Aesthetics is a part of our lived experience, yet is often regarded as that which reveals the limits of academic knowledge. It has been thought to lack the possibility of “epistemic fixation” (Seel 2000). Nevertheless, when aesthetics was introduced as a distinct philosophical field it was because the philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) wanted to fixate the aesthetic, a property of the object, both practically and theoretically, to avoid losing the aesthetic to the irrational. Baumgarten did not doubt the existence of aesthetic objects (formal beauty); that is, he did not question the individual work’s status as an object of aesthetics, and wanted to find scientific ways of investigating it.

Nearly three hundred years have passed since Baumgarten inaugurated the field of aesthetics, and although aesthetics has played a rather limited role in more contemporary philosophy, perhaps due to its complexity and linguistic opacity, the epistemic fixation of aesthetics has once again gained currency. The philosopher Mark Johnson (2007), inspired by both hermeneutic and pragmatist traditions, argues in his most recent book, *The Meaning of the Body. Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, that experiences with art are exemplary for all modes of meaning-making. Aesthetic experience, he claims, reveals meaning at an intensified level as it reaches beyond the linguistic, beyond the conceptual and propositional. To understand experiences with art is the beginning point for understanding experience. Drawing upon such different philosophers as Dewey and Gadamer, he argues that aesthetics should play a central role in philosophy for this very reason; it is actually the area of inquiry from which all philosophy should begin.
The Beginning of Philosophical Aesthetics

The field of aesthetics is a philosophical concern since Baumgarten’s inauguration of it. He writes not long after Descartes and not long before Kant, and may have held the same opinion as Descartes that (sense)truth is granted through divinity, yet takes part in the Enlightenment’s steadfast belief in Reason. Baumgarten attempts to extend the domain of reason to include perception and the arts too; they have their own cognitionis sensitivae (Baumgarten 1735, p. 77), or “sensate cognition.”

Baumgarten’s method is the same as that of his contemporary rationalists. He uses logical and rational arguments, and within the truth of his basic propositions the stringent arguments mainly stand or fall. Within Rationalism true knowledge is to be found through the use of reason. Baumgarten, through his love for poetics (and science/logic), realizes that if the arts are regarded as irrational then they lie outside the domain of what can be investigated scientifically. He wants to rescue the arts from the irrational and attempts to show how they have their own logic. “I wish to make it plain that philosophy and the knowledge of how to construct a poem, which are often held to be antithetical, are linked together in the most amiable union” (ibid. p. 36). Their logic, however, is different from that of the higher cognitive faculty. In Reflections on Poetry (1735), where the concept “aisthesis” or “aesthetics” is first used (Aschenbrenner and Holter 1954), he tries to show how poetics are the perfect representations for sense perception. It is perfect “sensate discourse” or “sensate cognition.”

Baumgarten writes in Latin and the term “aisthesis” harkens back to the ancient Greeks: Aristotle used it in De Anima to describe sense experience. Baumgarten argues for an independent scientific study of perception or sense experience, which he calls aesthetics. It is the first time that aesthetics is construed as an independent field, and it is not only linked to perception, but also to the arts: Baumgarten regards poetics as sense representations perfected, a main point he argues for in Reflections.

To bring his point home, Baumgarten needs to concern himself with the powers of the mind. In keeping with the contemporary faculty psychology, a differentiation of the mind into discrete functions, he sees cognition as bipartite: it comprises the higher faculty of thought (including logic) and the lower faculty of perception (Aschenbrenner and Holter 1954). Perception is as such to Baumgarten not a pure sense impression but a cognitive act, and it does not only provide the higher cognitive faculty with food (or sensing) for thought – it contains its own mode of knowing the world, a knowledge that is perfected in the arts. Perception actually finds its outmost sensuous expression in the arts, and