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## Aesthetics in Motion

On György Szerdahely's Dynamic Aesthetics

### I. Prooemium

The 1778 publication of the systematic treatise of György Alajos Szerdahely (1740–1808) entitled *Aesthetica sive Doctrina Boni Gustus ex Philosophia Pulcri deducta in Scientias, et Artes Amaeniores* (Aesthetics or the Doctrine of Good Taste based on the Philosophy of Beauty deduced from the Amiable Sciences and Arts)<sup>1</sup> marks the beginning of a relatively self-contained tradition in Hungarian aesthetics which ended in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a tradition of »university aesthetics«<sup>2</sup> made up of works written in Latin which were consciously embedded in the unfolding new European discipline of aesthetics rather than in the contemporary national context.<sup>3</sup> The different forms of his

- 1 Georgio Aloysio Szerdahely: *Aesthetica sive Doctrina Boni Gustus ex Philosophia Pulcri deducta in Scientias, et Artes Amaeniores*. Buda 1778, vol. 1–2. For the online edition of the original corpus in Latin, see *Opera Aesthetica Szerdahelyana* <<http://deba.unideb.hu/deba/szerdahely/aesthetica.php>> [20.03.2018]. All citations from this work are by reference to section.
- 2 In addition to Szerdahely, authors such as Ferenc Verseghy (*Analyticae Institutionum Linguae Hungaricae*, I–III, 1816/17) and Lajos Schedius (*Principia philocaliae, seu doctrinae pulcri, ad scientiae formam exigere conatus est*, 1828) can also be regarded as part of this Hungarian tradition of university aesthetics. Tomáš Hlobil has argued for the importance of the concept of »university aesthetics« and an »institutional approach« to the history of aesthetics in many of his writings. For an overview of the tradition of university aesthetics at Prague University, see Tomáš Hlobil: »250 Years of Aesthetics at Prague University – How the History of the Teaching of Aesthetics Has Evaded Historians«. In: *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* 5 (2013), 19–33.
- 3 This latter factor, needless to say, had a devastating effect on the reception of this tradition in the grand narratives of the rise of Hungarian (literary) culture. This is especially true of Szerdahely, who became, in addition, a fearful conservative authority in the politics of education in his later years. However, as István Margócsy argues, one misunderstands Szerdahely if one considers him an opponent of the program of modernisation based on his later political role or just because he was not promoting *the dominant* program of modernisation bound exclusively to the improvement of the Hungarian language (represented by such heroes of the grand narratives as György Bessenyei and Ferenc Kazinczy). In the 1770s and 1780s, when Szerdahely elaborated his aesthetic theory, Margócsy argues there were two coexistent modernising programs in Hunga-

name – György Alajos / Georgio Aloysio / Georg Aloys Szerdahely – perfectly reflect the different sources of his thought: Szerdahely, a Jesuit until the 1773 dissolution of the order who was exceptionally conversant in the Latin Humanist tradition, and also a *poeta doctus* who wrote in Latin, became the first Hungarian professor of aesthetics (1774–1784).<sup>4</sup>

This paper seeks to reconstruct Szerdahely's arguments as found in his *Aesthetica* concerning (1) the discipline of aesthetics, (2) the concept of taste and the beautiful, in order to reveal (3) the significance of the psychological and anthropological aspects of his theory. Focusing on the concept of »vivacity« (*Vivacitas*), one of the indispensable elements of beauty and the power of an artwork to evoke an intense affective response, the paper argues that this concept and our anthropological disposition to self-preservation through instinctive affective reactions (desire or aversion) constitute the underpinnings of his conception of artistic experience (a sympathetic engagement with an artwork). Furthermore, the paper also analyses, how these psychological and anthropological factors modify Szerdahely's notion of beauty and assure that aesthetics and aesthetic experience itself can become *the vehicle of real humanity*.

The paper will focus mainly on a close reading of Szerdahely's *Aesthetica*, or, to be more precise, on the relations of the particular statements or arguments in the overall structure. I adopt this approach for two reasons: first, regarding the particular arguments, Szerdahely is not an original thinker, strictly speaking. His work consists in no small part of paraphrases or translations from both classical rhetorical and modern aesthetic works. In the introductory chapter (*Prooemium*), Szerdahely reflects on his methodology, which seems to be in line with his view of aesthetics as the novel, shared enterprise of excellent authors; but at

ry: one, which later became exclusive, focused on the improvement of the national language, while the other, represented by individual endeavours such as Szerdahely's doctrine of taste, intended to spread the ideas of the Enlightenment, but determined literary value in terms of aesthetic properties (and not of belonging to the vernacular) and the social value of literature in terms of an aesthetic Bildung (and not of national improvement). See István Margócsy: »Szerdahely György művészetelmélete« [György Szerdahely's Theory of Art]. In: *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 93 (1989), 1–33, here: 31–33.

4 For Szerdahely's biography, see Béla Jánosi: *Szerdahely György Aesthetikája* [György Szerdahely's Aesthetics]. Budapest 1914, 4–7; Sándor Attila Tóth: *A szép-jó hatalma és a jezsuita szellem. Szerdahely György költészetelmélete és poézise* [The Power of the Beautiful-Good and the Jesuit Spirit. György Szerdahely's Poetics and Poetry]. Budapest 2009, 12–16.

the same time, he also emphasizes his own contribution through the act of compiling (selecting, evaluating) and illuminating examples (also chosen from the rhetorical-poetic tradition). Even though this ›methodological eclecticism‹ was in no way unique or scandalous in Szerdahely's time (one of his sources, Friedrich Justus Riedel, for instance, also applied it), it became a recurring theme in his reception, leading to the devaluation of his work as a mere compilation that lacks any originality.

Recently, however, the issue has been revisited by excellent interpreters with convincing results. Piroška Balogh, for example, argues that Szerdahely's method is based on an experiential foundation opposing dogmatism. Szerdahely, Balogh points out, operates a voice of a narrator which is sometimes admittedly subjective and uncertain, even ironic, and, while searching for truth, the narrator often stops, admits its limitations (referring to experience), and then starts again. This rhetoricized, reflexive, and experimental construction of the text transforms the *Aesthetica* into an intellectual ›travelogue‹.<sup>5</sup> Examining Szerdahely's eclecticism, Gergely Fórizs has shown that the passages which reflect on the act of compilation are themselves incorporated Cicero-segments, and this hidden reference suggests that Szerdahely ›constructs the character of the narrator as an eclectic philosopher through a reference to the classical author's reflections on his own method, who is considered to be one of the fathers of philosophical eclecticism.‹ Standing on this tradition, Fórizs argues, the compiler, like Cicero's ›existimator‹ opposed to the ›magister‹ in the *Orator*, must possess freedom and originality while examining a problem and selecting and evaluating his sources. Furthermore, this can result in a reading of the work which interprets its contradictory parts not as inconsistencies but as *various stages* of an unfolding aesthetic theory.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, recent research supports the second foundation of my approach: Szerdahely's *Aesthetica* is a *composed creative unity* which compels the interpreter to go beyond the acknowledgment and registration of the incorporated

5 Balogh also refers to the various sources of this method, from Bacon's aphoristic approach to the tradition of *Vernunftlehre* or the *meditationes*. See Piroška Balogh: *Téória és medialitás. A latinitás a magyarországi tudásáramlásban 1800 körül* [Theory and Mediality. Latinity in the Hungarian Flow of Knowledge around 1800]. Budapest 2015, 18, 33–37.

6 See Gergely Fórizs: ›Szerdahely György Alajos *Aestheticájának* alapelvei‹ [The Principles of György Alajos Szerdahely's *Aesthetica*]. In: *Irodalomtörténet* 94 (2013), 2, 187–207, here: 198–201, quotation from 199.

segments<sup>7</sup> to the *method* and *results* of this incorporation. Influenced mainly by the writings of German »popular philosophers«, such as Friedrich Justus Riedel's *Theorie der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* (1767) and Johann Georg Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (1771–74), Szerdahely puts to use some insights of the aesthetics of the Wolffian School, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750/58), and Georg Friedrich Meier's *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* (1748–50), but in many ways his theory is closer to the main work of criticism of the Scottish Enlightenment, Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762), a work which had an enormous influence on German (university) aesthetics. At the same time, as the heritage of Jesuit learning, he has the tradition of Latin Humanist poetics and rhetoric as his broad field of reference. His *Aesthetica* thus reflects the complexity and vitality of the new aesthetic discourse, while it also seeks to contribute to it, and his endeavour can lead us to some interesting questions.

## II. Aesthetica

*Uniformity amidst variety*: an insight of the ancients, re-contextualized and revitalized by such different modern authors as the Cartesian Jean-Pierre de Crousaz in Lausanne, the Lockean Francis Hutcheson in Dublin – or, as we will see, the former Jesuit rhetorician György Szerdahely, who held lectures in Bratislava, Buda, and then Pest. But this classicist formula can be also used to characterize German<sup>8</sup> *philosophical aesthetics* during the second half of the 18th century. Ernst Cassirer points out in his 1932 seminal work, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, that what assures the *unity* of Germanic philosophical aesthetic theories within the »uninterrupted exchange of ideas« in the (quasi-)

7 This was done in the 20th-century reception of the work. See Jánosi: *Szerdahely* (= note 4), 11–35; Endre Nagy: *A magyar esztétika történetéből. Felvilágosodás és reformkor* [The History of Hungarian Aesthetics. Enlightenment and the Reform Era]. Budapest 1983, 9–67.

8 As Kai Hammermeister notes, it would be better to speak of a »Germanic aesthetic tradition« because of the large number of authors – from Søren Kierkegaard to Georg Lukács – who certainly belong to the intellectual landscape of German philosophy but were not Germans and did not work in Germany. I argue that in the case of the 18th century, it is not only the Swiss Johann Jacob Bodmer and Johann Jacob Breitinger who may justify this small conceptual change, but also several Central European thinkers, such as Szerdahely himself. See Kai Hammermeister: *The German Aesthetic Tradition*. Cambridge 2002, x–xi.

aesthetic discourse of the period is their *systematicity*. The introduction of aesthetics to systematic philosophy did not only mean satisfying the requirements of a particular philosophical system, especially if one considers that 18th-century German aesthetics covers much more than theories sprung from Wolffian rationalism. Cassirer suggests that *systematicity* is important in the sense of focusing on the *relations* between the logic of human sensate life (i.e. of imagination, sensory perception, passions) and the workings of the mind and society. Furthermore, through the cultivation of the lower cognitive faculties, the new discipline, implying a »new ideal of humanity,« also contributes to the »doctrine of man,« a novel »philosophical anthropology.«<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, based *solely* on this sense of systematicity, the label »philosophical aesthetics« might be applied to earlier discourses: authors of the Scottish Enlightenment like Kames, for instance, considered the »rational science« of criticism part of the »science of man,« since by deducing the principles of art from »the sensitive branch of human nature« criticism can »open a direct avenue to the heart of man,« resulting not only in psychological, but also in socio-political insights.<sup>10</sup>

In his *Aesthetica*, Szerdahelyi also seeks to satisfy the requirements of systematic philosophy and to find the place of the new »philosophical discipline« (*Disciplina Philosophica*) in the general philosophical knowledge of man. Following Riedel, he argues that »just as man either thinks, acts, or feels (*sentit*); philosophy should also deal with the true, the good, or the beautiful« (I.I.II. III). This differentiation enables him to justify the rise of an autonomous discipline alongside dialectics, physics, metaphysics, ethics, and politics. At one point, Szerdahelyi seems to suggest that it is the systematic form that distinguishes modern philosophical aesthetics *as a science* from »a kind of aesthetics in practice« (I.I.IV.I) during Antiquity and early Modernity.<sup>11</sup>

The *variety* of philosophical aesthetics lies in its *openness*: even though as a distinct philosophical discipline aesthetics was born within the Wolffian School as the science of sensible cognition, the proper subject and desired method

9 See Ernst Cassirer: *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove. Princeton 1951, 331–333, 352–353.

10 Henry Home, Lord Kames: *Elements of Criticism* [1762]. Ed. and intr. Peter Jones. Indianapolis 2005, vol. 1, 14, 32.

11 In his enumeration of the representatives of this *practical aesthetics* and *artistic taste*, Szerdahelyi mentions Homer, Anacreon, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Cicero, Longinus, Phidias, Praxiteles, and Parrhasius and, from the Renaissance and early Modernity, Petrarch, Muret, Malherbe, Strada, Bacon, Bouhours, Boileau, Pope, Titian, Correggio, and Hogarth (I.I.IV.I).

of the new discipline remained highly contested. There were many competing aesthetic programs in the German Enlightenment, and even though the term ›aesthetics‹ became extremely popular, the initial conception proposed by Baumgarten was soon challenged and even overshadowed by various programs, despite the fact that most aestheticians recognized the significance of the Baumgartian travels through the ›mist-shrouded lands‹ of sensible cognition.<sup>12</sup> However, in their quest for a proper aesthetics, many representatives of the new science connected their programs to different philosophical discussions on beauty, taste, and the fine arts, which originally had not been considered part of a distinct philosophical discipline.

For example, Riedel, who was one of Szerdahely's main sources, when reviewing the possible alternatives for the new discipline in his *Theorie der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften*, mentions three ›paths‹ of aesthetics: the objective, artwork-centred Aristotelian, the conceptual Baumgartian, and the subjective-psychological Kamesian, which focuses on sensations called forth by artworks. In his rigorous and spirited criticism of Riedel's work in the Fourth Grove of his *Critical Forests*, Herder rightly remarks that many other names could have been listed beside the ones chosen by his countryman. Furthermore, Herder is also right to assert that these ›paths‹ are in no way mutually exclusive: aesthetic theory, at its best, unites these alternatives: ›without combining all three paths, which in reality are but a single path, no aesthetics is truly possible.‹<sup>13</sup> Be that as it may, this tendency blurred the boundaries between *aesthetic* and *critical theories*, creating a diverse aesthetic terrain.

Szerdahely reflects on the *modernity* of the ›name, cultivation, extension, method, and facility‹ of aesthetics (I.I.V.II.), listing Baumgarten, Meier, and Sulzer as its most important modern representatives. However, not surprisingly in light of the aforementioned openness of the new science, he also includes Shaftesbury, Burke, Kames, Batteux, and Du Bos (I.I.V.II.), authors who probably never would have thought they would eventually end up in such company. Szerdahely's enumeration perfectly indicates how the new discipline had already annexed the wider (quasi/pre)aesthetic discourse by the end of the 1770s, and that in his first *Critique* Immanuel Kant did not oversimplify when he stated that ›[t]he Germans are the only ones who now

12 Johann Gottfried Herder: ›A Monument to Baumgarten‹. In: Idem: *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*. Trans. and ed. Gregory Moore. Princeton–Oxford 2006, 43.

13 See Johann Gottfried Herder: ›Critical Forests. Fourth Grove, on Riedel's Theory of the Beaux Arts‹. In: Herder: *Selected* (= note 12), 186–189, here: 189.

employ the word ›aesthetics‹ to designate that which others call the critique of taste.«<sup>14</sup>

But the openness of 18th-century Germanic aesthetics goes beyond the aesthetic appropriation of different contemporary artistic, critical, moral, theological, psychological, etc. discourses. Szerdahely's program reveals how the new discipline incorporated the rhetorical and poetic tradition, and not only the classical textual corpus that served as a rich field of reference, but also the Latin Humanist ideals that saturated it (e.g. the ideal of the *orator perfectus*, the requisite of the unity of *decorum* and *honestum*, etc.). Poetics and rhetoric were especially significant in Jesuit learning, since as *studia humanitatis* or *artes humaniores* they formed the venue of self-knowledge and self-cultivation (*Bildung, paideia*) towards *humanitas*.<sup>15</sup> This concept of *Bildung* was in accord with the revitalization of *humanitas* in 18th-century thought<sup>16</sup> and continued by the conception of aesthetics (already inherent in the Baumgartian proposal and the criticism of the Scottish Enlightenment) as a science that – by cultivating and humanizing our sensible life or by polishing our manners and taste – enlivens the whole person and guides her as she becomes something more.<sup>17</sup> In Szerdahely's *Aesthetica*, the heritage of the Latin Humanist tradition is present not only in his classical references, but also in his extensive and emphatic treatment of the affections. Needless to say, affectivity permeates many modern aesthetic theories, albeit its importance is often overlooked, as are its connections to the rhetorical tradition.<sup>18</sup> I will argue that Szerdahely's theory of the affections is not a mere residue of rhetoric, but turns out to be crucial for his overall conception of aesthetics as well.

But let's start at the beginning to see the unfolding of his conception. Although Szerdahely incorporates the Baumgartian program of the cultivation of the lower cognitive faculties through the arts (I.I.II.III.), he emphasizes that his program does not encompass ›the whole of sensitive cognition‹ (*totam co-*

14 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge 1998, A21/B35, 156, 173.

15 See Tóth: *A szép-jó* (= note 4), 9–11, 37–44.

16 For the scope of Herder's new, far-reaching concept of *Humanität*, see Hans Adler: ›Herder's Concept of *Humanität*‹. In: *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*. Ed. Hans Adler and Wulf Koepke. Rochester, NY 2009, 93–116.

17 See Cassirer: *The Philosophy* (= note 9), 352–353.

18 For the importance of the rhetorical tradition, see John Poulakos: ›From the Depth of Rhetoric. The Emergence of Aesthetics as a Discipline‹. In: *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 4 (2007), 335–352, especially: 341.

gnitionis sensitiuae), only the »perfection and quality of things, Beauty« (*rerum perfectionem, et ingenium, Pulcritudinem*). Thus, the foundation of his aesthetics, which aims to offer *principles of producing and judging artworks* (I.I.III.I.), is a philosophy of beauty. The extension of the insights of the philosophy of the beautiful to the theory of the fine arts is justified by the initial assumption that the »nature and duty« of the arts is to »express and represent beauty« (*exprimere, et repraesentare Pulcrum*) through their respective media (I.I.III.II.). Following Baumgarten's distinction between *aesthetica theoretica* and *practica*, Szerdahely differentiates between *general or theoretical aesthetics*, which is concerned with »the universal theory of the fine arts deduced from the nature of beauty,« and *particular or practical aesthetics*, which focuses on the specific rules of the particular arts (I.I.III.III.). His *Aesthetica* constitutes his *aesthetica generalis*.<sup>19</sup>

Szerdahely decides to keep the name »aesthetics« despite the initial reduction of the Baumgartian program based on the assertion that we *sensibly apprehend* the beauty or deformity of things by the *faculty of taste*. Szerdahely refers to the analogy between the faculty and sense of taste, which was a commonplace of the modern theories of taste, employed to illuminate the sense-like, immediate, un-reflected nature of aesthetic experience. This analogy and the etymology of *aisthesis* support Szerdahely's decision to keep the name of the discipline. Aesthetics is defined as the »doctrine of taste« (*Doctrina Gustus*) deduced from the »philosophy and knowledge of the beautiful« (*Philosophia Pulcri, et cognitio*) (I.I.II.III.):<sup>20</sup> aesthetics is supposed to give principles to taste to create and appreciate artworks. However, the ultimate goal of his doctrine goes beyond refined *artistic* taste.

At first, however, it might seem to the reader of the *Aesthetica* that Szerdahely reduces the scope of the notion of taste. He defines it as the sense of beauty (*sensus Pulcri*), our faculty of sensibly distinguishing – without any rational

19 Following the *Aesthetica*, his *aesthetica generalis*, Szerdahely also published the works that constitute his *aesthetica particularis*: *Ars poetica generalis* (1783), *Poesis Dramatica* (1784), and *Poesis narrativa* (1784). Each of these works, as the continuation of their title indicates, is »adjusted to aesthetics or the doctrine of good taste«. Thus, Szerdahely's oeuvre presents something that Baumgarten's could not (even if one takes into consideration his 1735 *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*): a *full-fledged aesthetic program*. For a structural reading of Szerdahely's oeuvre, see Balogh: *Teória* (= note 5), 23–33.

20 »Philosophia Pulcri, et cognitio, est nostra haec Boni Gustus Doctrina, multis iam Aesthetica siue a gustando dicta propterea, quod rei propositae Pulcritudinem, vel Deformatatem homo quasi per Gustum sentiat: ἀισθάνομαι sentio, ἄισθησις sensus.« (I.I.II.III)



consideration of the underlying causes – the beautiful from the ugly (*Turpe*). Furthermore, he adds that this natural but educable faculty<sup>21</sup> has a significance in »the republic of the fine arts and literature« (I.I.I.I-II.), and that it is formed and improved through our encounters with the arts. Finally, Szerdahely also clearly asserts that the cognitive and moral judgments are different from the sense of beauty (I.I.I.I.), even though the operations of the latter are »analogous« to that of the moral sense (*Sensus Moralis*). (I.I.I.II.) Thus, at the beginning of his work, Szerdahely seems to argue for a sense of beauty distinct from reason and the moral sense, but, as we shall see, this is hardly the last thing he has to say on the matter.

Szerdahely argues that there are many points where the cognitive, the moral, and the aesthetic are intertwined. First, their interconnection is suggested in a rather subtle way by his brief historical overview of the great decline of taste in the arts: as a consequence of the Romans' luxurious lifestyle, »that immortal genius, humanitas, virtue, and good sense that successfully govern the arts were slowly corrupted by evil, leading to their destruction« (*Illud immortalitate dignum ingenium, illa humanitas, illa virtus, ille bonus sensus, qui felicissime regebat Artes, lento malo deprauatus, et in exitium est deductus*. I.I.IV.III.). Sentences like this already suggest that it is hardly *exclusively* beauty that constitutes the pattern or goal of the »liberal or aesthetic arts« (I.I.III.I-II.).

Second, an important and explicitly stated connection between the cognitive, the moral, and the aesthetic is that our judgments of taste guide us in the everyday course of our lives: »Taste is the monarch of most actions« (*Gustus est*

21 Szerdahely emphasizes the universality of the faculty of taste (I.I.I.II.), attributing its diversity to *individual factors*, such as the differences in the degree of its sensibility and how exercised it is. Szerdahely differentiates delicate, noble, and perfect taste, the last being an ideal represented by Cicero's *orator* or Castiglione's *cortegiano*. Thus, taste requires education and refinement. (II.III.VII.III.) Szerdahely also enumerates *external factors* that can influence judgments of taste: social and historical ones like education, habits, and forms of government in the age in which we live, and, also natural or material ones such as climate and temper (*educatione, a tempore, moribus, forma regiminis, coelum, et saeculum, et sanguis*). (II.III.VII.II.) In other cases, the differences in the workings of taste can be attributed to the *variety of aesthetic pleasure*: novelty, usefulness, or socially acclaimed status, for instance, can enhance the effect of an artwork even if it is not especially beautiful. Finally, Szerdahely reflects on the variety of taste in different peoples concerning what counts as beautiful (in the human form) and in various cultures concerning what counts as virtuous (*honestum, decorum*). Nevertheless, Szerdahely argues for a standard of taste, asserting that »the judgment of good taste is certain, as it relies on certain principles«. (*Boni Gustus iudicium certum est, quia nititur principiis certis*). (II.III.VII.V.)

*rex plurimarum actionum*). Taste, the sensibility towards temperance, order, and grace, »permeates« (*inmiscet*) our manners and morals (*mores*). (I.I.I.I.) This is, of course, in accord with the long history of taste, a concept which before its confinement to the aesthetic enclave »was originally more a moral than an aesthetic idea,« implying »an ideal of genuine humanity.«<sup>22</sup> As Szerdahely puts it at the end of his book, where he returns to the question of the moral and social significance of taste (just like Kames in his *Elements*): »good taste nurtures us and fosters us; it generates vivacity and a sense of beauty, stimulates us to do what is right, and blends with our daily actions [...]. Its noble spirit resides not only in the soul and the senses, but in the gestures and movements of the body, in speech, customs, the expression of affections, it elegantly reveals itself in many operations of life.« (II.III.VII.I.)<sup>23</sup>

Thus, aesthetics, as the doctrine of taste, will encompass much more than the theory of the fine arts: it will constitute a venue, through the encounters with the arts, to *polite sociability*. Szerdahely argues that this aesthetic *Bildung* comprises »the cultivation of the senses« (*sensuum cultura*) and the cultivation of the soul, »the heart« (*Cor*), which is defined as our affective faculty that reacts to various impressions (I.I.II.III.).<sup>24</sup> The purpose of aesthetics is to polish our affections and sensations, making us more worthy of ourselves (*quia dignior est homine*).<sup>25</sup> The desired ideal at the end of the improvements of our taste, this

22 Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Truth and Method*. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London 2004, 31.

23 »Bonum Gustum nutrimur, alimur que; ille viuacitatem, sensumque pulcrum ingenerat, ille ad bene agendum stimulat, et ducit: quotidianis etiam actionibus se immiscet [...] nobilem eius spiritum non in animo solum, et sensibus residere, sed in gestu, motuque corporis, in sermone, in consuetudine, in signis adfectuum, in plurimis vitae operationibus eleganter spectari.«

24 Szerdahely defines *esprit* as mind/reason (*Rationem*) and *cor* as affection/sentiment (*Adfectum*), and he mentions the seventeenth-century poet Vincent Voiture, who brought the terms into fashion. Again, it is a detail that reflects the eclecticism of his thought.

25 »Aesthetica, fateor, nec te continuo faciet locupletem, nec illico in summo dignitatum culmine collocabit; sed primo sensus, animumque tuum excolet; sanum, delicatumque Gustum, ac iudicium dabit; quomodo sit utendum sensibus, docebit; multarum rerum cognitione, melioribus longe diuitiis, instruet. Sic tuam, totamque Naturam decorabis, creabis res nouas, tibi, aliisque consules; neque semper indotatum te relinquet Aesthetica. Sed illa eius Pulcritudo, illa sensuum cultura, cordis, animique honestas semper debet esse potior, quia dignior est homine, quam opes irritamenta malorum. Profecto si virtutes Bellarum Artium enumerem, parum dixisse videtur Cicero, cum dixit: Haec studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, aduersis perfugium, ac solatium praebent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernociant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur.« (I.I.VI.III.)

*sensual-affective Bildung*, is a »Beautiful Spirit« (*Spiritus Pulcer*), a »Beautiful Mind« (*Mens Pulcra*), a »Beautiful or Aesthetic Man« (*Homo Pulcer, Hominis Pulcri, ac Aesthetici*) – i.e. the ideal of *humanitas*, reached through encounters with the arts: »The good taste of the human arts makes man beautiful and more human.« (*Artes Humaniores Boni Gustus faciunt Hominem Pulcrum, et magis Hominem.*) (II.III.VIII.II.). Aesthetics, then, as Balogh puts it, becomes the »theory of *humanitas*.«<sup>26</sup> It is also noteworthy that Szerdahely mentions several times that this aesthetic character, the possession of good taste, has become a kind of social expectation, a norm, and its absence is deemed shameful (I.I.I.V.; II.III.VIII.II.), a claim which, needless to say, should not prompt us to entertain illusions concerning the general state of 18th-century Hungarian society, similarly to the tension between the ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment and the general state of Scottish society at the time.

Szerdahely describes the »Aesthetic Man« (*Aesthetici Hominis*) as someone who »developed the faculties he was given by his author by the means of aesthetics in such a way that he feels delicately, thinks quickly, and presents his subject livelily, remains faithful to himself, and the law of reason governs his appetite and will, and he acts properly and honestly. As I have said, only those are beautiful and human at the same time in whom the senses of the beautiful and the good are mutually united. [...] You might say that he may be the standard of the common good.« (II.III.VIII. III.)<sup>27</sup>

Szerdahely clearly preserves the close interconnectedness of the aesthetic and the moral inherent in the tradition of the concept of taste by arguing that »good taste turns us away from the ugliness of things and actions and incites and leads us to the Good through the various grace and pleasures of beauty; it teaches us to act properly; this is its supreme virtue« (II.III.VIII. III.)<sup>28</sup>

Elevating us to humanity through beauty, the fine arts are justly called »Humanities« (*Humaniores*), Szerdahely asserts, and he concludes that »we find

26 Balogh: *Téória* (= note 5), 17.

27 »Hominem denique Pulcrum, et Bellum, qui facultates ab Auctore liberalius acceptas sic excoluit per Aestheticam, ut delicate sentiat, velociter cogitet, rem sibi, et aliis viuciter reddat, fideliter conseruet, adpetitum, et voluntatem ex imperio rationis regat, decore, honesteque agat. Illi, inquam, Bellus, et Homo est, in quo Pulcri, Bonique sensus mutuo sociatus est. [...] et amas: hunc ais ad commune Bonum esse magis idoneum.« (II.III.VIII. III.)

28 »Bonus Gustus debet nos a Turpitudine rerum, et actionum auertere, et per varias Pulcritudinis gratias, voluptatesque ad Bonum incitare, deducereque; ille nos docet recte agere: haec summa illius virtus est.« (II.III.VIII. III.)

here [in the republic of fine arts] a more refined humanity [...]; some even dare to say that without them [the arts], man can hardly be man (*hic Politiorem Humanitatem reperimus; [...] Hominem vix esse Hominem*).« (II.III.VIII.III.) Aesthetics, guiding our personal encounters with the arts and polishing our taste, becomes a vehicle of *humanitas*, incorporating the ideals of the rhetorical tradition (Cicero's *orator perfectus*) and the modern aesthetic discourse as well (e.g. Shaftesbury's *virtuoso* or Wieland's *schöne Seele*).<sup>29</sup>

This conception of aesthetics is of course not surprising if one reads Szerdahely's *Aesthetica* in the context of the university aesthetics of the period<sup>30</sup>, or in the discourse of *sensibility* unfolding from the 1740s. In his *Elements*, Kames argues for the social, moral, or political value of *criticism*, since by cultivating taste in the arts, among other things, criticism also »prepares us for acting in the social state with dignity and propriety.« The reason behind the efficiency of criticism is that it »tends to improve the heart« by moderating selfish passions and by »sweetening and harmonizing the temper.« In this regard, aesthetic criticism functions just like the arts in the traditional account of moral improvement through art experiences. For Kames, just like for Szerdahely, affectivity plays the central role. »Delicacy of taste« is the result of this affective improvement, which »invigorates the social affections,« becoming »a great support to morality [...]: a just relish of what is beautiful, proper, elegant, and ornamental, in writing or painting, in architecture or gardening, is a *fine preparation* for the same just relish of these qualities in character and behaviour.«<sup>31</sup> It is clear from this argument that Kames – just as Szerdahely – presupposes that the same qualities that are relevant in the realm of aesthetics will be relevant in »character and behaviour,« i.e. in the realm of aesthetic morality.

In his article on »Aesthetik,« Sulzer defines the new science as »the philosophy of the fine arts or the science which deduces the general theory and also the rules of the fine arts from the nature of taste.« And as the »main purpose of the fine arts is to awaken in us vivid feelings of the true and the good« (*lebhaften Ge-*

29 Fórizs offers an illuminating analysis of the ideal of *humanitas* in the *Aesthetica*, its various 18th-century and Ciceronian contexts, and its relation to methodological eclecticism: he suggests that Szerdahely's »ultimate aim is to represent and spread a worldview: the worldview of the eclectic philosopher.« See Fórizs: »Szerdahely« (= note 6), 190–195, 202–206, quotation from 206. See also Tóth: *A szép-jó* (= note 4), 40–44.

30 »Aesthetics has become the science of taste« concludes Endre Nagy, referring to the dominant tendency in the field of university aesthetics from the 1760s. Nagy: *A magyar* (= note 7), 31.

31 Home: *Elements* (= note 10), vol. 1, 13–17. [My italics – B.Cs.]

*fühls des Wahren und des Guten*), to »direct« »the soul through arousing pleasant and unpleasant sentiments« (*die Lenkung des Gemüths, durch Erregung angenehmer und unangenehmer Empfindungen*), aesthetics must become the »science of sentiments« (*die Wissenschaft der Empfindungen*) in order to guide the creation and judgments of artworks. Thus, the theory of art encompassed by aesthetics »must be based upon the theory of indistinct knowledge and sentiments« (*undeutlichen Erkenntniß und der Empfindungen*)<sup>32</sup>, a conclusion in line with Kames's insights, and also clearly influencing Szerdahely's conception of aesthetics.

Finally, Szerdahely's emphasis on the importance of affective engagement in his descriptions of the phenomenology of aesthetic experience points to the conception of *taste as sensibility*. Szerdahely argues that taste responds with pleasure to the beautiful and with aversion to the ugly as an instinct: it »speaks from the depth of the heart« (*recess cordis*) as an »inside agent« (*intus agente*) (I.I.I.II.), and its natural signs are »a tender heart« (*molle cor*) and »an easy, facile sensibility« (*facilis sensibilitas*) (I.I.I.IV.). One might notice here the influence of the 17th-century French discourse of *delicatessen*, which reverberates in the aesthetic thought of the Enlightenment, and of the discourse of *sensibility* which transformed Europe's aesthetic, moral and scientific terrain by the second half of the 18th century, concentrating on the affective and sensitive basis of both our moral and our epistemic (aesthetic) relations to the world and to ourselves as embodied, living and feeling selves.<sup>33</sup>

The close affinity between *taste and sensibility* is also expressed in Szerdahely's telling tropes through which he describes the instinctive, affective apprehension of beauty, unmediated by reflexive rational deliberations: writing about the different degrees of sensibility, he compares refined, sensitive taste to nitrate salt or gunpowder (*pulvis nitratus*), which ignites near fire. Furthermore, to give an example of those who do not have such sensibility, Szerdahely mentions Zeno's pupils, the stoics, while he asserts that anyone »who lacks all sense of taste, is no longer in accordance with human nature, but bears the signs of prodigious and monstrous creatures« (Qui sine omni Gustus sensu sunt, non magis secundum hominis naturam eduntur, quam prodigiosa corpora, et monstris insignia. I.I.I.II. – My italics – B.Cs.).

32 Johann Georg Sulzer: »Aesthetik«. In: Johann Georg Sulzer: *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste*. Leipzig 1771/1774, vol. 1, 20–21.

33 For a general account of this transformation that points out the comprehensiveness of the discourse of sensibility (with a strong emphasis on developments in the very model of natural philosophy), see Stephen Gaukroger: *The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility. Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1680–1760*. Oxford 2010.

### III. Pulchritudo

This brief analysis of Szerdahely's conception of aesthetics and his notion of taste reveals the crucial role of our *personal encounters* with the fine arts in Humanist learning. Now it is time to turn to the theoretical underpinnings of this claim: how can artistic experience be a vehicle of humanity, what enables it to form refined society? Or, to be more precise, how can (1) his concept of the beautiful, and (2) the anthropological determinations he delineates endow aesthetics and the fine arts with such an important role? In the following, I will argue that although ascribing the arts a role in our moral or social improvement is an age-old strategy, Szerdahely presents an original argument in support of this role of the arts through his concept of the beautiful.

Szerdahely sets out to grasp the nature of beauty in the second book, entitled *On Beauty (De Pulcro)*. There can hardly be a clear and distinct idea of the beautiful, Szerdahely laments, following the well-known Leibnizian insight, but instead of turning to the peculiarities of the inferior cognitive faculties as a true Baumgartian might, Szerdahely enumerates various empirical reasons for this lack of clarity, such as the diverse uses of the word ›beauty,‹ the various forms of the beautiful (corporeal and incorporeal, moral and morally indifferent), and the differences in our sense of beauty or affective states (I.II.II.I-III.; II.III.II.III.). Szerdahely proposes following the method of physics and starting from the effect of beauty, the pleasure it arouses in us, to get to »the thing itself« (*ad rem ipsam*) (I.II.III.I.). Just as we have seen in the case of the workings of taste, one quickly realizes when reading the descriptions of the effects of beauty, that aesthetic experience, for the former Jesuit professor, is essentially *sensual and affective*: beautiful objects »emit a certain alluring pleasure« (*voluptatem quamdam illecebrosam emittunt*) which »flatters our senses and heart, and sweetly attracts the whole person with a magical force« (*sensus, et corda permulcent, hominem totum magica quadam vi suavissime detinent*). (I.II.I.II.) Note that despite the strong emphasis on the senses and the heart, i.e. our affective responses to sense impressions, Szerdahely underlines that the »whole person« is concerned during aesthetic experience: our senses, imagination, and reason are moved at the same time (*sensus adficit, imaginandi erigit, intellectum mouet*). Furthermore, though Szerdahely argues that our intellectual and bodily pleasures (*voluptas*) are deeply related and returns to defend their place in the everyday course of our lives several times in his book (I.I.VI.II.; I.II.IV.III.), he also emphasizes their difference and hierarchy together with the »innocence« of the pleasures of the beautiful.

However, not everything that pleases us can justly be called beautiful, Szerdahely notes. Following Riedel's differentiation between the pleasures evoked by the beautiful and the good and Sulzer's arguments concerning the three »essential aesthetic forces« (the perfect, the beautiful, and the good)<sup>34</sup>, he distinguishes the pleasure of taste evoked by beauty from (1) the pleasure felt exclusively in the sensory organs, i.e. *the agreeable*, because it does not imply any knowledge of the object, while cognition is a necessary condition of aesthetic experience.<sup>35</sup> The pleasure evoked by beauty is also distinguished from (2) the intellectual pleasure found in *perfection*, since it does not enliven the whole body, and from (3) the pleasure found in *the good* based on its necessity and utility, evoking in us the desire to possess it. In contrast, we contemplate beauty only for the pleasure evoked by its form, *uniformity amidst variety*, without any concerns for possession or desire (I.II.V.II.).<sup>36</sup>

However, just as Sulzer does not conceive of these forces as antagonistic powers, asserting that »the perfect and the good must appear in the full charm of beauty« (»vor allen Dingen muß das Vollkommene und das Gute in vollem Reiz der Schönheit erscheinen«)<sup>37</sup>, Szerdahely, while differentiating these notions, maintains that the beautiful and the good sometimes overlap, referring to the Greek notion of *καλοκαγαθία* (I.II.V.II.). Szerdahely acknowledges moral beauty as a kind of beauty. He mentions Saint Ambrose's idea that, as a conse-

- 34 Szerdahely incorporated Riedel's argument concerning the opposition of the pleasure evoked by the beautiful and the good based on disinterestedness, sensibility, and the lack of desire. See Friedrich Justus Riedel: *Theorie der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften*. Jena 1774, 9–11. Szerdahely also used Sulzer's ideas of the various »aesthetic forces« (ästhetische Kraft), by which objects of taste »arouse sentiments in us«. Sulzer differentiates essential (*wesentlichen*) and accidental (*zufälligen*) forces, and he determines the three essential aesthetic forces as the perfect, the beautiful, and the good, which forces satisfy either our understanding, our taste, or our inclination. See Johann Georg Sulzer: »Kraft (Schöne Künste)«. In: Sulzer: *Allgemeine Theorie* (= note 32), vol. II, 602–605. The relation to Riedel and Sulzer has been pointed out in Jánosi: *Szerdahely* (= note 4), 23–24; Fórizs: »Szerdahely« (= note 6), 197, 201–202.
- 35 »Dum res tales placent, quae nondum cognoscuntur, complacentia non est in rebus ipsis, quae sensus adficiunt, sed in grato, et illecebrosos sensuum, organorumque nostrorum motu.« (I.II.V.II.)
- 36 »Pulcrum est, ut delectet; Bonum, ut prosit: Pulcrum est, quod tum etiam placet, cum nec possidetur, nec possideri desideratur; id est, ut quidam aiunt, sine respectu commodi proprii placet.« (I.II.V.II.) This claim constituted the focal point in the re-discovery of the *Aesthetica* at the end of the 20th century and led to the interpretation of Szerdahely as the proponent of the modern autonomous conception of the aesthetic. See Margócsy: »Szerdahely« (= note 3).
- 37 Sulzer: »Kraft (Schöne Künste)« (= note 34), 604.

quence of the unity of body and soul, virtue reveals itself through the beauty of the body: beauty is »goodness moulded into form,« while »inner virtue is a kind of beauty, as beauty itself is a virtue, though an external one« (*Virtus interior quaedam est pulcritudo, uti pulcritudo ipsa virtus est exterior*, II.III.II.III.). If one places the argument for *beauty as form* and *aesthetic pleasure as disinterested pleasure* beside the argument for *moral beauty*, this may illuminate the tensions in the *Aesthetica*, or, if we accept the dynamic eclecticism of the work mentioned earlier, it may reveal the unfolding, changing nature of the work.

Even though Szerdahely emphasizes the various forms of the beautiful, he clearly states that aesthetics is concerned only with *aesthetic beauty*, i.e. *when it targets the senses*, when it is sensibly apprehended (I.II.VI.II.). The aesthetically beautiful object strikes the senses, and sense impressions »move the soul« (*Com-mouetur ille animo*), stirring affections, evoking pleasure or pain. Szerdahely's narrator, admitting the limits of his inquiry, considers the reasons for this working of the human body a »mystery,« and he attributes it to »the benevolence of the Divine Majesty« (*Diuinae Maiestatis bonitas*). God, the argument goes, created us in such a way that external beauty evokes a »consonant harmony« (*consonam harmoniam*) in our senses and bodies. Szerdahely argues that there exists a natural consensus between the beautiful, the senses, and the heart, and like chords next to one another, if one of them is struck, the others are also moved (*ac tensas esse consuevit, quarum altera si impellatur, altera quoque mouetur*). This consonance is the cause of the pleasure we feel when contemplating a beautiful object: »When beauty is offered to the senses, the heart and the soul itself are necessarily moved. For this reason, some say that the principle of the Amiable Arts lies in the senses, movement, and [...] affections of the soul.«<sup>38</sup> (I.II.IV.II.) As Balogh puts it: the *Aesthetica* focuses on »a dynamic relation: the relation between the affect (*vis*) and the *motus* evoked by it (perturbation, affection, passion)«.<sup>39</sup>

Szerdahely, however, cannot accept a fully relative or subjective conception of the beautiful based on our sensory and affective response (*motus*): he asserts that beauty has an objective foundation in the object as well. This objective criterion is constituted by »the perfect unity of variety,« which Szerdahely defines as *form* (I.II.VI.II.) or *harmony* (I.IV.II.). Interestingly, Szerdahely discusses

38 »Dum enim Pulcra sensibus nostris offeruntur, cor, animamque ipsam moueri necesse est. Propterea placuit quibusdam dicere principium Artium Amaeniorum esse in sensu animae, in motionibus [...] et adfectibus.« (I.II.IV.II.)

39 Balogh: *Téória* (= note 5), 17.



many things under the heading of harmony in his enumeration of aesthetic principles, such as aesthetic truth and verisimilitude, propriety (*decorum*), simplicity and sincerity, grace and dignity, and the great and the sublime (*magnus, sublimis*).<sup>40</sup>

The *Aesthetica* arrives at a definition of beauty at the end of the section *On Beauty*: an object is beautiful (A) if its *various parts* form a *harmonious unity*, and (B) if it is »aesthetic« or »sensible« (*sensibilis*), i.e. if it strikes the senses and the heart.<sup>41</sup> Thus, beauty lies neither in the object (university amidst variety) nor in the subject with the propensity to receive it (taste/sensibility), but in the interaction of the two: beauty is a »relative« or »comparative« quality (II.I.I.IV.), dependent on form or harmony and its cognition in contemplation, where sensation, affection, and understanding are united (II.III.I.I-II.). Szerdahely alludes to the resemblance between beauty to Lockean secondary qualities, just as Kames did in his *Elements*: »beauty, in its very conception, refers to a percipient; [...] its existence depends on the percipient as much as on the object perceived, [and thus it] cannot be an inherent property in either.«<sup>42</sup> The allusion to this tradition suggests that Szerdahely conceives of perception as both passive and active: Szerdahely calls the impressions made on the sensory organs »real« (referring to rays of light reaching the eye), while he uses the word »imaginary« to refer to the act of reflecting on these impressions, the cognition of the evoked idea through the operation of the mind (II.I.I.IV.). In the following, I focus on the principle of beauty that makes it a relational or relative quality: sensibility.

40 János revealed the various sources that probably led Szerdahely to this expanded notion of harmony, from Meier to Kames, Riedel, and Sulzer. He criticized it for its arbitrary and theoretically groundless approach. See János: *Szerdahely* (= note 4), 26–27.

41 »Consideratis rebus, quae communi Gustu pulchrae esse iudicantur, et quae suavi quadam delectatione sensus, animosque perfundunt; reuocatis, suoque pondere libratris multorum sententiis existimo Pulchrum esse, in quo est Varietas partium seu verarum, seu aequivalentium concorditer unita, et Aesthetice, siue bene ad sensum proposita. Tria haec, Varietatem scilicet, eiusque Conformitatem idoneam, et Aesthesim, id est, Sensibilitatem in omni eo, quod sine dubio ab omnibus sano sensu praeditis Pulchrum esse sentitur, non obscure deprehendo; unde licet concludere: haec ad naturam, et constitutionem Pulchri esse necessaria.« (I.II.VI.II.). János discerns here the influence of Riedel: *Theorie* (= note 34), 33–35; János: *Szerdahely* (= note 4), 24.

42 Home: *Elements* (= note 10), vol. 1, 148–149. Kames, a representative of the Scottish common-sense philosophers, rejects the Lockean representational theory of perception, and keeps the definition of beauty as a secondary quality for different reasons. For the possibilities of a proper Lockean aesthetics, see Dabney Townsend: »Lockean Aesthetics«. In: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 4 (1991), 349–361.

#### IV. Sensibilitas – Vivacitas

The third, phenomenal principle of beauty, *aisthesis* or *sensibilitas*, is the force of the harmonious object to stir the affections and move the mind by striking (*feriant*) and impelling (*impellent*) our senses. (II.I.I.I.) An object is *aesthetically* beautiful insofar it possesses certain »signs« (properties), namely »light« (*Lux*) and »vivacity« or »liveliness« (*Vivacitas*) (II.I.I.V.), which can animate and move us: thus, aesthetics must necessarily encompass the study not only of the beautiful form (uniformity amidst variety), but also of the sources of this »sensible beauty« (*Pulcritudo Sensibilis*) and the human faculties with which we apprehend them (sensation, imagination, cognition, passions).

Among the properties that make an object aesthetically/sensibly beautiful, Szerdahelyi, inspired by Baumgarten, discusses first the idea of »aesthetic light« (*Lucem Aestheticam*), the power of an object to strike the senses with a strong impulse. Szerdahelyi discusses various aesthetic »colours« as »the various forms of objects through which they possess a certain degree of light or sensibility, and move our senses« (II.I.II.V.). Such properties assure intense sense impressions, and they encompass novelty (*Nouitas*), which we enjoy because of our »lively spirit« (II.I.III.II.); forms and images (*Formae, Imagines*) like resemblance and dissimilitude; the ridiculous (*Ridiculum*); the various temperaments (*humor*); and, finally, the schemes or figures (*Schemata, Figurae*), such as »iconism« (*Iconismus*). The common function of these »colours« is that they evoke lively impressions, turning our attention to the object, which, in turn, is also presented to us in a different light (as in the case of poetic images): the properties that give aesthetic light to an artwork serve to heighten both its sensual/affective and cognitive value. But let's return for a moment to the aforementioned colour, »iconism«: iconismus (as a figure or image) means the sensible and lively representation of an object that makes it present as if it were before our eyes (II.I.VII.III.). We are turned into »spectators« (II.I.VII.IV.). In many ways Szerdahelyi's iconism resembles Kames's notion of »ideal presence« produced by »a lively and accurate description.« Kames argues that, through the »lively and distinct images« of such descriptions, »I am insensibly transformed into a spectator« and brought to »a kind of reverie,« in which I conceive of the ideas as really present: it is this suspension of reflection upon my own situation that constitutes the necessary condition of a genuine emotive response to fiction.<sup>43</sup>

43 Kames writes that »the reader's passions are never sensibly moved, till he be thrown

The strong emphasis on the sense of sight throughout the *Aesthetica* can be attributed to the claims that (1) sight is the most spiritual sense, since the pleasure is not felt at the organ itself, only in the mind<sup>44</sup>, and, maybe more importantly, (2) that it is through this sense that we receive the strongest affective impulses. Since the first claim is also true in the case of hearing, it is this latter argument formulated in Horace's *Ars poetica*, and thus the visual sources of *vivacity*, that elevates sight to the top of the hierarchy of the senses. Sight, Szerdahely argues, possesses a Gorgo-like character, since it has an immediate and violent effect, and therefore literature »imitates the manner of the other arts« and turns us into spectators (II.I.VII.IV.).

After discussing the various properties (colours) that give aesthetic light to artworks, Szerdahely turns to the other source of sensibility: *vivacity*. As I have tried to show, arguments for the significance of our intense affective response to aesthetic objects permeate the entire work. In the chapter dedicated exclusively to vivacity, Szerdahely focuses on the sources of these responses in works of art and then offers an anthropological foundation in human nature to explain them. At the beginning of the chapter on the concept of vivacity, Szerdahely asserts that vivacity »resides in the affections of the soul« (II.II.II.): it embraces on the one hand the *properties* of artworks (»signs«) that stir affections, and, on the other, the *affections* themselves. In Szerdahely's words: »In the works of poetry, eloquence, painting, sculpture, and the other arts, there has to be life (*Vitam*) and liveliness (*Viuacitatem*) in order to be aesthetic, sensible, and beautiful (*Aesthetica, Sensibilia, et Pulcra*).« (II.II.I.I.) After this initial remark comes a rhetorical argument with a reference to Cicero's *De Oratore* (I.XII.53.) and the power of the orator to excite anger or hatred, or, in other cases, compassion: »Every artist works for people; this is why they have to be careful to fill their works with aisthesis (*Aesthesim*) and vivacity (*Viuacitem*), which excite (*excitet*) in us the same feeling (*sensum*) and life (*Vitam*): just as our life consists of motion (*motu*), the power (*vis*) and vigour (*vigor*) of these disciplines lie in moving and setting the soul at ease.« (II.II.I.I.)<sup>45</sup>

into a kind of reverie; in which state, forgetting that he is reading, he conceives every incident as passing in his presence, precisely as if he were an eye-witness.« See Home: *Elements* (= note 10), vol. 1, 68–70, quotations from 69.

44 This argument can be also found in Home: *Elements* (= note 10), vol. 1, 11–12.

45 »Omnis Artifex laborat pro hominibus; curandum ergo praepremis ipsi est, ut eam operi suo Aesthesim, Viuacitatem que imponat, quae sensum in nobis eundem, et Vitam excitet: sicut Vita nostra in motu sita est, ita earum Disciplinarum vis, et vigor in mouendis, sedandisque Animis constituitur.« (II.II.I.I.)

This is the reason why the chapter on vivacity focuses on the analysis of different affections, which Szerdahely, like Malebranche in his taxonomy of the passions, organizes around love and hatred as the two parent affections. Szerdahely examines the causes and the physiological expressions of the affections as well as the different ways to excite or calm them, and his aim clearly resembles that of Aristotle in the second book of the *Rhetoric*: the chapter is to be a useful guide to artists.

This influence of the rhetorical tradition also offers criteria for the evaluation of artworks: »The life, spirit, and liveliness (*vita, spiritus, et Viuacitas*) of the human arts reside in the affections. The seat and source of the affections are the heart and the soul. This is why I say that nothing is as necessary to the artists as the doctrine of the affections. (*Doctrinam Affectuum*)« (II.II.I.II).<sup>46</sup> To back up this statement concerning all of the fine arts, Szerdahely later refers to the rhetorical tradition again, more specifically to an argument presented by Longinus in his treatise *On the Sublime* (VIII.4.), which was often used in the 18th-century debates concerning the relation of the sublime to »the pathetic«. Szerdahely points out that Longinus emphasized that it is passions used properly that make a speech genuinely sublime, lending it »a kind of fury« (*furor*) and »divine spirit.« Expanding this insight to all the arts, Szerdahely then concludes that »nothing makes our arts more aesthetic, sensible, and lively than properly bestowing affections on them« (II.II.X.VI).<sup>47</sup>

After interpreting Szerdahely's aesthetic program as a sensual-affective *Bildung* that aims at the cultivation of *humanitas*, i.e. a refined sensibility (taste), the strong emphasis on the affections and the claim that the »life of the aesthetic« (*Vita Aesthetica*) resides in the affective response should not come as a surprise. However, one might wonder how exactly the aesthetic dimension of an artwork (discussed under the heading of sensibility, aesthetic light and vivacity) relate to its moral dimension (which is, in turn, is an emphatically aesthetic morality, as we have seen)? One can find an answer at the end of the book, where Szerdahely returns to how taste permeates customs, manners, mo-

46 »Artium ergo Humaniorum vita, spiritus, et Viuacitas est in Affectibus. Affectuum autem sedes, et fons est cor, atque animus. Propterea dico, nihil aequè necessarium esse Artificibus, et nobis omnibus, quam Doctrinam Affectuum.« (II.II.I.II.I.)

47 »Propterea quod Longinus de una duntaxat Eloquentia fidenter adfirmat, nulla re, quam adfectu generoso sublimiorem fieri orationem; eam enim furore quodam, et diuino spiritu adflat, et velut adflatis similem reddit: id ego de omnibus Humanitatis Artibus repeto, nulla re artificia nostra magis Aesthetica, magis sensibilia, et viuacia esse, quam si Affectum aliquem sibi conuenienter inditum prae se ostendant.« (II.II.X.VI.)

rals, and societies, calling taste »the sense of the beautiful and the good« (*Gustus sensatio Pulcri, et Boni*, II.III.VII.IV.). Szerdahely, suggesting the dependence of the moral insights on the aesthetic properties of an artwork, proposes that »[s]ince it affects the senses, beauty shapes and moves the heart more than all the inquiries of the philosophers. Thus, it either prepares a place for virtue in the heart, or if someone's soul is already in possession of virtue, it makes it even more amiable and gracious (*magis amaenam, et gratiosam*).« (II.III.VII.IV.)<sup>48</sup>

Needless to say, Szerdahely asserts nothing new here. His answer might call to mind an argument of the rhetorical tradition going back to Aristotle's arguments for the importance and efficacy of *pathos* in addition to rational arguments (*logos*) and the trustworthiness of the orator (*ethos*); Cicero's three *officia oratoris, docere, delectare, movere*; and Horace's teaching of the values of poetry, *dolce et utile*.<sup>49</sup> The insight that art (especially poetry) should evoke an affective response in order to be cognitively and/or morally valuable is revitalized in 18th-century aesthetic thought to the extent that it becomes a commonplace, and not only in moral sentimentalism. Earlier we have seen how Sulzer saw the purpose of the arts in »directing« the soul through positive or negative sentiments towards the good and the true.<sup>50</sup> In his article on aesthetic forces (the one that was earlier utilized by Szerdahely to argue for the distinct nature of the beautiful), Sulzer argues that the »most important force« of the arts can be found in driving us towards the good and deterring us from the evil through their »vivid descriptions of good and evil« (*lebhaftige Schilderung des Guten und Bösen*). For this reason, dramatic and epic poetry are given a crucial role, since they possess in the highest degree the aesthetic force of *the good*, i.e. they can contribute to our moral improvement best through the *vivid representation* of sentiments, characters, and actions.<sup>51</sup> Writing about Breitingen, Cassirer points

48 »Pulcritudo siquidem cum sensus adficit, cor magis informat, et mouet, quam omnes Philosophorum cognitiones. Atque ita vel virtuti parat in corde locum, vel, si cuius animum virtus iam possedit, eam magis amaenam, et gratiosam facit: Sit ergo Gustus sensatio Pulcri, et Boni.« (II.III.VII.IV.)

49 Horace's teachings are invoked by Baumgarten as well: he quotes Horace when, in his argument for the connection between poetic value and strong affective impressions, he writes that »since aroused affects determine sense impressions, a poem which arouses affects is more perfect than one which is full of dead imagery [...] *it is not enough for poems to be beautiful: they must also be charming and lead the mind of the listener where they please*.« Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten: *Reflections on Poetry*. Trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther. (Berkeley–Los Angeles 1954), §29. [My italics – B.Cs.] Also see Poulakos: »From the Depth« (= note 18), 341.

50 See Sulzer: »Aesthetik« (= note 32), 20–21.

51 See Sulzer: »Kraft« (= note 37), 605.

out something similar in the thought of the »Swiss critics«: the »task of poetry [...] is to stir the emotions, but the 'pathetic' is not of course their only and highest goal. Stimulation of the imagination is rather *to prepare the way for rational insight and to predispose the mind of the listener to such insight.*«<sup>52</sup> Another kind of argument can be added to these, which is found in the *Elements*, where Kames argues that rather than leading us to rational insights, artistic experiences can be conceived of as »mental exercises« of virtue that tend »to make virtue habitual.«<sup>53</sup>

As the earlier quotation shows, Szerdahely also argues that sensible pleasure proves to be only an immediate, and not the final goal of the arts, their ultimate goal being to convince us of (moral) truths or to dispose us to virtue by stirring up affections.<sup>54</sup> In the explanation of our moral improvement through the arts several of the abovementioned aspects of Szerdahely's theory join together. He argues that beauty draws us towards the good because it serves as a sensible »allurement« (*illecebra*) or »bait« (*esca*): beauty is the »flower of goodness« (*Bonitatis flos*). (II.III.I.III.) Note that, unlike Sulzer or Kames, Szerdahely does not attribute a role in our moral improvement to the vivid, immersive representation of certain subjects, but to *beauty* itself. Szerdahely operates here with the general concept of beauty instead of the more specific notion of sensibility, but his argument reveals that it is the principle of sensibility inherent in Szerdahely's notion of beauty that is relevant here. Since »the soul is more easily moved by the senses of the body« (II.II.I.III.), Szerdahely argues, sense impressions impel us to approach, contemplate, and apprehend the beautiful and, through the beautiful, the good. This is, Szerdahely asserts, »*the great utility of Beauty*« (*magna Pulcri utilitas*). (II.III.I.III.)

52 Cassirer: *The Philosophy* (= note 9), 336. [My italics – B.Cs.]

53 See Home: *Elements* (= note 10), vol. 1, 77. Kames explains these aesthetic exercises of virtue with the notion of »the sympathetic emotion of virtue«. This feeling accompanies our emotive responses to virtuous acts and disposes us to similar virtuous deeds as well, »prompting us to imitate what we admire«. Ibid., 48–52.

54 This can also explain the importance of »iconism« and poetic imagery in general in Szerdahely's theory. Cassirer emphasized how the 18th century reconsidered the idea of poetic imagery not as *ut pictura poesis*, but as awakening »clear and vivid sensuous ideas«. He also pointed out that imagery becomes crucial, because »[w]hat the mere concept and the abstract doctrine cannot achieve is to be accomplished by the proper choice of metaphor and poetic imagery. For this reason, poetic imagery now assumes decisive importance and comes to occupy the central position in poetics«. Cassirer: *The Philosophy* (= note 9), 336.

– My italics – B.Cs.) Here he refers to Marsilio Ficino, probably to his argument on love, however, interestingly enough, he omits the strong theological overtones of Ficino's argument.<sup>55</sup>

To conclude this line of argument, I would like to refer to Szerdahely's aforementioned remark, according to which those who completely lack sensibility »bear the signs of prodigious and monstrous creatures« (I.I.I.II.). This passing remark gains a deeper meaning given the role attributed to sensibility (taste) and liveliness, the power of an artwork to excite affective responses. The necessary condition of our self-improvement through artistic experience is a sensitivity (taste) that assures an *affective engagement* with a work of art. People who cannot be moved, i.e. lured or excited by artworks, can be considered monsters, since it is exactly this sensibility that assures our meaningful encounters with artworks, during which we exercise our moral affections and become disposed to moral truths.

Well, so far, so good. However, Szerdahely proposes an *anthropological* argument in his chapter on vivacity which explains why the affective engagement with artworks is discussed in terms of morality and moral education. This argument also offers an answer to how aesthetic experience can become a vehicle of Humanist self-improvement. Szerdahely delineates an *anthropological foundation* for our moral improvement through our artistic encounters: he argues that »our soul is moved by the apprehension of beauty and goodness or the representation of ugliness and evil: we incline to the beautiful or the good, and turn away from the ugly and the evil, we desire the first and have an aversion to the latter.« (II.II.I.III.)<sup>56</sup> It means that every affective reaction implies such judgment: impelled by nature, we desire the good (*Adpetitus*) and have an aver-

55 In his *Platonic Theology*, Ficino recapitulates the argument he elaborated in his book on love: »[t]he splendor of the highest good is refulgent in individual things, and where it blazes the more fittingly, there it especially attracts someone gazing upon it, excites his consideration, seizes and occupies him as he approaches, and compels him both to venerate such splendor as the divinity beyond all others, and to strive for nothing else but to lay aside his former nature and to become that splendor itself. [...] the soul burns with a divine radiance which is reflected in the man of beauty as in a mirror, and that, caught up by that radiance secretly as by a hook, he is drawn upwards to become God.« Marsilio Ficino: *Platonic Theology*. Ed. and trans. Michael J.B. Allen and James Hankins. Cambridge 2001–2006, XIV.I.4, vol. 4, 223.

56 »Porro Animus noster mouetur vel adprehensione Pulcri, et Boni, vel Turpis, et Mali repraesentatione; ad Pulcrum, et Bonum inclinamur; a Turpi, et Malo auertimur; illa adpetimus, haec auersamur.« (II.II.I.III.)

sion to the evil (*Auersio*): everything which seems good and advantageous to us evokes the feeling of love (II.II.IV.II.), while everything that seems evil and harmful to us excites the feeling of hatred (II.II.V.I.).

Szerdahely seems to argue for *a natural instinct of self-preservation*, in which our senses and affections, the lively responses to impressions of an object, play a crucial role: »the affections were given us as instruments for the preservation of man (*ad conseruationem hominis*), for the protection of human society (*ad tuendam humani generis societatem*), and finally for virtues« (II.II.I.III). What is at the basis of all affections and what grounds our self-preservation is »the love for ourselves,« a form of self-interest, impelling us towards what seems advantageous (II.II.IV.I.). The natural responses of desire or aversion serving our self-preservation led Szerdahely to deduce all affections from love and hatred: he defines love as »the sense of the good« (*sensum Boni*) and the »life of the beautiful« (*Vitam Pulcri*) (II.II.IV.I.), insofar as we love what seems to be good or advantageous for us, and such objects *arouse in us the desire to possess them* (II.II.IV.II.). Among the goods (*Bonorum*), Szerdahely mentions virtue (*Honestum*), the agreeable (*Delectabile*), and the useful (*Utile*), i.e. an object can be good/advantageous from the point of view of *virtue, bodily pleasure, and social status*. (II.II.IV.III.)

To illuminate how affections contribute to our preservation, Szerdahely argues that there are two stages of the generation of the affections: first, an external object has an effect on the sensory organs which brings the faculty of »phantasy« into motion. Phantasy apprehends the image of the good or the evil, resulting in a corporeal reaction (*concitatur sanguis, et humores, calor, et spiritus*) to enable the body to pursue good (*insequor*) or avoid evil (*fuga*). This corporeal reaction, the »overflow of spirits« (*spirituum inundation*), can be properly called *pathos* or *passions*, Szerdahely argues, since in this stage we passively feel pleasure or pain. Second, these feelings are followed by rational reflection forming a judgment concerning what to do next.

This leads Szerdahely to conclude that *what arouses affections in the fine arts must be good or evil*, and that the representation of what arouses affections must have a strong influence on the senses and on phantasy (II.II.II.). One might discern here the influence of the aforementioned Sulzerian argument concerning the role of vivid representation of good or evil in our encounters with artworks, but Szerdahely also draws on such representatives of the moral sentimentalism of the Scottish Enlightenment as Francis Hutcheson, who, in his 1725 *Inquiry*, argued that our moral sense makes the artistic representations of moral objects far more pleasurable and affectively intense than representations



of morally indifferent ones.<sup>57</sup> Similarly to the Scots, Szerdahely also asserts that »iconic« representations that have a strong influence on the senses and phantasy can contribute to social coherence by evoking sympathy in us, making us susceptible to the pains of others as *affective exercises of virtue*. (II.II.IX.I.II-IV.)

I would like to finish my essay by pointing out some interesting problems concerning the concept of beauty that can be attributed to Szerdahely's eclecticism. As we have seen, Szerdahely – instead of applying a Sulzerian, Kamesian or Hutchesonian strategy – expects (aesthetic) beauty to function as the »bait« of the good, to draw us to virtue sensually. However, in this case, beauty would have to evoke in us a *desire* for itself, i.e. the beautiful in this case should be among the various goods (*Bonorum*): *Honestum, Delectabile, Utile* (II.II.IV.III.). Although the good and the beautiful are sometimes mentioned as synonyms (as the earlier quotations show), Szerdahely does not mention the beautiful among the objects that *arouse in us the desire to possess them* explicitly, probably because he previously insisted in his Riedelian argument that *the beautiful as form* does not excite the desire to possess it.

As I have pointed it out, only the third, phenomenal principle of beauty, *sensibility*, not the first two, unity and variety, seems to play a role in leading us to the good, i.e. it is sensibility, the power of an artwork to strike the senses and stir affections, that enables such objects to play a role in our moral improvement, just as it is taste (as refined sensibility) that unables us to experience them in a way that is relevant to this affective *Bildung*. As I have already mentioned, Szerdahely argues that artworks must »strike and impel« (*feriat, et impellat*) the senses and »violently stir« (*violentia excitabitur*) the affections, becoming »tyrants« of our souls, like the music or the spectacles at the trials of ancient Rome, because bodily pleasures and pains (goods and evils) are especially important in our attractions and aversions, our judgments and choices (II.II.II.II.).

57 »Dramatic, and Epic Poetry, are entirely address'd to this [moral] Sense, and raise our Passions by the Fortunes of Characters, distinctly represented as morally good, or evil [...]. Where we are studying to raise any Desire, or Admiration of an Object really beautiful, we are not content with a bare Narration, but endeavour, if we can, to present the Object it self, or *the most lively Image* of it. And hence the Epic Poem, or Tragedy, gives a vastly greater Pleasure than the Writings of Philosophers, tho both aim at *recommending Virtue*. The representing the Actions themselves, if the Representation be *judicious, natural, and lively*, will make us *admire the Good, and detest the Vicious*, the Inhuman, the Treacherous and Cruel, by means of our moral Sense, without any Reflections of the Poet to guide our Sentiments.« Francis Hutcheson: *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. Ed. Wolfgang Leidhold. Indianapolis 2004, 173. [My italics – B.Cs.]

Things become interesting with Szerdahely's decision to integrate vivacity (the affective power of artworks) as part of sensibility into the general concept of beauty. Setting aside for the time being the theoretical problems of such an expansion of the concept of beauty in order to incorporate certain properties of *artworks*, let's turn to some of its intriguing consequences. If affections are *only* aroused by the apprehension of what seems to be advantageous or harmful, good or evil (II.II.X.I.)<sup>58</sup>, as Szerdahely asserts in his theory of affections, and if vivacity is a necessary condition of beauty, then the experience of *beauty turns out to be interested* in a sense. Thus, the Riedelian argument that uniformity amidst variety (beauty as form) is contemplated without any further interest and desire proves to be only an early stage in the development of Szerdahely's concept of beauty or an attempt to rule out only *certain kinds* of interest, but certainly not *all kinds* of interest. Even if disinterested contemplation is true of form, it is definitely overshadowed by the power of an artwork to strike the senses and arouse desire for the good through vivid representation and imagery.

Szerdahely, like the other authors mentioned earlier, could have elaborated a theory of the arts that departs from the concept of the beautiful by shifting attention to the moral aspects of art experience instead through analyzing the various *aesthetic* ways artworks sensually and affectively engage us: Kames discusses the beautiful in a relatively short chapter and in terms of passions and emotions, while Sulzer also defines it as one among the three species of the aesthetic forces, underlining the significance of the good. Szerdahely chooses a different path. Instead of going beyond the beautiful to other dimensions of artworks, in order to account for the moral dimension of art experience, he incorporates affectivity and morality into the aesthetic concept of beauty itself. The *Aesthetica* also offers an anthropological and psychological explanation of affective engagement in terms of our natural desires and aversions, which serve self-preservation. Interestingly, even though Szerdahely's primary motive is to explain how artworks govern our cognitive and affective faculties, by incorporating the affective and moral dimensions of art experiences into the very concept of the beautiful, Szerdahely argues, though not explicitly, for the involvement of a kind of self-interest and desire in aesthetic experience as well.

58 »Quidquid amamus, vel odimus, eapropter adpetimus, aut fugimus, quod Bonum, aut Malum esse cognoscamus; igitur lex haec erit summa: Animum ex diuersa, multiplici- que Boni, et Mali repraesentatione, imaginationeque regendum esse, perturbandum, aut placandum. Cum Bonum, vel Malum exhibetur, sanguis, animusque concitatur; illa cum diminuuntur, aut sufferuntur, sedatur cor, et tumentes fluctus residunt: Sicut Bona, et Mala proponuntur, ita oriuntur, et sedantur Adfectus.« (II.II.X.I.)

## V. Conclusio

In his *aesthetica generalis*, György Alajos Szerdahely argues for a doctrine of taste, a philosophical discipline that can polish our manners and social conduct through a sensual-affective *Bildung* offered by art experiences. Szerdahely's eclectic work presents his theory in its unfolding and makes transparent its various stages. This paper traced the development of his concept of beauty from *beauty as form* (uniformity amidst variety) to *beauty in motion* (sensibility). Initially, Szerdahely argues for unity and variety as the two main constituents of a beautiful object, evoking disinterested contemplation, but he then turns to *sensibility* as the third necessary condition of beauty: an object becomes *aesthetically* beautiful only if it has the power to strike the senses (*Lux*) and stir the affections (*Vivacitas*), enlivening the whole embodied person. As I see it, this third principle of sensibility proves to be more emphatic than the first two, leading to (1) the aesthetic conception of beauty as an experiential quality; but more interestingly to (2) the incorporation of the element of *self-preservation* and *self-love* in the experience of beauty. The reason for the latter development lies in Szerdahely's anthropological arguments, which found every affection on the instantaneous apprehension of good or evil concerning ourselves, implying desire (*Adpetitus*) or aversion (*Auersio*) in our reactions. What makes his *Aesthetica* interesting as well as problematic at some points is that Szerdahely accounts for the moral and social values of art experiences not by turning to other dimensions of such experiences (e.g. the role of moral emotions and the vivid representation of virtues or characters that evoke them, etc.), like many of his contemporaries did (e.g. Hutcheson, Kames or Sulzer), but by incorporating affectivity (and thus self-love) into *the concept of beauty itself*, eventually transforming beauty into the sensible »allurement« (*illecebra*) or »bait« (*esca*) of goodness. The problem is already inherent in Szerdahely's aesthetic program: on the one hand, he wants to construct aesthetics on the foundation of the philosophy of beauty, on the other hand, however, aesthetics is expected to guide us in our self-improvement, i.e. to become the doctrine of taste, in which beauty must give way to other aspects of the aesthetic experience of artworks. At this point, however, as I have tried to show, the aesthetic concept of beauty will be unable to accommodate these various aspects of *art* experiences without some discrepancies.

