

## **Prosaics: theory of everyday sensibility as Baumgarten's *Aesthetica Practica***

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### **1. Introduction**

Everyday aesthetics has recently become an object of interest among many contemporary aestheticians. There has been a partial shift in focus of attention from traditional artistic objects and the idea of beauty to everyday common objects and environments such as cities, landscapes, gardens, food, dwellings as well as ordinary activities such as cleaning, doing laundry, working, shopping, walking, eating etc. Any everyday item, site or activity can be considered now as an aesthetic object, even a cleaned room or a pencil, by paying attention to its so called aesthetic aspects. Dewey's (1934) emphasis on experience disengaged our discipline from object-centric exclusivity by emphasizing the experiential and Berleant's (1992) highlighting environments contributed to disengage aesthetic theory from the exclusivity of the artistic focus. On the other hand, the new concept of "artification" coined by Ellen Dissanayake (1988, 2009) pointed at non artistic objects and actions "made special" in rituals and other uses by their aesthetic qualities as a natural human behavior that precedes symbolization. The term was developed by aestheticians like Naukkarinen (2012) and Saito (2012) contending that everyday aspects and activities can be approached from an artistic viewpoint.

For practitioners of aesthetics such as architectural, graphic, urban, interior and industrial designers, the goal of an aesthetics of everyday objects and places has always been a priority in their work and theory. Decorators of the Pharaohs' palaces, the Renaissance courts, the French and Russian monarchy's castles like Louis XIV or Catherine the Great, Chinese Imperial palaces to the more recent Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements, plus the whole Bauhaus school vision, the conscientious production of an aesthetics in the everyday, especially for the upper classes has been an historical constant. Today decorators and fashion designers, haute coiffure and couture, chefs, makeup specialists, jewelry makers, tattooers and even prosthetic dentists and plastic surgeons are concerned with aesthetic effects, not only functional, as the very core of their craft.

Yet this focus upon objects of appreciation and artification need not be the sole interest in the field of everyday aesthetics, even as a direct influence of mainstream Aesthetics inquiries on artistic objects. Indeed, traditionally, Aesthetics has dealt with those extraordinary objects that are classified as artworks, but this fact does not mean that Aesthetics is solely the study of the artistic or extraordinary nor that it's opposed to the everyday: the extraordinary is simply opposed to the ordinary and both are part of everyday life. (cf. Leddy 2012) The ordinary,

from the Latin *ordinarius*, means the usual, regular, ordered, none of which opposes the aesthetic nor the artistic.

There are three great omissions in these recent debates on everyday aesthetics. One is the concept of sensitivity, which is no less than the foundational object of this discipline, sometimes mentioned on the side but never given the priority it deserves. For this reason, I am compelled to go back to the founding text of this branch of philosophy and emphasize that Aesthetics was clearly and very specifically defined in Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* as the science of sensitive knowledge, *scientia cognitionis sensitivae*, meaning the study of sensitivity and its modes of experience including art and beauty but, by implication, also beyond: the non art and the non-beautiful. Aesthetics concerns everything the impacts or is impacted through sensitivity.<sup>1</sup>

Another great omission in these texts is precisely the subject and other human beings, the role of sensitivity in our interactions with others, face to face or mediated. These interactions are acutely intertwined and constituted by sensitivity, as we are not simply robots bumping into each other. The task of the aesthetician here is to inquire how sensitivity is affected even by the most minute details and constituted in various situations and contexts, not only emotionally, a task for psychology, but in the broader sense of sensitive experience with enormous social and political implications.

The third omission is methodology. The consequences of this lack, specifically in everyday aesthetics, are in my view quite serious, since it threatens this incipient and very relevant field of inquiry to become a mere anecdotal, descriptive and impressionistic collection of personal accounts where everything goes. One can choose a favorite everyday aesthetic object and discurr on why it can be included in the aesthetic catalogue trying to echo the manner in which traditionally an artist, curator or art historian proposes to include x or y into the catalogue of art.

With these three omissions in mind I will focus each one in the course of this paper. In the introduction I am presenting a state of the question in everyday aesthetics and observations regarding these omissions. In the second section, I will contextualize the originality of Baumgarten and examine his plan of work, how he prioritized and organized his concepts, and what his relevance is today. In the third I will deal with how we can explore aesthetics centered on sensitivity as experiential epistemology from Baumgarten's initial proposal and its implications. In the fourth I elaborate on the concept of Prosaics initially proposed as theory of everyday aesthetics (1994, 2006a,b, 2007a) and revise its link with Baumgarten's *Aesthetica Practica*, never written and yet coherent with his view of Aesthetics as perceptual epistemology here focused on everyday life. By the use of the term "Prosaics" as theory of everyday aesthetics (rather than the practice itself) I argue for the centrality of the subject, as opposed to "Poetics" dealing with the object or collection of objects categorizable as artistic and how to approach them analytically. This involves attention to the social contexts and semio-aesthetic conventions in the diverse cultural institutions that constitute subjectivity (yes, subjectivity is not innocent, natural and pure, but socially constituted, as Gombrich's "non-innocent eye"). In the fifth, I will center on methodology, which was delineated in Baumgarten's index but can be built depending on the specificity of each

<sup>1</sup> Although traditional Aesthetics theory generally uses the term "sensitivity", the term "sensitivity" is more accurate to Baumgarten's original Latin *sensitivae*.

aesthetic inquiry. Among other possible options, here I remind of an analytical model by eight combinatory categories (cf. Mandoki 1994, 2006b, 2007) that can be useful to systematize and share observations on what is aesthetically relevant in everyday life.

I will attempt a sort of archaeological endeavor on Baumgarten's text to uncover the foundations of a building that could have been constructed according to what was sketched in his index for *Aesthetica* in 1750-1758 from which hopefully a firmer structure of this discipline could be pursued. (See Fig. 1 copy of Baumgarten's index in the original Latin text)

## **2. The irrational in the age of rationality**

It is unfortunate the little attention given by modern theory to Baumgarten's attempt to systematize the study on Aesthetics, as his work has not even been translated from Latin to English, only to German and lately Italian. Nonetheless he constitutes, together with Kant, the basic reference to any serious inquiry in this discipline.

Baumgarten dedicated three texts to the study of Aesthetics, each of them increasingly systematic: 1) his dissertation *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* 1735; 2) *Metaphysica* 1739, and 3) the mayor work (399 pages) *Aesthetica* 1750-1758. In the Prolegomena of *Aesthetica* §13), Baumgarten writes: "Whoever reads with passion about the subject, will not lack eloquence nor clear order. That the theme be to you the first occupation, the clear order the second, and that lastly, expression be the third." Indeed, Baumgarten was so passionate about aesthetics, such a problematic theme, that his short life (he died at 47) did not suffice for the whole enterprise. He chose a subject of study unfavorable to the eyes of his continental contemporaries, the concept of sensitivity, right at the climax of European rationalism by Leibniz, Descartes, Spinoza and Wolff (his teacher) who did not particularly care about this topic (while on the other side of the English channel the empiricists Shaftesbury and his pupils Addison and Hutcheson as well as the painter Hogarth were inquiring on taste and imagination, followed by Burke and Hume). He answered beforehand to this probable objection in *Aesthetica* § 6: "You can object to our science 4) it is unworthy of philosophers, and sensations, fantasies, fables, emotional disturbances etc. are below their horizon. Reply: a) the philosopher is a man among men and does not do good to consider alien to himself such an important part of human knowledge." <sup>2</sup>

With his best possible methodological rigour, Baumgarten attempted to establish a logical science of the non logical, and a rational study of the non rational field of experience, perceptual phenomena and beauty appreciation. This audacity earned him criticism from Kant on a note to Transcendental Aesthetics in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) who questioned the possibility of an objective science on subjectivity. However, later Kant also zealously attempted to study subjectivity objectively in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) and establish an objective claim to the universality of the judgment of taste despite of its being, by definition, subjective.

Baumgarten foresaw and answered this objection in Prolegomena § 10 of *Aesthetica* as follows:

<sup>2</sup> Translation to English of all Baumgarten's quotes are by the author from original and from Baumgarten 2014 partial trans. Iberlucía .

Objection. 8) Aesthetics is an art, not a science, Answer. A) These aptitudes are not opposite. How many that in other times were only arts are now sciences? B) That our art can be demonstrated, is proven by experience, is *a priori*, since psychology, etc., provide enough true principles, what to this art is lacking to elevate to science, is taught by other evoked uses.

Although the term “art” is used in another sense from the modern sense (note the “only arts” expression), precisely here stands the main tension that has obscured the trajectory of aesthetic theory for so long: that it must deal with appearances and corporeal senses in their full materiality right in the midst of western philosophy’s tradition of degradation of the body and distrust of perceptions as deceitful from truth and knowledge. European philosophers since Socrates and Plato have doubted transient appearances as delusive, followed by Christian medieval philosophy’s stigmatization of the body as root of original sin. Such context did not promise a good reception to inquiries on Aesthetics (albeit it promoted its artistic products).

The object of value and attention for Western philosophy since Parmenides has been the soul and the mind in their immateriality and an emphasis on permanence, perfection and immovable essences. Consequently, the idea of Beauty as an abstract and objectified entity replaced the evanescence of the experiential because Beauty can be spiritualized, related to essences and located at the peak of the Platonic triad in his Theory of Ideas. Despite it all, for our fortune, aesthetics has remained very concrete, corporeal, and sensorial thanks to prolific mother nature and to artists’ zeal, passion and efforts to explore and touch sensitivity through their very grounded, sensuous and material vehicles of signification by sound, color, texture, rhythm, light, word and gesture.

Among the problems inherited from Baumgarten’s writings, apart from a conflation between art (as a specialized professional practice) and Aesthetics (denoting the study of sensitivity), is the confusion between the evaluative sense of the term “aesthetic” used as a laudatory adjective synonymous to beauty, and the descriptive sense in academic use which is a noun, a field of study. As Berleant clearly stated it: “The first is the misguided idea that Aesthetics concerns only the fine arts and the beauty of nature. The second impediment is the presumption that to call something aesthetic is to honor it. Both of these conventional misunderstandings unnecessarily restrict the applicability [of] the aesthetic, diminish its vitality, and largely divest it of its profound normative power.” (Berleant 2010: 18) Another problem is the conflation of the aesthetic as both the object of study of Aesthetics and the discipline itself, which does not occur in other branches of philosophy: people say “this is very aesthetic” but never say “this is very ontologic” or “very epistemic” although an act is qualified as “unethical”. Given this tendency, when we add to it the attention on the everyday, then everything seems to become aesthetic whereas it is mainly the inquiry, not the object, what this term denotes.

### **3. Baumgarten’s Aesthetics as *scientia cognitionis sensitivae***

Contrary to mainstream Aesthetics’ object-centered and art-centered conception, for Baumgarten *Aesthetica* was not only the study of beauty and art, albeit certainly a part of it as

they are effects of sensitivity. He gave to Aesthetics a much more relevant role among the various branches of philosophy, namely as a type of epistemology pertaining to the study of sensitivity in its original sense *aesthesis*<sup>3</sup> denoting perception and experience, and only indirectly related to beauty, taste and art. Its object of study is how perception generates experience, the knowledge of sensorial cognition even if not “clear and distinct” but confused as a “lower” (a concession to current rationalism) cognitive faculty. Aesthetics would be a *gnoseologia perceptualis* or *gnoseologia sensitivae*, on the same level as *gnoseologia intellectualis* or rational knowledge.

I can not emphasize enough the significance of this approach as it basically means situating Aesthetics as the non conceptual epistemology, that of experience. Sensitivity is not a mere detection device to feed the intellect; it involves a whole spectrum encompassing full receptivity of the creature to the world including sensation, emotion, appreciation, fascination and experiential cognition all biologically and culturally determined.

Even if Baumgarten established Aesthetics (from αἰσθάνομαι) as the science of sensory cognition, the concept had very strange turns along its almost three centuries of development. He coined the term in its modern academic use (with Descartes’ “clear and distinct ideas” in mind) in his *Meditationes philosophicas de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (§ CXVI) to denote sensations of inferior knowledge by opposition to Logic or superior knowledge, αἰσθητά vs νοητά: “the things are known by a superior capacity as objects of logic, whereas the things perceived must be by an inferior capacity as its object or aesthetics”. (Baumgarten [1735] 1975: 9)

By 1737 in *Metaphysica* § 533 Baumgarten perseveres in his interest on Aesthetics as dealing with fantasy, memory, fiction, sensory judgment, pleasure and disgust, among others. In the section dedicated to *Sense in Empirical Psychology*, Baumgarten defines it as: “The science of sensitive expression and knowledge is AESTHETICS (Logic of lower Cognitive Faculty, Philosophy of graces and muses, lower gnoseology, art of thinking beautifully, art of the analog of reason)”. A whole array of very dissimilar items, all related only to the fact of being appreciated by or related to sensitivity.

In 1750, he begins *Aesthetica* in the Prolegomena (§1) stating his well known definition of Aesthetics: “Aesthetics (theory of liberal arts, inferior gnoseology, art of thinking beautifully, art of the analogous to reason) is the science of sensitive knowledge” In the blueprints of his index to *Aesthetica*, Baumgarten meticulously structured the parts of the edifice he was about to build in the following manner:

I. AESTHETICA THEORETICA, that teaches, is general and prescribes:

- 1) Heuristica upon things and thoughts (chapter 1);
- 2) Methodologia about a clear order (chapter 2);
- 3) Semiotica about signs of what is thought and disposed in beautiful form (chapter 3);

II. AESTHETICA PRACTICA, applied to the specific (Part II).

<sup>3</sup> Although many authors use the term “aisthēsis or “aisthesis” as translation from the Greek αἰσθησις, I have preferred “aesthesis” directly related to academic term “aesthetics” to emphasize its original sense on the perceptual rather than the beautiful. It is also necessary in distinguishing the aesthesis (as the object of study) from the aesthetic (as the study). I am using “aesthetic” as the quality and “Aesthetic” as the study.

On I. *Aesthetica Theoretica*, 1. *Heuristica*, A) Knowledge of Beauty in general, B) in the specific, a) aesthetic character, Positive  $\alpha$ ) *Natura* he refers to the aesthetic nature of the soul and innate character of the aesthetic,  $\beta$ ) *Exercitatio* on producing beauty, and  $\chi$ ) *Disciplina*, a theory on the matter and form of the knowledge of beauty,  $\delta$ ) *Impetus*, by which he means eloquence, ecstasy or furor, and all that is beautifully planned, and  $\epsilon$ ) *Correctio*. Then b) aesthetic works, c) aesthetic magnitude ending with the sublime, and d) aesthetic truth, e) aesthetic light, f) aesthetic certitude and g) life of aesthetic knowledge.

Other subjects are the richness of the material, aesthetic grandeur, the absolute greatness of matter, the relative size of matter, the relationship between thoughts and matters in general, the tenuous style of thinking, aesthetic truth, aesthetic falsity, aesthetic verisimilitude, fictions, average thinking style, the sublime style of thinking, the vices that oppose the sublime, etc.

For Baumgarten there is negative aesthetic dignity § 192 and negative aesthetic ethos § 194: “There is also a part and a kind of the aesthetic ethos, on the basis of which it can be defined as negative.” This subject alone is worth a whole book at least.

The end of Aesthetics, for Baumgarten, is perfection of sensitive knowledge in itself: *Aesthetica* § 14 “ *Aesthetices finis est perfectio cognitionis sensitivae, qua talis* ” and consequently , despite the inaccuracies due to language and time gaps, it is clear that he proposes it as a form of gnoseology.

Kant, who admired Baumgarten and used his texts for his courses , followed his idea on the opposition of the sensitive to the intelligible in his *Inaugural Dissertation* ( Section II, paragraph 3): “On the distinction between sensible things and intelligible things in general” :

**Sensibility** is the **receptivity** of a subject by which it is possible for its representative state to be affected in a certain way by the presence of some object. **Intelligence**, rationality, is the **faculty** of a subject by which it is able to represent to itself what by its quality cannot enter the senses. The object of sensibility is sensuous; what contains nothing but what is knowable by the intellect is intelligible. In the older schools the former was called **phenomenon**, the latter **noumenon**. To the extent to which knowledge is subject to the laws of sensuousness it is sensuous; to the extent to which it is subject to the laws of intelligence it is **intellectual** or rational.

(Kant [1770] 1894, Section II Agraphia 3 p. 50, emphasis in the original)

Two decades later in his *Critique of Judgment* , he follows this same line of contrasting aesthetics to logic emphasizing its subjective condition as opposed to the logical:

“The judgement of taste is therefore not a judgement of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical, by which we understand that whose determining ground can be *no other than subjective*. ” “ [...] Conversely, if the given representations are rational, but are referred in a judgement simply to the subject (to its feeling), the judgement is so far always aesthetical”. (Kant [1790] 1914), § 1 emphasis in original)

Note the turn Aesthetics took with Kant: from Baumgarten’s analogue to epistemology to a question of taste in Kant. If Kant would have followed Baumgarten more strictly, he would have written a Critique of Experience or Perception (or Critique of Impure Reason) or better, Critique of Sensitivity. It is clear this is what Baumgarten had in mind, as he describes in first person the experience of experiencing:

I think of my present state. Then, I represent my present state, that is, SENSE. Representations of my present state or SENSATIONS (appearances) are representations of the state of the present world. Then, my sensations owe their existence to the power of representation of my soul in function of the position of my body (*Metaphysica* §534 emphasis in original).

I find this part particularly illuminating. First because of its iteration and emphasis on the present and on presence. He repeats the term “present” four times, and “re-present” four times. His search begins in the present, intently and insistently, bringing this sensorial presentation to the senses (aesthesia) into its verbal re-presentation (semiosis) to understand and share them. Second because we clearly have here an antecedent to Husserl’s bracketing or phenomenological *epoché*, *first-person point of view*.

Those parts of the body, with whose correlative movement the external sensation coexists are AESTHETIC FACULTIES (sensory organs). Through them I have the faculty of sensing 1) any body that touches mine, TOUCH, 2) light, VISION, 3) sound, HEARING, effluvia of the bodies that rise to the nose, SMELL, 5) the dissolved salts through the internal part of the mouth, TASTE. (Baumgarten *Metaphysica*: §536 emphasis in the original).

Baumgarten’s “aesthetic faculties” are the senses. The original object of aesthetic inquiry for Baumgarten, allow me to insist, is experience and perception; not artistic experience (as Dewey’s “an experience”), nor artworks or beauty but the flow and openness of our sensory faculties. Aesthesia is our primordial access to the phenomenal world.

Given the branching of present philosophy, one could classify the philosophy of art as separate from Aesthetics and parallel to the philosophy of science, philosophy of law, or philosophy of history, namely philosophies of human activities, whereas Aesthetics should be classified as a form of epistemology, parallel to logic but focused on the sensorial or experiential. In this sense, theories on the artification of the everyday are more akin to a philosophy of art rather than Aesthetics in the Baumgartian epistemological sense as a science of sensitive knowledge. Thus, an alternative name for Aesthetics through this approach can be senso-epistemology, experienceology (excuse the neologism), perceptual gnoseology, perceptology or phenomenology (phaneroscopy in Peirce, better “phanerology”), even aesthesio-epistemology or simply aesthesiology.

Baumgarten’s work is too rough and outmoded in many aspects and tragically incomplete. Words have changed their meaning but his rigour and effort on systematicity is an enduring contribution. It is regrettable that such work on the clarification of aesthetics is quoted from quotations but not read and his work not followed, when he should be on every introductory course on Aesthetics.

#### **4. Prosaics as *Aesthetica Practica*: inquiring sensitivity in everyday life**

Baumgarten’s exploration of *Aesthetica Theoretica* was initially dedicated to the study of beauty and art, especially poetry as an extension of his first *Meditations* consisting mainly of art theory. But the object of study of the second unwritten part of *Aesthetica*, *Aesthetica*

*Practica* remains a mystery. We may therefore conjecture that perhaps it could be developed as the **study** of aesthetics in everyday life because of its omnipresence on how we all put into use, interpret and apply a variety of aesthetic activities and strategies across the whole social fabric. It is a theoretical enterprise (not the practice itself as cosmetics, art or design) where, in opposition to traditional art-centered aesthetics, the creators are not professional artists but all of us, inevitably.

Sensitivity eludes us precisely because it is not an object but subjectivity itself, the condition to experience which can only be traced by experience itself. This is the main problem of Aesthetics, sensitivity studying sensitivity, a subject studying subjectivity, a complicated task of experiencing experience to study it, of being the subject and object simultaneously. The questions of expression, meaning, imitation, representation and the whole array of aesthetic categories such as beauty, the grotesque, the comic, the graceful or the tragic are as relevant to everyday aesthetics as they have been for traditional aesthetics of art. Experience or aesthesis is not only the condition of possibility for both art and everyday aesthetics but for life itself.

Aesthetics, however, does not occur only in the mind of the aesthetician as is said of beauty in the eye of the beholder. Sensitivity is not an isolated entity but is configured biologically, culturally and socially. It can be cultivated and refined, fertilized and nurtured or blunted, wounded and deformed. (cf. Mandoki 2019) What codes and conditions regulate and configure it is a matter of great importance for everyday aesthetics: its main goal and challenge.

When we study such intricate and elaborate aesthetic expressions in cultures different from Western traditions, we must acknowledge the richness and variety of manifestations through rituals, ornamentation, gestures, festivities, apparels, beliefs, dance, music, settings, masks, tattoos, myths, scarification, etiquette and interaction codes etc. Everything for the sake of the experience they produce. All of our artistic languages (music, dance, painting, theater, sculpture, narratives and rhymes) have their parallel under different conventions in other cultures. To begin with, we need to acknowledge that in our cultural games, aesthetics are not reduced to artworks but meticulously applied to these manifestations with different purposes and contexts for the sake of politics, religion, marketing, education, science outreach, sports, medical practice, gender display, the media, occultism, tourism etc. (Amplly argued and exemplified in Mandoki 1992, 1994, 1995, 1998, 2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b , 2015b, 2019, 2022)

As scholars on this topic, we must face a very serious challenge: *Aesthetica practica* understood as everyday aesthetics may bring to mind its common use referring to cosmetics, branding, interior and graphic design, advertisement, decoration, and be swallowed by it. Precisely for this reason, I was forced to coin a different term, “Prosaics” opposed to “Poetics” to emphasize the theoretical character of everyday aesthetics inquiry.<sup>4</sup> Prosaics means the study, not the practice, of everyday aesthetics in the same way that Poetics, for Aristotle, is the study of tragedy, lyrical poetry, comedy and epic, not the practice. This term seemed adequate in 1994 when I published my first book on everyday aesthetics and it still seems so, revised in the subsequent books related to this topic (2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b).

<sup>4</sup> It was also used by Morson [1990: 15] to refer to Bakhtin’s study of prose in the novel.

The term “prosaics” is not used as an adjective synonymous to the trivial, but denotes the branch of Aesthetics that studies sensitivity in everyday life.

As I argued in a previous work (Mandoki 2007a: 79) there is a key difference between aesthetic activities in Poetics (artistic aesthetics) and in Prosaics (everyday aesthetics). Prosaics’ expressions are ephemeral, intermittent, and unfinished whereas Poetics’ expressions are finite even if their interpretation may remain open and variable.

The relevance of this approach lies in its focus on how sensitivity is molded, impacted, manipulated, elevated, nourished or poisoned by the variety of aesthetic instruments, strategies, devices and languages. There are aesthetic modes and conventions that regulate interactions affecting the sensitivity of participants in social encounters, for example the modes of etiquette and intimidation, clique clues of belonging, codes denoting authority that are not only semiotic but aesthetic, exhortations to actions, strategies for collective identification, etc. The settings, tones, postures, types of language, props and costumes we ordinarily perceive and display have been barely examined despite of their rich dramaturgical quality. Goffman (1959) was the pioneer in pointing at how rooted and elaborated these displays are in everyday life. Our task is to demonstrate how aesthetics are involved here too, not only semiotics, since apart from signifying they also impact sensitivity.

By “aesthetic activities” I am referring to what specifically appeals and impacts our and others’ sensitivity, not only at the first level of the senses. Aesthetic activity takes place in our homes, in relation to the sacred, to education, sports, medicine, in our work, in politics, in the use of time and particularly through the display of identities and status for social and collective survival. Sensitivity is a more complex faculty than sense perception even if it derives from it. Aristotle explored both *Sensus et sensibilibus* as the study of the senses and *De Poetica* as the study of art thus encompassing an ample aesthetic spectrum from the simple to the complex. Aesthetica Practica or Prosaics focuses on experience or sensitivity in all its manifestations, natural and cultural.

As I dedicated my academic life mainly to this topic for three decades, I argued that everyday aesthetics is not merely a matter of classification of common items and activities to judge if they merit or not the status of “aesthetic” or “art-like” but can elucidate how political systems can manipulate people and have indeed done so with catastrophic unnameable consequences (2003), how violence can be exerted upon sensitivity leaving incurable wounds, especially upon the most vulnerable which are children, determining their view of the world most likely for the rest of their life (Mandoki 2019), and how it can poison or enrich our reality, enslave or elevate, accompany or isolate, consecrate or trivialize. Prosaics is thus not only a scholarly endeavor but has political consequences in safeguarding sensitivity, human and others. (Mandoki 2015).

## **5. Methodologia**

When dealing with the methodology for Aesthetics, a common confusion emerges: on one hand the idea that aesthetic methodology involves a method for having aesthetic experiences such as distancing, estrangement., being disinterested, defamiliarization, elevating its significance, focusing attention, or taking an aesthetic attitude. It is as if there were steps one

has to take in order to guarantee one is having an aesthetic experience. However, aesthetic experiences do not result from methodologies and there are no recipes to have them. On the other hand, methodologies are indeed necessary for Aesthetics' inquiry to make sure one is working theoretically rather than anecdotally sharing personal experiences.

Almost three centuries after Baumgarten's proposal of methodology for Aesthetics, we certainly have not found, and seem to have no hope for ever finding, a methodology to express ourselves beautifully, to appreciate beauty, to produce it, and much less to think beautifully. But what is possible, however, is to propose methodologies to **study** how we react to beauty and why, as well as to the whole array of other aesthetic categories, nourishing or impoverishing, through the whole spectrum of human and non human sensitivity. Very significant experimental work on this topic is done by Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics and by Evolutionary Aesthetics.

*Aesthetica practica* could be divided in similar sections as Baumgarten's *Aesthetica theoretica* as follows:

- 1) *Heuristica practica*, focused on the study of the invention or emergence of new forms of experience and aesthetic communication in everyday life, the processes of creativity of percepts that widen and enrich human environments or impoverish them.
- 2) *Methodologia practica*, inquires the methods to study everyday aesthetics, a key issue theoreticians are required to be explicit about, whether analytic, pragmatist, Marxist, empirical, evolutionary, semiotic, phenomenological, etc. (My work has drawn upon phenomenology and semiotics, specifically pragmatics as the context and signification for the analysis of sensitivity is crucial).
- 3) *Semiotica practica*, on the relation between experience and signification, sense perception and meaning through aesthetic means, not only in the artistic but through various institutional and social practices. All these have specific codes of expression to impact sensitivity that are open to inquiry.

Methodologia is precisely what is so crucially lacking in Aesthetics for going beyond descriptions, impressions, anecdotes, and the analysis of propositions regarding art and beauty with barely any connection to experience.

Since I've been interested in the interplay of sensitivity through social relations and how it is configured by the contexts and institutions in which it is displayed, what their codes and connections are and how they impact upon sensitivity, I devised an observation and interpretation method like a litmus test that calls attention to when and how is sensitivity at play. (Mandoki 1994, 1995, 2006b, 2007a) As a first approach to a methodology for the study of Prosaics, I proposed a semiotically based octadic model of categories with inter crossings of 16 combinations to detect and highlight the specifically aesthetic processes in everyday life. These categories are distributed along two axes, one focuses the channels of expression (verbal, acoustic, somatic or visual/spatial) and the other focuses the modes of expression and degree of intensity (closeness or distance, dynamics or staticity, emphasis or plainness, and expansion or contraction). Even if all taxonomies are relatively arbitrary, this model so far seems reasonably functional and enlightening for this purpose.

This approach points at the opposite direction from the new proposal of artification of the everyday that takes non artistic objects as art-like and attempts to see the everyday from an artistic viewpoint. Contrary to artification of the everyday to enclose it within traditional art-

like categories, the Prosaics framework is non prescriptive nor object-centric; it is not normative, and does not operate as a guardian of good taste. It detects both the positive and the negative, the pleasurable and the painful. It is a purely philosophical endeavor to understand the subtleties of sensitivity. It is understandable that works on everyday aesthetics would follow the tradition arguing for the beauty or art-likeness of a particular everyday object, activity or setting. Analyzing particular objects or acts as artworks and arguing for their pertinence and value, however, has been the role of art history, criticism and theory, rather than Aesthetics.

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude, I proposed to revalue Baumgarten's foundational text *Aesthetica* conceived specifically as a theory of sensitivity and an epistemology of experience or perceptual gnoseology rather than as a study of art or of beautiful objects. As a consequence I suggested that the second part of *Aesthetica*, the unwritten *Aesthetica Practica*, could be developed today as the theory of aesthetics in everyday life or Prosaics. I consider the need of this neologism "Prosaics" for the theory of everyday aesthetics, as opposed to Poetics or theory of artistic aesthetics, to emphasize its theoretical and not practical character and especially to not force art-like terms unto non artistic objects as they require their own categories and criteria of classification. I pointed at three omissions in recent papers on everyday aesthetics: the centrality of the subject, the role of sensitivity and a methodology. I dedicated a section in the text to examine each of these central concepts and indicate a methodology based on an octadic model that can aid in these inquiries.

*Scientia cognitionis sensitivae* is a deep and interesting concept with very important social and political implications as it encompasses the whole range of the experiential yet to be better understood. It is naive to believe that aesthetics deals only with embellishing the environment or with detecting the artistic and the art-like. Injustices occur by the use of aesthetics not only for propaganda, as Nazism, Stalinism and Maoism's utilization of it, but for the most cruel ends. Attention to everyday aesthetics has great relevance today by both its nourishing and toxic effects especially given the increasingly dehumanizing conditions within contemporary mass societies, the degree of violence (aesthetic and economic) and the penury undergone by so many people despoiled even of the satisfaction of their most basic needs.<sup>5</sup> We have a task to study aesthetic strategies that oppress children in schools and fill them with fear and hatred, camps that militarize children and utilize them for a clique's profit. It is of Aesthetics' concern all impositions to oppress women by surgeries that occidentalize Asian face features, a Japanese requirement for women to speak in high pitched voices that emphasize their gender and submission, by modes of clothing that seriously restrain their senses and hide them from others in the same measure as the opposite, the body as object of exhibition, criticism and stigmatization for the cosmetics industry's profit. In sensitivity resides the ultimate vulnerability of every live creature (from caged animals to caged humans) and as such it urgently deserves to be protected.

<sup>5</sup> Particularly relevant are interpretations of political aesthetics cf. Mandoki 1991, 1992, 2003, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2015, 2019, 2020, 2022a, 2022b.-

Baumgarten brought to the fore the subject of Aesthetics at the height of European rationalism when we were led to believe that *cogito ergo sum* was the first principle of philosophy. On the contrary: *sensu ergo sum!*

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Figure 1

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## SYNOPSIS.

Prolegomena. §. 1-13.

Traſtatio.

I. Aethetica theoretica, P. I.

1) heuristica, C. I.

A) de pulcritudine cognitionis generatim, S. I. §. 14-27.

B) ſpeciatiim.

a) character aethetici.

N) poſitiuus.

a) natura, S. II. §. 28-46.

β) exercitatio, S. III. §. 47-61.

γ) diſciplina, S. IIII. §. 62-77.

δ) impetus, S. V. §. 78-95.

e) correctio, S. VI. §. 96-103.

ζ) negatiuus, S. VII. §. 104-114.

b) veritas aethetica.

α) generatim, S. VIII. §. 115-118.

β) ſpeciatiim.

a) materiae.

1) ipſa, S. VIII. §. 119-129.

2) eo ducentia.



5

a) topica

## SYNOPSIS.

a) topica, S. X. §. 130-141.

b) argumenta locupletantia, S. XI. §. 142-148.

β) perſonae, S. XII. §. 149-157.

γ) vſus vtriuſque cum breuitate

1) abſoluta ſemper, S. XIII. §. 158-166.

2) relatiua aliquando, S. XIII. §. 167-176.

c) magnitudo aethetica.

N) generatim, S. XV. §. 177-190.

β) ſpeciatiim.

a) materiae.

1) abſoluta, S. XVI. §. 191-201.

2) relatiua, S. XVII. §. 202-216.

3) ratio cogitat, ad materiae

a) generatim, S. XVIII. §. 217-229.

b) ſpeciatiim in genere cogitandi.

1) tenui, S. XVIII. §. 230-265.

2) medio, S. XX. §. 266-280.

3) ſublimi, cuius.

1) na-

## SYNOPSIS.

I) natura, S. XXI. §. 281-309.

II) vitia oppoſita, S. XXII. §. 310-328.

D) argumenta arguentia, S. XXIII. §. 329-351.

β) perſonae, grauitas et magnanimitas aethetica

1) abſoluta, S. XXIII. §. 352-363.

2) comparatiua meditaturi

a) tenuia et media, S. XXV. §. 364-393.

b) ſublimia, S. XXVI. §. 394-422.

e) veritas aethetica.

N) generatim, S. XXVII. §. 423-444.

β) ſpeciatiim

a) falſitas oppoſita, S. XXVIII. §. 445-477.

β) verifiſimilitudo.

1) generatim, S. XXVIII. §. 478-504.

2) ſpeciatiim in a) fictionibus

I) hiſte-

## SYNOPSIS.

I) hiſtorici, S. XXX. §. 505-510.

II) poetici, S. XXXI. §. 511-525.

β) fabulis, S. XXXII. §. 526-538.

γ) argumenta probantia, S. XXXIII. §. 539-554.

δ) ſtudium veritatis aetheticum

1) abſolutum, S. XXXIII. §. 555-565.

2) comparatiuum

a) in dogmaticis et hiſtoricis S. XXXV. §. 566-584.

b) poetiſticum, S. XXXVI. §. 588-613.

e) lux aethetica

f) certitudo aethetica

g) vita cognitionis aethetica.

2) Methodologia, C. II.

3) Semiotica, C. III.

II) Aethetica practica P. II.



PRO-

## Abstract

This paper proposes to revalue Baumgarten's foundational text *Aesthetica* conceived specifically as a theory of sensitivity and an epistemology of experience or perceptual gnoseology rather than as a study of art or of beautiful objects. As a consequence, the second part of *Aesthetica*, *Aesthetica Practica* left unwritten could be developed today as the theory of aesthetics in everyday life or Prosaics. I consider the need of this neologism for the theory

of everyday aesthetics, Prosaics, as opposed to Poetics or theory of artistic aesthetics, to emphasize its theoretical and not practical character (practiced by designers) and specifically to not force art-like categories unto non artistic objects as they require their own concepts and classification. I point at three omissions in recent papers on everyday aesthetics: the centrality of the subject, the role of sensitivity and a methodology. I thus indicate a methodology based on an octadic model that can aid in these inquiries. *Scientia cognitionis sensitivae* is a deep and interesting concept with very important social and political implications as it encompasses the whole range of the experiential yet to be better understood.