

Aesthetic Investigations

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The Quest for Certainty in the Age of Aesthetics

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Abstract: In this paper, I suggest conceiving the ‘Age of Aesthetics’ and its theoretic attempts from Baumgarten to Hegel and from Lessing to Schiller as a quest for certainty within the utterly uncertain field of the sensuous. Though this quest may not be an exclusive trait of that age, I claim it is essential for understanding the driving forces of classical aesthetics. Drawing largely from Ernst Cassirer’s reconstructions, I also try to link my conception of the Age of Aesthetics to the recently discussed problem of intuitive understanding as articulated by Eckart Förster. Finally, I am giving a speculative outlook on the notion of ‘aesthetic certainty’.

The ‘age of aesthetics’ ranges from the publication of Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* in 1750 to Hegel’s death in 1831 and thus covers a period of 81 years. This has at least been suggested by the organizers of the Conference of the European Society for Aesthetics in Amsterdam in 2014. In the following, I will take this suggestion seriously by offering an outlook on the variations of a certain philosophical theme, which shall make intelligible the assumed ‘spirit’ of that age.

As the title indicates, I propose to regard the quest for certainty as the central problem of the age of aesthetics—and more precisely: *the quest for certainty within the world of the sensuous*. There are, of course, alternative ways of making the age of aesthetics conceivable as a whole, but I claim that the endeavour of a quest for certainty is an *essential feature* of the age of

aesthetics. And although this quest is not restricted to aesthetics alone—since it rather takes place under the general conditions of fundamental change in the arts, sciences and cultural life in general—it occurs in the field of aesthetics in a specifically insightful way.

Talking about a ‘quest for certainty’ obviously alludes to John Dewey’s book with the same title and reflects my general indebtedness to Dewey’s philosophy.¹ My own approach will, however, deflect from the path the great pragmatist indicated, since my focus is rather on the way in which certainty is treated in the classical period of philosophical aesthetics and applied to the problem of intuitive understanding. The textual sources of my argument are, first, Ernst Cassirer and his reconstruction of ‘classical aesthetics’ and, second, the contemporary philosopher Eckart Förster and his reconstruction of a ‘methodology of intuitive understanding’ in Goethe. While Förster delineates the possibility and actuality of intuitive understanding in terms of a rigorous method of inquiry, I am using Cassirer’s contribution to show that aesthetics investigates the possibility of intuitive understanding as well. In the eighteenth century, aesthetics is the branch of philosophy which systematically delves into the problems of controlling sensuous intuitions and their passages—in terms of their lawfulness, for instance—as a source for the creation of ‘form’.

My attempt to bring these two perspectives together aims at showing that the struggle with uncertainty in sensuous experience does not prevent the possibility of intuitive understanding, but rather conditions it—as well as showing the kind of certainty it conveys. Furthermore, I want to show that there are two basic ways of intuitive understanding: the methodological one Förster finds in Goethe and the genuinely aesthetic one represented by the protagonists of the age of aesthetics. These two ways are consequently directed at two different modes of certainty: the relative certainty of scientific inquiry and a more transgressive mode, which I address as *aesthetic certainty*.

In the following, I begin with a short draft of the age of aesthetics by setting out the three cornerstones of Baumgarten, Kant and Hegel (I.). After that, I will try to cut out the ‘classical’ phase of this age from Lessing to Schiller with the help of Ernst Cassirer (II.). Subsequently, I will combine the view gained from Cassirer with the problem of intuitive understanding (III.). Finally, I will sum up my reflections on the quest for certainty in the age of aesthetics by presenting a speculative outlook on the notion of aesthetic certainty (IV.).

I. THE THREE MIGHTY CORNERSTONES

If Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten makes the age of aesthetics begin, he does so by defining its endeavour and its task within the first comprehensive framework, giving aesthetics the shape of a systematically fullfledged discipline. However, he did not so much systematize the current more or less ‘presystem-

atic' aesthetic discourse, but rather developed aesthetics from certain logical problems he was trying to solve. For Baumgarten—a sharp-witted student of Christian Wolff—formal analysis was the very business of philosophy and he was not satisfied with the typical limitations of traditional German school metaphysics ('Schulmetaphysik'). So in the end his aesthetics appears as an epistemological theory of cognition or knowledge ('Erkenntnis')—but 'knowledge' as provided by sensual activity.² And thus Baumgarten does not only start the discipline of aesthetics, but also its quest for certainty, which appears as the quest for the certainty of knowledge in the insecure field of sensual experience.

Immanuel Kant, then, develops his momentous contribution to aesthetics (apart from the transcendental aesthetics of time and space) in his third *Critique*, which—as is well known—addresses the problem of judgement. Here, the question of certainty arises as concerning the reliability and generalization of sensuous, subjective, experience based judgements. His answer is that the only kind of judgement which is subjective and still kind of certain—'certain' in terms of its legitimate call for general acceptance—is aesthetic judgement about something as beautiful or sublime. But in contrast to Baumgarten and in direct rejection of his position, Kant states that aesthetic judgement does not contain or generate proper knowledge (which, according to Kant, is only the case in logical judgement). Since it remains a question of taste, aesthetic judgement necessarily is subjective, no matter how commonly shared the respective taste may be. But the *play*, in which the human capacities or faculties ('Vermögen') of reason find themselves while judging aesthetically, assure us of these very faculties and give the respective judgement a transsubjective direction.

Before turning to Hegel, I have to admit that Kant did also explicitly speak of 'aesthetic certainty' elsewhere, namely in the course of his published lectures on logic (the so called Jäsche Logik). Here, he defines certainty as aesthetic, insofar as it is delivered by sense experience, and is recognized as something necessary. In other words: if there is something that, according to sensuous experience can be no different, then this something is aesthetically certain.³ But this kind of a posteriori certainty is of relatively low status compared to 'real' a priori knowledge, which alone is (or can be) apodictically certain. But at least Kant acknowledges that aesthetic certainty can support what in his own words is called 'the approximation to certainty' or even the 'hope ... for getting to certainty'.⁴ This hope appears as the driving force of Kant's thoughts on logic—and perhaps of his philosophy altogether, including his aesthetics.

Hegel, finally, turns philosophical aesthetics systematically into a philosophy of art—and art alone. Yet, aesthetics is not only restricted to art as its subject matter, but the whole function of art is transformed in terms of a theory of truth—in terms of the self-certainty of the absolute spirit that is subject and object at the same time. Hegel—who, arguably, is the termi-

nator of the age of aesthetics—most clearly undertakes a quest for certainty, as his *Phenomenology of Spirit* documents. Since Hegel’s dialectical struggle with sense certainty ‘proves’ that this low kind of certainty is not yet real and true, he has to keep searching within the developing forms of spirit, and finds true self-certainty only within the absolute spirit, of which art represents the sensual level. So art already belongs into the realm of truth as graduated self-certainty, but art as such is still not entirely sufficient, it is not yet the highest form of self-certain truth, and not yet the end of the ‘history’ of the spirit. Therefore, Hegel’s quest transfers art to religion and further to philosophy—and this is precisely what might be regarded not only as the end of art, but as the end of aesthetics as well.

These three reference points shall give some initial orientation for a perspective on the quest for certainty typical of the age of aesthetics. The next step is to develop this picture a bit further by identifying the classical phase within that age.

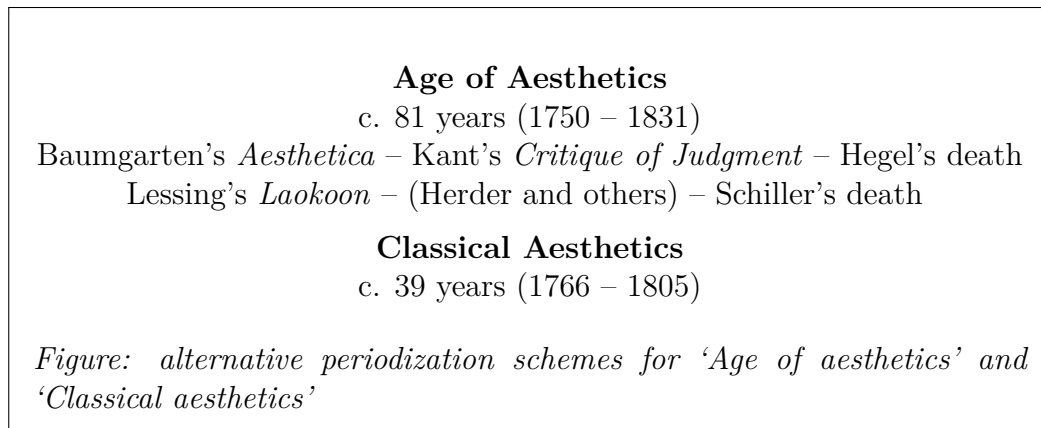
II. ERNST CASSIRER’S RECONSTRUCTION

In order to give a slightly richer picture, I will now turn to Ernst Cassirer’s reconstruction of ‘classical aesthetics’. Cassirer develops his outlook on the basic problems of eighteenth century aesthetics in the last chapter of his book on *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung (The Philosophy of Enlightenment)*, published in 1932. Furthermore, he already presents an extensive reconstruction of what he calls the ‘discovery of the aesthetic world of forms’ in an earlier book from 1916, called *Freiheit und Form (Freedom and Form)*.⁵ Since the latter work is concerned with German intellectual history, there is a strong emphasis on the German speaking traditions in this part of Cassirer’s reconstruction of aesthetics.

Combining the two textual sources Cassirer offers I take his conception as a specification and résumé of the characteristic style of thought of the age of aesthetics and construe it in terms of the quest for certainty as my thematic guideline (which is not an explicit issue in Cassirer’s reconstruction itself).

For Cassirer, it is clear that Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* (and maybe already his *Metaphysics*) means a turning point in aesthetic thought, and therefore Baumgarten apparently started *something*. Anyway, Cassirer does not acknowledge Baumgarten as the *effective* beginner of the philosophical discipline of aesthetics, but rather as someone who first delivers the means for a still upcoming breakthrough of this branch. This may seem quite surprising from today’s perspective, but apparently Baumgarten was not as well received as his legacy makes us think. It is rather Gotthold Ephraim Lessing to whom Cassirer gives the credits of being the one who ‘broke the spell’.⁶ But Cassirer not only suggests an alternative beginning of the age of aesthetics, but also an alternative ending, thus identifying ‘classical’ aesthetics, which makes for a slightly different story: With Leibniz in the back, Baumgarten initiates

what Lessing effectuates—and that is the overcoming of the aesthetics of enlightenment by a new synthesis of philosophical rationalism, poetics and art criticism. So, with Lessing, begins what Cassirer specifically calls ‘classical aesthetics’. This period appears as a contrasting one between pre-systematic poetics of enlightenment and post-systematic romanticism and it ends with Friedrich Schiller, as we will see later. The word ‘systematic’ is used here only to describe the paradigm of a discipline, not to depreciate the contrasting periods. Taken strictly as a historical period, Cassirer’s classical aesthetics is much shorter than the total ‘age of aesthetics’, though fully embraced by it. In this respect, we are looking at 39 years from Lessing’s *Laokoon* to Schiller’s death as the ‘core’ of the age of aesthetics (leaving open whether the counting makes sense at all).



Trying to come to terms with these different schemes of periodization (see figure above), we may treat Baumgarten and Lessing methodically as a unit—whereas Baumgarten appears as the first, and Lessing as the second beginning of aesthetics. This unit is constituted by systematic problems, which the two thinkers share. Drawing from Cassirer’s reconstruction, these problems range between two poles, which are sensuous knowledge on the one hand and the problem of laws in creative (i.e. artistic) production on the other. Accordingly, the quest for certainty within aesthetics now appears on the scene as a systematic focus on what I would like to term *demonstrative certainty of an intuition, which is governed by its own rules*—where intuition denotes sensuous and imaginative perception (‘Anschauung’), and rules mean *inner* rules of intuition itself, not external regulations.

But what does ‘demonstrative certainty’—a term I take directly from Cassirer—mean?⁷ In the context of eighteenth century aesthetics, it confronts the problem of mere subjectivity, which it tries to ‘solve’ by taking up again the concept of the ideal subject called ‘the genius’ (especially in Shaftesbury). Genius, or the idea of it, is the very source of all artistic laws and rules and thus serves the function of delivering a point of self-certainty. Cassirer summarizes this idea as follows: ‘Between what the genius does, and what

the real true rules reveal, no opposition can arise, for in the freedom of the genius the source of all artistic necessity is enclosed'.⁸ The necessity of all artistic activity is what Lessing—according to Cassirer—is after, and this necessity is what the aesthetician wishes to grasp in a lawlike form. For such laws—in analogy to the laws of nature, which have to be revealed—are excellent *media of certainty* at a moment, when it is already realized that approaching a state of certainty needs a strict method. Lessing represents the attempt to synthesize and even harmonize lawfulness and free movement, which can be paraphrased like this: There should be no determination by an external law, but there must be an internal law of the nature of artistic becoming itself, one that can only be revealed by itself (and by no other). In this line of thought the idea of the self-certain 'genius' means the pure act of production or pure becoming in and of itself. This, in a sense, can be called an 'aesthetics of intuition', as Cassirer does indeed call it, but (unfortunately) 'intuition' here denotes the complete or total vision of the genius as embodied in a great individual artist—with the questionable result that the concept of intuition, which is applied here, approaches divine intuition.⁹ In doing so, the metaphysically overcharged idea of the genius is believed to guarantee a certain basis for the rules of creative production.

At least two more important agents appear on the scene of Cassirer's discussion, namely Herder and Winckelmann. Whereas Herder represents a radical aesthetics of self-certain intuition, Winckelmann's truly classicist aesthetics of 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' aims—once more—at the *apodictic* certainty of a supersensible meaning, which materializes (preferably in marble) only in order to be capable of being contemplated. In effect, Winckelmann attempts to terminate the quest for certainty by giving an ultimate—and thereby dogmatic—answer to it. Winckelmann conceives aesthetics as being mostly about *works* (and not about *forces*), which are of course made of some kind of matter, but this matter is transcended by its meaning, which is a meaning of universal character, escaping the disturbances of the ever-changing sensuous world.¹⁰ Herder in turn fights for a dynamic conception of 'synthetic comprehension' ('synthetisches Begreifen') and insists on the idea of individuality: Herder teaches that certainty is something we always already have—and thus the task is not so much to search for certainty in an analytic fashion, but to reveal it by acting creatively.¹¹ This idea relies on the self-revealing self-certainty of the creative human mind's forces or capabilities. As Cassirer stresses, Herder presents a version of the notion of certainty and of its sources, which is essentially based on individuality. This conception draws on the rather poetic work of his teacher Johann Georg Hamann, who is regarded by Cassirer as the important link for the passage from Lessing to Herder.¹² But in contrast to his teacher—who was even more radically fostering individuality and whose style of thought was everything but systematic ('what he gives are not fragments, but fragments of fragments'¹³)—Herder tries to establish a more stringent philosophy of history in general and of aes-

thetics in particular, especially in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791) and his *Kritische Wälder* (1769). The idea of the intrinsic rules of action and (artistic) creation is formulated as ‘succession through force’, which means a succession, that is guided by the poetic ‘force’ of a certain individual.¹⁴ For Cassirer the important discovery that Herder’s philosophy brings to the fore is the idea of the basic *act of forming* (‘Formung’ = giving shape to something), which means the essential medium of human self-knowledge and self-determination.¹⁵

Cassirer deliberately stages the relation between Winckelmann’s so called ‘classicism’ and Herder’s more progressive position in inverted order, as if Winckelmann’s writings were the opposing reaction to Herder’s. Actually it was Herder, who polemically reacted to Winckelmann’s influential approach, while referring more balancedly—although still critically—to Lessing’s *Laokoon* (which was itself already a reaction to Winckelmann). Winckelmann’s aesthetics first appeared in his *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* in 1756 and thus very much at the beginning of the age of aesthetics, whereas Herder’s *Kritische Wälder* appeared 13 years later in 1769. Winckelmann’s approach would even fall out of classical aesthetics altogether, if Cassirer would strictly limit this period to the linear time scale illustrated above. But Cassirer’s non-linear presentation is not a clumsy attempt to get Winckelmann into the story; on the contrary, it is strictly justified by Cassirer’s method, which seeks to reconstruct the problems of aesthetics by putting them into a systematic context. Winckelmann is the antagonist, whose appearance represents the one great alternative to what the protagonists of the aesthetic discovery pursue. If there is a *dynamic* notion of form in Lessing and Herder, there must also be a *static* or ‘*plastic*’ one as its counterpart—and this is precisely Winckelmann’s notion of form.¹⁶ Furthermore, Winckelmann’s influence was obviously not restricted to the time of his writings, but pervaded the aesthetic discourse for a long time as a recurring authority. In this respect, Cassirer tries to do justice to Winckelmann’s approach as an important stage in aesthetic thought which in retrospect ‘leads’ to Schiller and Goethe as the ‘sublation’ of classical aesthetics.

Consequently, Friedrich Schiller makes his appearance in the course of Cassirer’s *Freiheit und Form* not merely as the representative of yet another stage within classical aesthetics, but rather as the culmination and ending of this specific era. However, at first sight, Schiller seems to discard the quest for certainty altogether, since his conception of the aesthetic play—as developed in the *Aesthetic Letters*—promotes indeed an appraisal of suspense and a certain kind of uncertainty. Indetermination, which means liberation, appears as the purpose and the very nature of aesthetic experience, which thus becomes *the* means of the core topic of Schiller’s philosophy: freedom. Freedom is only to be found in the aesthetic play, where it is experienced in the phenomenon of beauty. Beauty means the aesthetically experienced

certainty of freedom as occurring in the state of playing—though getting into the state of playing is itself a rather uncertain affair. The dialectical character of the play—being an uncertain affair, which nevertheless assures of the possibility of freedom—corresponds to the intricate conditions of the realization of freedom in human life. This is reflected by the pedagogical trait of Schiller’s aesthetics, which is about showing how the experienced certainty of freedom may emerge in an aesthetically edified human life—a life, in which the ‘ludic drive’ is fostered in its quest for beauty.

Cassirer’s reconstruction of Schiller’s aesthetics is admittedly much more detailed and complex than my rather pointed interpretation, which puts emphasis on the significance of freedom and beauty as modalities of the quest for certainty. But Cassirer, too, stresses that in Schiller beauty is constituted by the emergence of freedom in a concrete sensuous appearance—and this, again, means that freedom becomes certain in, and only in, beauty as provided by concrete vision.¹⁷ In other words, an encounter with the phenomenon of concrete beauty, in the dynamic state of aesthetic playing, gives evidence of freedom’s possibility in human life, an evidence which is not inferred, but sensuous and intuitive. But the intuitiveness of individual encounters with the phenomenon of beauty does not render these encounters simply contingent and merely subjective. Cassirer refers to a couple of letters, which Schiller wrote to Körner in the 1790s (a series of these became the famous *Kallias*-letters), where he shapes his ‘objective’ (‘gegenständliche’) law of beauty, which is rooted in a general cognitive function and a general *drive* within human nature.¹⁸

I would like to sum up Schiller’s position by saying that striving for beauty means striving for freedom and both are modes of the striving (or, along the lines of Kant’s logic, modes of the hope) for human self-certainty. As Schiller states in another letter to Körner from 1794 (which is again quoted by Cassirer), beauty is not an empirical term of description, but a normative claim and as such an *imperative*: We are still searching for freedom as presented in appearance.¹⁹ And aesthetics, in this sense, is the *normative theory of reassuring humanity of itself*.

If Baumgarten and Lessing represent alternative versions of the beginning, Schiller and Hegel represent alternative versions of the ending of the paradigmatic period of aesthetic thought in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: Whereas Schiller represents the end of classical aesthetics (according to Cassirer), Hegel represents the end of the whole age of aesthetics. But no matter which ending might be regarded as the more significant one, either way it becomes clear that the aesthetic pursuit of certainty requires an important role for intuition, not only in terms of concrete vision, but also in terms of the power of judgement as well as in terms of a distinctive mode of *aesthetic reason*. As we can see in aesthetic thinkers from Baumgarten and Lessing to Schiller and Hegel, aesthetics as philosophy treats certainty by recognizing the specific ways, in which *poetically mediated intuition* is en-

gaged in aesthetic operations and in aesthetic experience in general. This implies that the intuition in question is by no means ‘immediate’, but rather thoroughly mediated by creative imagination. The term ‘mediated intuition’ is the keyword which leads to the third part of this paper, where, finally, Goethe enters the scene as the hero of Eckart Förster’s recent reconstruction of German Idealism, to which I turn now.

III. THE METHODOLOGY AND AESTHETICS OF INTUITION

In his brilliant book about the *Twenty-five years of Philosophy*—which addresses the period between the release of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—Eckart Förster recently exhibited Goethe’s studies in the natural sciences as the execution of a ‘methodology of intuitive understanding’. Förster addresses a crucial period of philosophical thought, which falls entirely into the age of aesthetics, as described above. However, Förster is not addressing—at least not explicitly—problems of aesthetics. This is understandable, in as far as his major task consists in reconstructing the outrageous idea that philosophy might have begun with Kant and ended with Hegel (according to those philosophers themselves). This idea and the task to make it somehow intelligible does not primarily concern aesthetic thought, which is moreover clearly not the only signature of philosophy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In this sense, Förster’s not considering the aesthetic dimension of his subject matter is excusable, and it avoids a misunderstanding about the status of intuitive understanding as Förster conceives it in the context of scientific inquiry. Still, I would like to draw a connection between Förster’s reconstruction of Goethe’s ‘methodology of intuitive understanding’ and the function of ‘intuition’ in classical aesthetics.

What does intuitive understanding mean? The term appears in the third *Critique* in §§ 76 and 77, where Kant uses ‘intuitive understanding’ on the one side and ‘intellectual perception’ on the other as limit-concepts in order to show what human understanding is like: it is discursive in understanding and sensuous in perception. Thus intuitive understanding, as well as intellectual perception, is something humans do *not* have—in other words, what these concepts delineate is not human nature, but divine nature. Förster, however, argues that there are delicate distinctions within Kant’s argumentation, which (deliberately or not) allow for different readings concerning the range of this concept or idea.²⁰ Thus, Förster shows that the speculation about intuitive understanding does not necessarily lead to the assumption of a divine vision of nature in its totality; it is also possible to assume such a vision only of *aspects* of nature, i.e. of some of its products. And that assumption makes plausible a considerably more modest version of intuitive understanding, which suits the human mind as it only aims at *synthetically universal understanding*. This is a mode of understanding that starts with conceiving the whole of a particular

something and then moves on to the different internal states of that whole, i.e. the observable moments or phases, in which the whole becomes in a sense ‘viewable’. If *discursive* understanding proceeds by going from one part to another (*discurrere* in the Latin sense), in order to get sight of the whole by summarizing the parts, *intuitive* understanding has by contrast already an idea of the whole as it begins to proceed. This initial idea may be dark and incomplete, but it controls the process of understanding, which concerns the clarification of its very own parts, which is to say: its internal passages.

Interpreting the inherent distinctions of Kant’s claim, Förster shows (especially in the eleventh chapter of his book) that Goethe—who was in this respect strongly inspired by Spinoza, or rather by the Jacobian Spinozism of his time—has in fact established a plausible scientific method of intuitive understanding in the guise of his morphology of plants and later in his chromatics.²¹ This method takes its starting point at the conceived whole of the life-cycle of a plant (or the whole of the colour circle), and directs the scientific mind to the *moments of passage* within the cycle. In this sense, the methodology of intuitive understanding means *the study of passages* within the dynamics of a transformative whole (of a plant, for instance). The idea of the whole—the intuition—does not yet understand itself and therefore aims at a complete series of its internal passages.

But what is a *passage*? It is the conceivable, though not as such perceivable, way from one integral part of the respective whole to another part, which—according to the series that constitutes the processual whole—is the *next* part. Strictly speaking, the objects of direct perception are the concrete parts, while the passages between them are imagined—whereas ‘imagined’ does not mean deliberately made up, but cognitively apprehended (based on the concrete experience of systematic relations between the parts). Thus the indirect perception of such passages can only take place across the dynamics of sensual changes. Understanding passages means understanding the structure of a transitional movement from one state into another. If this kind of understanding has a direction as regards its perspective, it is twofold and reciprocal: It goes top-down from the intuited idea of the whole to its internal passages and then bottom-up from the concrete transitory phenomena to the whole, of which these phenomena are the momentary phases.

In his interpretation of the famous §§ 76 and 77 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Förster puts a lot of effort into explaining that ‘intuitive understanding’ and ‘intellectual intuition’ are by no means two names for the same thing, but rather opposing limit-concepts. According to Förster’s reading, they are two different attempts of speculation on the fundamental character of intuition and non-human (or super-human) understanding. But while intuitive understanding can be defended both as a possibility of human understanding in general and as an actual methodology of human inquiry (as in Goethe), there is no such path for intellectual intuition (even though Fichte tried to find it).²² The main reason is that intellectual intuition would require

a mode of actually creating the objects of understanding, since they cannot possibly stem from empirical, i.e. sensual intuition. This might in a sense seem possible in mathematics, but not in any kind of actual inquiry of the graspable phenomena of nature, understood as the world human beings live in. In other words, Kant's insistence on the fundamentally sensual character of human intuition is right: There can be no purely intellectual and thus non-sensual human intuition. However, from the obvious limitations of sensual intuition as the very source of uncertainty it does not follow that all modes of human understanding necessarily need to bypass these limitations strictly *discursively*. While human understanding is limited anyway, the study of phenomenal concretion as attained through attentive sensual detection is as much a source of knowledge—namely demonstrative knowledge—as discursive knowledge and thus *another path* of understanding. To avoid confusion: The claim is not that there is a pure mode of intuitive understanding, nor that the discursive and the intuitive modes are ever separated from each other. Human understanding is one, but it has (at least) two modes. Furthermore, the intuitive mode of understanding does not exclude discursive cognition from its operations—and as far as I can see neither Goethe, nor Förster is claiming anything like this. It rather integrates or accompanies discursivity without being reducible to it. So the claim is that intuitive understanding is possible and actually happening as soon as an inquiring mind gives attention to concrete occurrences as passing moments or stages of a whole—a whole, which is synthetically apprehended and always a relative, though still objective, one.

Coming back to aesthetics, the most remarkable point is that the systematic focus on phenomenal concretion and the moments of sensuous and sensual passages delineate precisely one of the central topics of philosophical aesthetics since Baumgarten. This is especially true for Lessing, Herder and Schiller, whose *aesthetics of intuition* Ernst Cassirer subsumes under the principle idea of 'form' or 'forming'. And furthermore this is already true for the—pre-systematic—aesthetic thought of Shaftesbury, who, as Cassirer presumes,²³ introduced the term 'intuitive understanding'—though in a Neoplatonic, not in a Spinozistic sense—into aesthetic discourse in the beginning of the eighteenth century. In this sense, Goethe's method in the natural sciences and the parallel endeavour of aesthetics share a common ground in intuitive understanding! But it is important to note that they do not merge into each other. Both are rigorous in style and scope, and they operate independently. But what they share is a *problem*, which concerns the promotion of sense-certainty to knowledge-certainty—to use more or less Hegelian terms. They do, of course, differ with regard to their subject matter: the subject of aesthetics is primarily poetic imagination and art, as well as the self-reflection of humanity in terms of its creative forces, whereas the subject of Goethe's scientific methodology consists in the conceivable phenomena of nature. Thus we have two basic modes of intuitive understanding:

- a) intuitive understanding, *scientifically* considered for the study of nature;
- b) intuitive understanding, *aesthetically* considered for the study of the human capacity of poetic imagination and artistic creation.

Consequently, intuitive understanding—be it from the perspective of artistic or of scientific intuition—shows two poles of certainty, which build a corresponding cycle: First, the initially had, but still unclear certainty of the initial whole, and second, the articulated, effectively transformed certainty of the ‘new’ whole. The latter is the product of the largely non-discursive—or: not-only-discursive—explication, which the passage-oriented study undertakes, in order to make the intuition understood. But none of these modes of certainty are immediate or self-evident, even though common sense and a longstanding tradition of ‘immediatism’ in philosophy may notoriously say so. They are always already entangled in articulation and thus modes of *mediated* intuitive certainty. The initially had intuition is already mediated, since every act of perception (which is not the mere reception of sense-data) has its inner articulation or ‘symbolic pregnancy’ as Cassirer says. And the mediation of certainty as resulting from intuitive understanding consists in the method by which it is attained—like the method of ordering the series of cyclically passing stages as in morphology or chromatics.

While Goethe’s morphology and chromatics, as Förster maintains, can be regarded as an attempt to smooth the way for a methodological consideration of intuitive understanding in the natural sciences, aesthetics—as a new branch of philosophy—is already in its own way exploring this path of intuition as a modality of understanding and (normative) reason.²⁴ Summing up what has been said above, aesthetics in the eighteenth century—at least since Shaftesbury, as Cassirer pointed out—becomes the specific kind of philosophy, which reveals the functioning of intuition as thought-controlled affection.²⁵ It is thus another crucial source for a philosophic theory of intuitive understanding, which Förster is looking out for.

Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that even Förster—who, as I said, widely neglects aesthetics—chooses the decisively aesthetic example of watching an ‘experimental’ movie, as he tries to demonstrate how intuitive understanding works (apart from Goethe’s manners of studying nature).²⁶ Förster thinks of a movie, which is ‘experimental’ in the sense that the scenes, which make up the filmic story, appear in a seemingly disjointed order. Only after watching the whole movie, when the final scene has shed a new light on all the preceding scenes, the connectedness of the parts is finally revealed and a key for understanding the whole story is delivered. I guess we should best think of movies like *Memento* by Christopher Nolan, the episodic movies by Alejandro González Iñárritu like *21 grams*, or, probably best known, *Pulp Fiction* (by Quentin Tarantino). While watching either one of these movies for the first time, the parts of the whole are given to the viewer, but what is lacking are the passages that connect them and make them a whole. Yet, as soon as the viewer has the key to the *idea* of the whole, as delivered by the

last scene, as Förster imagines, she or he can watch the movie for the second time and easily *see* the intelligible passages of the parts in the light of their final connection.

Unfortunately, Förster did not elaborate this example any further, and, surprisingly, he does not even mention the aesthetic quality of the filmic experience, while stressing its quotidian character. Still, this example emphasizes an inherent connection between the scientific methodology of intuitive understanding on the one side and aesthetics as the philosophy of poetically mediated intuition on the other. The link between them is the principle of *exemplaricity*: On the scientific as well as on the aesthetic side, the example—i.e. the description of a singular concrete appearance—serves as the means of *demonstration*, which is the very mode of generating intuitive certainty.

Förster ends his book on *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy* with an outlook on the future of philosophy and states that the only path that is still open for the philosophical efforts of tomorrow, was the path of intuition or, more precisely, of a ‘*scientia intuitiva*’.²⁷ Since the path of discursive understanding is already well-trodden, the philosophy of the future will have to be a (new) philosophy of intuition. If Förster’s statement is adequate, it would implicitly underline the significance and importance of philosophical aesthetics out of the spirit of its classical period, when the concept of intuition was shaped and valued by this new branch of philosophy.

Philosophy would, however, first have to come to terms with the unwanted (metaphysically overcharged) implications of this concept in order to make the idea of intuition more clear. In other words, philosophy would have to articulate its intuitions about ‘intuition’. Therefore—at least in the reconstructive attitude Förster promotes—it would have to recollect all the effort and the hopes that have already been put into ‘intuition’ in various philosophical traditions. To name but a few outlooks from the twentieth century, that should be considered as treating intuitions as the source, the means or the goal of philosophical inquiry, there are the tradition of phenomenology since Husserl, the Bergsonian tradition of intuitionism through Deleuze, the use of epistemic and ethical intuitions in parts of the analytic tradition, as well as James’ radical empiricism and other aspects of American pragmatism like Dewey’s emphasis on ‘qualitative thought’. Besides this, there are already attempts to explain how a methodological consideration of ‘the genius’ might be sustained—taken as a figurative, but still necessary assumption about the (non-mythical) source of creativity—, without any concession whatsoever to the metaphysics of romanticism.²⁸

Förster’s claim concerning the future of philosophy, which aims at (yet another) complete revision of philosophy’s prevalent tasks, is too bold, too far-reaching, and still too vague to be discussed and developed at the end of this paper. But if the envisaged path of a ‘*scientia intuitiva*’ will be taken all (no matter on which side of the path), there is a lot of material to be

systematically reconstructed—and it will be inescapable to incorporate aesthetics, which is no less than the most competent authority for the forces and ‘laws’ that make up and control the process of intuition as passage-oriented attention. It is thus a distinguished guide to find the path, which may lead to a science of intuition in the first place.

IV. A SPECULATIVE OUTLOOK ON ‘AESTHETIC CERTAINTY’

Being inspired by such visionary suggestions, I shall sum up my findings by speculating on an answer to the remaining question: What is *aesthetic certainty*? If the rise of (classical) aesthetics is about a quest for a specific kind of certainty (emerging within the intuitive mode of understanding), this kind of certainty must consequently be qualified as aesthetic. To be clear, not all intuitive understanding proceeds aesthetically, but all aesthetic certainty can only be attained within intuitive understanding.

The following is a collection of speculative elements towards an intelligible notion of aesthetic certainty:

1. Aesthetic certainty is certainty as concretely experienced in intuitive understanding.
 - 1.1. It is derived from demonstrative insight.
 - 1.1.1. ‘Insight’ means the moment of recognizing or grasping something sensually present in its complex quality and relations.
 - 1.1.2. ‘Demonstrative’ indicates that this kind of insight relies on something that is shown. In other words, it relies on a material (sensual) vision, in which understanding is itself carried out. This happens, for instance, in composing a series of specimen, which demonstrates the overarching idea of the morphology of a species; and this happens in experiencing a work of art, say a movie, a poem or a piece of music, which cannot be understood properly by description, but only by showing its impact in the quality of its appearing.²⁹ In both cases the understanding of passages is essential, and these passages need to be *presented* in order to be graspable.
 - 1.1.3. Demonstrative insight equals the function of ‘knowledge’ (though this term is probably too captious) as regards the material conception of the complex relations of something present to sensual intuition.
 - 1.2. This insight, from which aesthetic certainty is derived, is insight into concretion.
 - 1.2.1. Insight into concretion basically means that it does not work by means of abstraction, which is the very instrument of discursive understanding. It is a material, not a formal insight into sensually apprehended dynamic structures (passages).
 - 1.2.2. Abstract ideas (like the idea of the whole of a plant’s life cycle, or the whole of the movie’s story) may inform, even pervade the process

- of intuitive understanding as long as they are converted into concrete material moments of contemplation (as passing complexes, which present themselves to sensual attention).
2. Certainty becomes specifically *aesthetic* as it is derived from the conscious intensification of sensual and imaginative activity.
 - 2.1. This intensification conveys a greater clarity of sensual conception.³⁰
 - 2.1.1. As defined *ex negativo* ‘intensification’ means to forgo the economical reduction of ‘symbolic’ abbreviations, which on their part serve the kind of clarity ‘logical’ conception provides.
 - 2.1.2. Consequently ‘intensification’ means the conscious broadening of one’s attention to the phenomenal patterns of actual experience.
 - 2.2. The clarity in question (which is precisely not the clarity of ‘logical’ conception) means the imaginative or poetical enhancement of sensual conception (which is not to be confused with mere fancy).
 - 2.3. Clarity is the prerequisite of certainty: Clarity as poetical enhancement of a consciously broadened sensual conception is the prerequisite of aesthetic certainty.
 - 2.4. Aesthetic certainty thus consists (at least in part) in the *experience* of such clarity in sensual conception.
 - 2.4.1. An alternative phrasing, using Herder’s terms, is: Aesthetic certainty consists in a self-consciously experienced act of synthetic comprehension.
 - 2.4.2. The ‘experience’ of clarity indicates the moment, in which synthetic comprehension (as an act of understanding) becomes apparent as a singular event.
 3. Aesthetic certainty is the self-reflective experience of certainty.
 - 3.1. This thesis was already implied in the preceding ones, especially in 2.2. and 2.4., since the experience of clarity in conception (insight into concretion) is necessarily self-reflective.
 - 3.2. Certainty can only be experienced, where uncertainty is the normal case: namely in the field of sensual experience, which is the sphere of human’s limited intuition. Otherwise neither a methodology, nor an aesthetics of intuition would be needed. This we learn from the age of aesthetics (as described above).
 - 3.2.1. Among other things we learn (from Kant) that the subjectivity of judgement becomes certain in aesthetic judgement, which takes place despite the fundamental uncertainties of its common acceptance as objective.
 - 3.2.2. We also learn (from Herder) about individuality as certain in the aesthetic act of forming, which is, in short, the act of controlling inner and outer forces.
 4. Aesthetic certainty is the certainty of freedom.
 - 4.1. Together with ‘form’, this is the actual motif of classical aesthetics and the pressing problem to which it is responding in the beginning (Lessing)

- and in the end (Schiller).
- 4.2. Lessing's claim (i.e. Cassirer's reading of it) about the self-governed rules of aesthetic intuition delineates the 'individual law', which is the epitome of human freedom.³¹
 - 4.2.1. While creating a work of art (or performing an aesthetic vision in general), I experience myself as the ruler, who is actively setting the 'law' of this act.
 - 4.2.2. In setting the law in an aesthetic act, I experience myself as acting freely.
 - 4.2.3. In experiencing myself as the ruler, who sets the law freely, not only the law, but my freedom to set it, become certain—though this certainty prevails only in the aesthetic act.
 - 4.3. From Schiller we learn that freedom is experienced in the dynamic state of playing, which is the moment, in which human life reflects itself.
 - 4.3.1. The playing is between me and a concrete sensual appearance.
 - 4.3.2. The dynamic state of playing is the moment, in which beauty is experienced—as a concrete sensual appearance and my reflective experience of this experience.
 - 4.3.3. Beauty is the experience of a concrete sensual appearance of freedom itself.
 - 4.3.4. Thus the possibility of freedom becomes a certainty of aesthetic experience (and the quest for the realization of this possibility takes place by means of aesthetic edification).
 - 4.4. Thus, the certainty of freedom is conveyed aesthetically—and what becomes certain in aesthetic experience is freedom (or the possibility of it).
 5. Aesthetic certainty is the self-certainty that I am existing in this world—and that I fit into it.³²
 - 5.1. It is for certain the clarity of *my* sensual conception, *my* demonstrative insight into concretion, the intensification of *my* sensual and imaginative activities, it is *my* judgement, *my* individuality in the act of forming, *my* rule for *my* creative act, and it is *my* freedom I experience.
 - 5.2. By experiencing the world with the greatest clarity of insight into its sensually comprehended concretion, and while experiencing my own 'forces' and the inner-worldly possibility of freedom, I experience myself as having an *affirmative attitude* towards the world. So one thing is certain: I am part of this world, I must be existing in it and I must somehow be fitting into it.
 6. Aesthetic certainty is never able to promote itself to the state of 'truth': The quest goes on forever.

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NOTES

1. Cf. Dewey 2008.
2. See the famous § 1 of Baumgarten 2009, which gives the definition of aesthetics as the science of sensual knowledge/cognition: ‘Aesthetica (...) est scientia cognitionis sensitivae’.
3. ‘Certainty’ is Kant’s name for the modality of logical completeness of knowledge (‘logische Vollkommenheit des Erkenntnisses der Modalität nach’) and aesthetic certainty is its sensory correlate. Cf. Immanuel Kant 1923, volume IX, chapter IX (<http://www.korpora.org/kant/aa09/>).
4. Cf. Kant 1923, IX, p. 84 (<http://www.korpora.org/kant/aa09/084.html>).
5. Ernst Cassirer 1998 (hereafter referred to as Cassirer PdA); Cassirer 1994 (hereafter referred to as Cassirer FF).
6. ‘In der Tat blieb die Wirkung Baumgartens auf einen engen Kreis beschränkt, und in das eigentliche Leben der neuen deutschen Dichtung hat er kaum eingegriffen. Erst Lessing hat hier den Bann gebrochen.’ Cassirer PdA: p. 477 (emphasis by Cassirer).
7. In German it is ‘demonstrative Gewißheit’. Cassirer uses the term as a take-off to his description of Baumgarten’s philosophy, cf. PdA: p. 453.
8. My translation from Cassirer FF: p. 105: ‘Zwischen dem, was das Genie tut, und dem, was die echten wahrhaften Regeln aussagen, kann kein Gegensatz entstehen: denn in der Freiheit des Genies ist der Quell aller künstlerischen Notwendigkeit erschlossen.’
9. Cassirer FF: p. 106: ‘Beide, das göttliche und das menschliche ‘Genie’, verbindet der gemeinsame Zug, daß sie eine Anschauung des Ganzen der Welt ihr eigen nennen, die nicht mühsam aus den Teilen zusammengelesen werden muß. Kraft dieser Gesamtansicht wird jede echte Tragödie zur wahrhaften Theodizee.’
10. Cf. Cassirer FF: pp. 127-139, and within this chapter, especially pp. 130-132.
11. Cf. Cassirer FF: pp. 108-127, and for Herder’s conception of ‘synthetic comprehension’ see especially p. 119.
12. Cf. Cassirer FF: p. 108.
13. Cassirer FF: p. 109, my translation.
14. The respective passage is to be found in chapter 16 of the first volume of the *Kritische Wälder* (Herder 1769) and quoted in Cassirer FF: p. 121.
15. Cassirer: FF: p. 127.
16. Cf. Cassirer FF: p. 139.
17. Cf. Cassirer FF: p. 285. ‘Vision’ as well as the German word ‘(sinnliche) Anschauung’ are of course not restricted to visual perception, but indicate sensual experience in all its modalities.
18. Cf. Cassirer FF: p. 284.
19. Cassirer FF: p. 288.
20. Eckart Förster 2012, 158-160, and 253-276.
21. Cf. Förster 25 Jahre: chapter 4 (‘Wie wird man Spinozist’; ‘How to become a Spinozist’), pp. 87-109.
22. Cf. chapters 8 and 10 of Förster’s book.
23. Cf. Cassirer PdA: p. 424. As the footnote on this page indicates, Cassirer seems to read Shaftesbury mainly through or at least in connection with Schiller. This becomes more obvious in his essay on ‘Schiller and Shaftesbury’ from 1935, in: Cassirer 2004, 333-352.
24. This view — at least as regards the relation of art and natural sciences (both embodied in Goethe) — is supported by David E. Wellbery in an essay on Förster’s idea of a ‘methodology of intuitive understanding’, cf. Wellbery 2013, 259-274.
25. Cf. Cassirer: PdA, pp. 417-443 (‘IV. Die Ästhetik der Intuition und das Genieproblem’), especially p. 425.
26. Förster 2012, 261.
27. Cf. Förster 2012, 366, cf. also Förster 2012, 371.
28. Besides Cassirer it was, for instance, Edgar Wind, who took up this task and showed (already in his remarkable dissertation from 1922), this reading of the idea of the genius tracks back to Kant’s methodological use of it. Cf. Wind 2011, 295-300.
29. The term ‘appearing’ as opposed to ‘appearance’ is borrowed from Martin Seel.
30. The terminology here is more or less taken from Cassirer PdA: p. 466.
31. I borrow this term, of course, from Simmel.
32. I emphasized the significance of aesthetic experience for taking part in the world and

fitting into it in my book *Die Kopfhörerin*, Niklas 2014. At least in part, the argument draws from Josef Früchtl's thesis

about the reestablishment of trust into the world by aesthetic experience of movies, cf. Früchtl 2013.

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