texts by other authors;
2. Intratextuality: the Aesthetica refers to other texts by Baumgarten;
3. Autotextuality: the Aesthetica refers to the text of the Aesthetica itself.

(1) Intertextuality. Proving the presence of texts by other authors in Baumgarten’s writings does not require any great philological art since he cites and paraphrases a great deal. And his allusions also operate within a canonical framework, allowing him to assume that his audience possesses the classical ed-

---

ducation required to understand them. Dagmar Mirbach’s 2007 translation of the *Aesthetica* into German documents these citations and allusions in endnotes, a useful index, and a reference list of the texts and authors they refer to. They show that Baumgarten favors particular dialogue partners. Both the *Meditationes* and the *Aesthetica* cite Horace extensively, especially his “Ars poetica,” which serves as the intertextual basso continuo in Baumgarten’s theory of literature. He turns to Horace to lend authority to many of his own reflections on literary texts. But he cites Horace in a way that proceeds more topically than argumentatively: following the rhetorical tradition, he uses short sentences as mnemonic places (loci) and attaches his own arguments to this scaffolding. The same is the case for Cicero, whom Baumgarten cites in the *Aesthetica* even more often than Horace, especially in the context of epistemological problems, as Buchenau has eruditely demonstrated. In addition, Pseudo-Longinus’s treatise *On the Sublime* particularly plays a role when Baumgarten treats ethical problems, and, above all, his philosophical project would be unthinkable without Quintilian’s *Institutionis oratoriae*. For this reason, one hears the double voice of “Baumtilian” across entire paragraphs of the *Aesthetica*, with Quintilian’s analysis of rhetorical figures especially resonant. And the list of influences continues with a number of other ancient and early modern rhetorical and poetic texts.

While Baumgarten directly appropriates and integrates these texts on rhetoric and poetics, his relationship to the two preeminent philosophers of the German Enlightenment, Leibniz and Wolff, is ambivalent. He positions his philosophical project in response to them as if they were Scylla and Charybdis. As is well known in the scholarship, Baumgarten begins a repudiation of rationalist philosophy in his *Metaphysica*, and the *Aesthetica* continues this work. But despite this antagonism, he quotes exhaustively from the rationalist canon and employs Leibniz–Wolffian concepts, which he redefines. Following Harold Bloom, we can interpret this ambivalence as a textual figuration of anxiety. Although Bloom only applies his model to literature, it captures well Baumgarten’s relationship to Leibniz and Wolff. Baumgarten jostles with these two giants not only for epistemic space and legitimacy for his new science but also for his own place in the history of philosophy – his own imaginary identity and unique-

---

50 See 3.4 Poetics.
ness. In his psychoanalytic theory of influence, Bloom considers such an oedipal rivalry between powerful men and presumably weaker followers as the driving force of history. They “make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.”

(2) Intratextuality. Maybe even more stunning than Baumgarten’s references to others’ texts are his references to his own. The Aesthetica refers constantly to both his Metaphysica and his Ethica, forming an intratextual triad out of a thick net of cross-references. Mirbach even refers to the Ethica and the Aesthetica as the Metaphysica’s twin daughters, while the Aesthetica investigates the cognitive faculties, while the Aesthetica delves further into the appetitive faculties, these cross-references reflect Baumgarten’s own understanding of the Metaphysica as his principle work – or at least as the work that lays claim to philosophical authority and so frequently has to come to the aid of the contentious “science of everything that is sensate.”

(3) Autotextuality. The abundance of intertextuality and intratextuality in the Aesthetica should not let us forget that it, above all, unyieldingly refers to its own paragraphs – both to paragraphs within the same section and to paragraphs from previous sections; to single paragraphs, groups of paragraphs, and entire sections. This permanent insinuation of coherence and consistency comes across as the textual figuration of an obsessive compulsion. But Baumgarten’s meticulousness is more than justified. These self-citations often set the stage for his conceptual work, which defines his philosophical project. For example, he transfers concepts from the sphere of desire into the sphere of cognition – like sensitivus – or invents aestheticologicus to describe a new concept of truth for sensate cognition.

So far I have described what texts Baumgarten cites, including texts by other authors and his own. More significant, however, is the text that he does not cite at all, his Meditationes. Although he embraces transtextuality in the Aesthetica, he conspicuously leaves out the text that initiated his aesthetic project in 1735.

---

53 See 3.1.2 Desire.
54 See 3.1.1 Cognition.
55 See 3.2 Rhetoric. When referring to Latin adjectives or participles as concepts, I only use the masculine nominative singular ending to improve readability.
56 See 4.1.2 Truth.
The *Aesthetica* does not mention his earlier reflections on poetics a single time, making it seem like Baumgarten is trying to avoid the topic that actually forms the core of the *Aesthetica*: the theory of literature. This avoidance of poetics is surprising since he extensively quotes the entire literary canon of antiquity, in particular Virgil’s *Aeneis*. The scholarship usually explains the absence of poetics by differentiating (misleadingly) between the main work, the *Aesthetica*, and its preliminary stages in the *Meditationes*, the *Brieffe*, and part 3 of the *Metaphysica* on psychology (psychologia).

Contrary to this generally accepted position in the scholarship, I argue that the *Meditationes* is latently and compulsively present in the *Aesthetica*. The connection to the *Meditationes* is first of all transmitted through Horace, whom Baumgarten cites equally indefatigably in both works. Second, the *Aesthetica* is structurally based on the *Meditationes*. Both are organized according to the canons of rhetoric (officia oratoris; see MED § 10; AE §§ 13, 18 – 20): heuristics (inventio), methodology (dispositio), and semiotics (elocutio). But before engaging with this structure, I want to turn to yet another type of transtextuality in order to show that the *Meditationes* is not merely a preliminary draft of the *Aesthetica*. Genette would classify the relationship between the two works as a fourth type of transtextuality that he calls hypertextuality: “By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary. The use of the metaphoric ‘grafted’ and of the negative determination underscores the provisional status of this definition.”

In comparison to the concept of intertextuality, the concept of hypertextuality does not refer to a single, precisely locatable reference such as a quote or a paraphrase. Text B can refer to text A by mentioning text A but also without doing so. What is decisive is that B cannot structurally exist without A. Text B is due to a more-or-less obvious transformation of text A; that is, hypertextuality occurs in the case of “an entire work B deriving from an entire work A.” This means that only a text that chronologically precedes a hypertext can become a hypotext. The chronology guarantees the direction of the references: text B cannot exist without text A, but A can exist without B; A influences the existence of B, but B does not influence the existence of A.

Such hypertextuality depends structurally on the fifth, most abstract type of transtextual relationship outlined by Genette: “The fifth type (yes, I know), the

---

57 See 5 Narratology.
58 See 3.2 Rhetoric.
most abstract and most implicit of all, is *architextuality*, as defined above. It involves a relationship that is completely silent, articulated at most only by a para-textual mention, which can be titular (as in *Poems, Essays, The Romance of the Rose*, etc.) or most often subtitular (as when the indication *A Novel, or A Story, or Poems* is appended to the title on the cover), but which remains in any case of a purely taxonomic nature.”¹ For the same phenomenon, Broich and Pfister offer the perhaps even more fitting concept of systemic reference, which they differentiate from intertextual references to single texts.² The *Meditationes* and the *Aesthetica* are related by exactly such a systemic reference because both works share a rhetorical blueprint – as I will later show in detail.³ Based on this systemic reference, we can infer that the *Aesthetica* has the same epistemic object as the *Meditationes*: the literary text.

If one accepts that a systemic reference conjoins the *Meditationes* and the *Aesthetica*, then one can either claim that the *Meditationes* is a condensed version of the *Aesthetica* or that the *Aesthetica* suppresses the *Meditationes* into latency; the latter view has a lot to commend it. Baumgarten’s anxiety might perhaps even apply less to his philosophical predecessors than to his own preceding text. Perhaps he wanted to distance himself from his earlier poetics because it appeared unworthy to him as a philosopher? After all, his aesthetics aims to establish a new position in the order of knowledge. For precisely that reason, it seems as if he wanted to steer clear of literature, the epistemic object that his philosophical project depends on.

From the perspective of this avoided intertextuality, the hierarchy between the two texts is inverted: the *Meditationes* is not a preliminary stage of the *Aesthetica*, the supposed main work; rather, it is the other way around. The *Meditationes* already reflects theoretically on everything Baumgarten views as important to literary texts, and it is where he gives a name to his aesthetic child: literature (poema). We are thus dealing here with an inversion in the chronology between text A and text B. Genette himself believes that such a temporal inversion is at the base of all theories of intertextuality: “I can also trace in just about any work the local, fugitive, and partial echoes of any other work, be it anterior or ulterior.”⁴ In *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (1999), Mieke Bal outlines a model of such a topsy-turvy chronology, in which influences are no longer one-way streets. This model plots texts in a nonlinear history, viewing earlier works as the belated reworkings (aftereffects) of later

---

63 See 3.2 Rhetoric.
works. In this context, the *Meditationes* only unfolds its significance for Baumgarten’s œuvre when one views it as an aftereffect of the *Aesthetica* or as an aftereffect of the entire triad of the *Metaphysica, Ethica*, and *Aesthetica*. Only under the condition of this thought experiment does the preeminent role of literature in his philosophical project become clear.

In addition to rampant transtextuality, Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* is defined by his unique style. While Mirbach emphasizes that his style is “achromatic”65 – meaning that his text is formulated for the purpose of academic lecturing and so proceeds less abstractly than philosophical discourse – I would like to point out, as I did in the introduction, that Baumgarten lacked the requisite concepts for his philosophical project. The *Aesthetica* thus functions with the help of a “translation machine” that allows him to use the same concepts in different contexts. Stubbornly and awkwardly, he transfers these concepts not only from one discipline to another but also from one book to another. The translation begins with epistemology (psychology, rhetoric, semiotics, poetics) and then leads from metaphysics to ethics. His narratology, which is treated in the present book for the very first time, forms an interface between epistemology and metaphysics as he expounds on psychology, rhetoric, ontology, and even cosmology.

Baumgarten’s philosophy can thus basically be considered as a philosophy of style in which the concepts themselves are discursively produced. They form argumenta ex vi verbi. Originally rooted in dialectics, this method soon found its way into rhetoric, which provides, on the one hand, topoi in the canon of invention and, on the other, figures in the canon of style. Cicero further develops the dialectical method from Aristotle’s *Topics* in his own *Topica* and in *De inventione*, where he provides catalogues of how to form arguments etymologically and describes such arguments as loci ab etymologia. Baumgarten’s translation machine is based on precisely this method, and its most important etymologically rooted figure is analogy. Following Jacques Derrida, “all the so-called *symbolical* or *analogical* figures” perform the etymological work of displacing words.66 But one does not need to look into the future to postmodernism, for Baumgarten imports etymology (etymologia) as an analogical method from dialectics into philosophy in his *Philosophia generalis*, edited and published posthumously in 1770 by Förster. In the first part, on onomatology (onomatologia), he associates etymology with the artes liberales in general, and with figures and tropes in particular (see PHG §§ 5–20).

---

As I will demonstrate in this study, the essential foundation of aesthetics turns out to be the “fundament of literalness.” In the process of working on his philosophical project, Baumgarten switches back and forth between different disciplinary registers, conjoining them etymologically to such an extent as to produce an interdisciplinary relay. The transferred concepts do not have an origin; instead, his paragraphs invoke with every single concept a loop of disciplines that I will enter in the following chapter at the arbitrary point of psychology. In doing so, I take the commonplace that his aesthetics is based on the lower faculties of the soul as the starting point of my argument.