



Lifeworld art: on Husserl's *Crisis* book and beyond

Günter Figal¹

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Abstract

In the article I discuss Husserl's conception of the Lifeworld as developed in his *Crisis* Book, in order to find out whether art can be especially illuminative in order to understand the Lifeworld and one's own living in it. I draw a parallel between the sciences as discussed by Husserl as abstractions from the Lifeworld that offer a special view of what in the Lifeworld as such remains disclosed. However, scientific and artistic abstraction differs in character. Whereas the sciences establish formal systems and thereby discover the world as to its computability, the arts abstract from the everyday set of meanings and go back to the primordial and original experience of the world in its perceptibility. Thus they are able to draw attention to the essential character of the Lifeworld as such.

Keywords Lifeworld · Sciences · Art

1 1.

Does art contribute to or even improve an understanding of our lifeworld, and if so – in which way? Hearing or reading this question one very likely would in principle understand what is meant; one would have an at least vague idea of “art” as well as of “lifeworld” and could therefore grasp what is questioned or even figure out some possible responses. As to art, this is not very surprising; almost everyone confronted with the word “art” or an equivalent in other languages would be able at least to exemplify and vaguely circumscribe what the word could mean. However, as to “lifeworld” things are slightly different. What a lifeworld is can hardly be exemplified; the word is more abstract than “art” and thus more difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, it

✉ Günter Figal
guenter.figal@philosophie.uni-freiburg.de

¹ University of Freiburg, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

is not enigmatic. Though vague, it is self-explanatory, namely as a word referring to the world we live in.

The self-evident intelligibility of “lifeworld” is particularly remarkable, because the word originally is not a word of ordinary language, but came to prominence as a philosophical term introduced by Husserl. Though Husserl did not coin the word, and though even the young Heidegger used it a few years earlier than Husserl, it was Husserl who was first to make the word a term.¹ He did so in a lecture held in 1924 in Freiburg on the occasion of Kant’s 200th birthday, and later, in his fragmentary book on “the crisis of the European sciences,” he used the word as a key term associated with an extensive phenomenological research program.² The latter indicates that for Husserl the detailed meaning of “lifeworld” was less than clear. The self-evident intelligibility of the word hides the fact that it needs philosophical explanation, and accordingly a response to the question of whether art contributes to or even improves an understanding of the life world, cannot be given offhand. Rather, questioning the lifeworld is a necessary endeavor, and as such a true philosophical task. As to its conceptual intelligibility, the lifeworld is like all original topics of philosophy, for instance like time, about which Augustine says that, if not asked, he knows what time is, but, intending to explain this to a questioner, he would be ignorant of it.³

2 2.

Given Husserl’s key role as to the philosophical prominence of the lifeworld, it seems obvious to first address oneself to him in order to get a more concrete and clearer idea of the term. However, Husserl’s considerations on the lifeworld are mostly sketchy and not at all consistent. Hans Blumenberg, whose revealing phenomenological work again and again has centered on the problem of the lifeworld, even holds that Husserl’s philosophical program concerning the lifeworld is a “lifeworld misunderstanding.”⁴ Provided that the lifeworld is self-evident for those who inhabit it, no philosophical conception of the lifeworld would be needed.⁵ And, as Blumenberg further argues, because of its self-evidence the lifeworld even excludes philosophy.⁶ Attempts of philosophically describing the lifeworld do not fit into the lifeworld and thus indicate that it has been lost. Accordingly, descriptions pretending to reveal how it is to live in the lifeworld prove to be posterior constructions.⁷ The lifeworld, as Blumenberg concludes, “is the *status naturalis* of theoretical consciousness as long as theoretical consciousness does not exist.”⁸

¹ Heidegger (1993, pp. 62–63)

² Published posthumously in Husserl (1956, pp. 230–287).

³ Augustine (1981, XI, 14).

⁴ Blumenberg (1986, pp. 7–68).

⁵ Blumenberg (1986, p. 22).

⁶ Blumenberg (2010, p. 49).

⁷ Blumenberg (1986, p. 23).

⁸ Blumenberg (2010, p. 54).

Blumenberg's interpretation is helpful insofar as it draws attention to the specific difficulty of philosophically grasping the lifeworld. But it is also problematic, because it is over-pointed and thus partly misleading. Husserl, indeed, characterizes the lifeworld as "the self-evident in all human life" and also as "a realm of original evidence."⁹ The lifeworld is in no respect dubitable; even lifeworldly "horizons of things unknown (*Unbekanntheithorizonte*)" are "horizons of the incompletely known (*Horizonte unvollkommener Bekanntheiten*)" and thus dependent on what is self-evidently known.¹⁰ However, Husserl does not regard the lifeworld as a world that once existed and was abandoned with the origin of theoretical consciousness like the natural state with the foundation of civil states. Rather, he holds that, though the lifeworld has existed earlier than science, it continues to exist in the epoch of science as a way of being.¹¹ The lifeworld even is a necessary condition of science, provided that science can pose questions only on the basis of the constant world that in advance derives from pre-scientific life.¹² However, if the lifeworld functions as such a pre-scientific basis of science, it could indeed, as Blumenberg says, not be scientifically explored and even less exhausted. The lifeworld would again and again at least partly withdraw from scientific intentions, if, according to Husserl, every scientific attempt of conceiving the lifeworld is founded in and conditioned by the lifeworld, and thus, like every scientific endeavor, necessarily has a dark lifeworldly side. This, again, holds also true for Husserl's program of a philosophical "science of the lifeworld."¹³ So, the lifeworld is scientifically inexhaustible – however, not, as Blumenberg holds, as an early state of humankind, but as the timeless basis of scientific consciousness.

This does not mean that the lifeworld is the dark side of conscious human life as such and thus a variation of the unconscious. Rather, living in the lifeworld is a kind of consciousness too; it is perceptual intuition. As Husserl says, perception is the "primary mode (*Urmodus*)" of intuition insofar as it represents in "primary originality (*Uroriginalität*)", that is in the mode of "authentic presence (*Selbstgegenwart*)."¹⁴ As Husserl adds a few pages later, every human activity is founded in the "passively having the world (*passive Welthabe*)" of perceptual intuition. Without such intuition human beings would not have objects of whatever kind they could refer to and be interested in. The lifeworld, to conclude with Husserl's own words, is "the self-evidently existing, evermore intuitively given world (*die selbstverständlich seiende, immerfort anschaulich vorgegebene Welt*)."¹⁵

Though Husserl unmistakably introduces perceptual intuition as the essential character of the lifeworld, he does not regard this character as the only one. Rather, he mentions that the lifeworld is shared with others "in every actual association" and thus includes a manifold of different activities.¹⁶ According to a manuscript comple-

⁹ Husserl (1962a, pp. 126, 130).

¹⁰ Husserl (1962a, p. 126).

¹¹ Husserl (1962a, p. 125).

¹² Husserl (1962a, p. 113).

¹³ Husserl (1962a, p. 126).

¹⁴ Husserl (1962a, p. 107).

¹⁵ Husserl (1962a, p. 113).

¹⁶ Husserl (1962a, p. 124).

menting the main text of Husserl's book, the lifeworld is "our particular world" and as such "the horizon of our interests."¹⁷ Though "every practical world" and "every science" presupposes the lifeworld, "everything nascent and every result" achieved by human beings becomes "itself a piece of the lifeworld (*ein Stück Lebenswelt*)."¹⁸ Regarded in this way, the lifeworld would in general be the world inhabited by human beings insofar as it is characterized by the self-evidence of everyday life. It would form a contrast mainly, of not only to the scientific world, which is "a theoretical-logical substraction" of something "that in principle is imperceptible" and thus "cannot be experienced as to its proper being."¹⁹ In accordance with this distinction, Husserl introduces two different kinds of truth: "on the one hand the everyday-practical truths of situations" and "on the other hand scientific truths, whose justification leads back to truths of situations" – in such a way, however, that the truths of situations are scientifically used and to such an extent modified so that scientific methods are not impaired.²⁰

The reason why Husserl regards the lifeworld as virtually encompassing all human practice is not difficult to guess. Including a manifold of different attitudes and activities the lifeworld is comprehensive and complex in a way that makes a phenomenological "science of the lifeworld" relevant or even necessary. However, such an extensive research program is not necessary for a critical discussion of science with reference to its disregarded fundamentals. Conceiving the "everyday-practical truths of situations" as an alternative to scientific truths, Husserl himself makes sufficiently clear that practical truths as such do not have any noteworthy significance for the sciences. Everyday practice certainly is relevant to the social character of scientific institutions and also to the life of scientists, but not to the truth of scientific results.

However, this is different with regard to the "passively having the world," which is bound to perceptual intuition. Insofar as sciences claim to discover the world that primarily is accessible to perception, and not just to construct a world, they must rely on the "authentic presence" provided by perceptual intuition. The same holds true for everyday practice and its particular situational truths. Insofar as both, sciences and everyday practice, share perceptual intuition, which is the primary character of the lifeworld, they both can be regarded as manifestations of this world. The lifeworld, then, proves to be the world of "authentic," and that is of primarily perceptible presence. It can therefore be called *the aesthetic world*, provided that the meaning of the term is taken in a broader sense that includes not only different kinds of perception, but also the perceptible, and, on the other hand, does not exclude the specific designation of beautiful things and their experience. In this case a closer relation between the lifeworld and art becomes graspable.

Understanding the lifeworld in the way just suggested is in line with a conception of phenomenology mainly represented by Merleau-Ponty. As Merleau-Ponty writes in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, "the world is what we perceive (*le monde est*

¹⁷ Husserl (1962a, p. 459).

¹⁸ Husserl (1962a, p. 462).

¹⁹ Husserl (1962a, p. 130).

²⁰ Husserl (1962a, p. 135).

cela que nous percevons).²¹ As the title of his book indicates, Merleau-Ponty is mainly interested in perception, and less in the very character of the perceptible and perceived world. However, the perceptible is phenomenologically relevant not only as correlate of perception. Examining the perceptibility of the world can also shed light on its lifeworldly character, and not at least on its specific inconspicuousness. Though ubiquitous, the aesthetic mostly remains unnoticed because of its self-evidence. Without the aesthetic both, everyday-practice and scientific research, would be impossible. However, what counts in both kinds of practice is not their perceptual ground, but what makes them specifically practical or scientific. Making attempts to reach whatever aim and to find appropriate means for achieving it, one is attentive to both one's aim and one's possible means; pursuing scientific investigations one concentrates on how a particular topic can be determined and explained in accordance with methodical standards. In both cases, the aesthetic remains inconspicuous.

Accordingly, and this leads back to Blumenberg's considerations, the lifeworld understood as the aesthetic world is not readily accessible; it withdraws from practical as well as from scientific endeavors. On the other hand, however, the objections made above against Blumenberg's interpretation, still prove sound. The lifeworld is not a kind of natural state but, as one could say using a term that Husserl introduces in another context: it is the "primordial" world of human beings.²² Nevertheless, this world has to be rediscovered. Because it withdraws with the dominance of practical and scientific life, Husserl's idea of a phenomenological examination of the original lifeworld is completely justified.

Husserl's idea, as the title of his book indicates, is especially motivated by the scientific revolution of modern times as it was mainly initiated by Galilei, whose radical mathematization of physics Husserl discusses quite extensively.²³ However, Husserl's intention is not a critical assessment of the modern world or of modern culture. Though he criticizes the dominance of positivism and of "positive science" from the 19th century on, he does not doubt the legitimacy of modern science, but only holds that a phenomenological complement is needed in order to conceive and describe the lifeworld as its fundament.²⁴ However, if the lifeworld can be understood as the aesthetic world, not only science, but everyday practice, too, would necessarily be complemented by phenomenological research.

As to a phenomenological complement to science, Husserl's program is thoroughly clear. Following Galilei's conception of a "mathematical universe," Husserl regards modern science as an attempt of objectifying the world in a way that eliminates "the relativity of subjective perceptions."²⁵ In reference to entities that are reduced to their measurable determinateness the perspectival character of perception and of any perception-based experience is irrelevant. Taking into account how crucial this char-

²¹ Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. xi).

²² Husserl (1963, p. 145).

²³ Husserl (1962a, pp. 20–45).

²⁴ Husserl (1962a, p. 3).

²⁵ Husserl (1962a, pp. 26–27).

acter is for Husserl's phenomenology, one will at once realize that with the idea of a "mathematical universe" phenomenology as such is at stake.²⁶

Husserl's response to the challenge of modern sciences, namely his conception of the lifeworld, is completely in line with his earlier conception of phenomenology as an exploration of the subjective sphere.²⁷ As Husserl says, the lifeworld is "a realm of a completely self-contained subjective (*ein Reich eines ganz und gar in sich abgeschlossenen Subjektiven*)" and thus a sphere that completely excludes objectivity.²⁸ Its main character is relativity, and relativity, again, is entirely subjective. It is the "subjective-relative," which can truly be experienced, whereas the objective, as already quoted, is nothing but a "theoretical and logical substruction."²⁹

Rethinking Husserl's considerations just sketched, one can hardly contest his main point, namely that relativity, and first of all the relativity of perception is a character of subjective experience. For instance, looking at something is an experience of oneself and insofar "subjective"; moreover, it is a manifestation of an individual's life and as such dependent on the individual's "subjective" visual disposition; it also is particularly determined by the looking individual's point of view and thereby "perspectival." However, different points of view for looking at something cannot be reduced to perceiving "subjects" as if the perspectival would be nothing but a character of these "subjects." Husserl himself, at least in his earlier and more detailed considerations on this topic, does not give reason to such a reduction. "Transcendent objects," that is objects belonging to the exterior world are as such spatial and therefore cannot be viewed completely at a glance. At least for a more extensive examination, they require different points of view.³⁰ This, again, is so, because they themselves, at different sides, offer different views, so that someone exploring such an object from different perspectives corresponds to the object's proper "perspectival" visibility.

However, exterior objects not only are a necessary complement in order to understand the structure of perception and perception-based experience. Without such objects Husserl's conception of perception as representation in "primary originality (*Uroriginalität*)," in the mode of "authentic presence (*Selbstgegenwart*)" could not be maintained.³¹ How should original intuition be possible, if not something external could be authentically present? So, if the lifeworld is an aesthetic world, it cannot be adequately understood as merely "subjective." Admittedly the lifeworld clearly is the world of "subjects"; it borrows its name from the "subjective life" of its inhabitants. However, as a world of aesthetic experience, this world must also include objects that are not reducible to the meaning they have for "subjects" referring to them. If the intuition of "authentic presence" is lifeworldly essential, the lifeworld is not possible without something that is authentically present, which, again, must be something exterior.

²⁶ See, for instance, Husserl (1973).

²⁷ Figal (2018, pp. 149–150).

²⁸ Husserl (1962a, p. 114).

²⁹ Husserl (1962a, pp. 128, 130).

³⁰ Husserl (1966, pp. 16–24). See Figal (2015b, pp. 126–138).

³¹ Husserl (1962a, p. 107).

This does not mean that for the inhabitants of the lifeworld such intuition would be permanently explicit. It could also tacitly provide the basic certainty of “having the world (*Welthabe*)” and thus, among other practices, enable scientific “substruction.” On the other hand, such intuition of “authentic presence” cannot be permanently concealed, in which case one would have good reason to take it as a mere fiction. So “authentic presence” must be able to become manifest, and its manifestation must be open to experience. Only then one can examine which objectivity can be present as the original objectivity of the lifeworld and also discern which objects can mostly reveal this objectivity as character.

3 3.

After having discussed Husserl's conception so far, it is consequent to first consider Husserl's answer to the question of how to grasp the original objectivity of the lifeworld, and to do so in order to examine its potential as well as its limits. Possibly the most detailed version of such an answer is to be found in a text that belongs to Husserl's *Crisis* project, but was published earlier than the book, namely in 1939. Because of this the text has become especially prominent, but also because of the extensive commentary Jacques Derrida has devoted to it.³² In this text Husserl discusses “the origin of geometry” and thus a topic that clearly is of crucial importance for Husserl's critical discussion of the Galilean idea of a “mathematical universe.”

The passage of the text most pertinent to Husserl's conception of “authentic presence” begins with a methodological reflection. Husserl makes clear that the elucidation of the “origin” of geometry he intends is not a reconstruction of its historical beginning, but instead an explication of its “immanent structure of meaning (*innere Sinnstruktur*).”³³ So, Husserl's idea is not to reduce geometry to historical facts, but to give an *a priori* explication of “the apodictic” that “the founder of geometry in a pre-scientific world” must have had available as “material of idealizations.” As such “material,” Husserl first mentions “spatiotemporality,” and also the “shapes” and “figures” that are possible in space and time. A few lines below he states that the “environment” of the “first geometers” must surely have been “a world of ‘things’” including human beings as “subjects” of this world. All these “things” have “corporeality” – though, as Husserl adds, human beings and also “cultural objects” related to them cannot be reduced to that. However, as Husserl concludes, all entities can nevertheless be regarded as “pure bodies,” and such bodies, again, must have “spatiotemporal shapes” and, related to these, “material qualities.”³⁴

Husserl's considerations just sketched are especially illuminating because the “world of ‘things’” he introduces, indeed is a world of “original” or, as one could also say, of “primordial” things. Though Husserl mentions “cultural objects” and also points to the “practical life of desires” as well as to a technical formation of things that accords to the needs of such life, he does not presuppose a practical lifeworld, out

³² Husserl (1962b).

³³ Husserl (1962a, p. 380).

³⁴ Husserl (1962a, pp. 383–384).

of which geometry emerges as a formalized version of the practical skill of surveying. Rather, he conceives the theoretical endeavor that geometry is as enabled by the initial experience of “pure bodies.” Only because the initial experience is not woven into producing and practical life, concentration on the “pure bodies” is possible. As a consequence of this, further and more differentiated accentuations can be made, in such a way that, at the shapes of things, forms like surfaces, lines and angles are discovered and recognized as separate correlates of discovery. As soon as the “invariant content” of such forms is grasped, pure geometrical figures are discovered.³⁵

Though Husserl’s explication of geometry as an unfolding of something originally experienced is impressive, it does not in every respect come up to the original intuition that according to Husserl himself is essential for the lifeworld. Husserl does not mention the perceptibility of the “pure bodies” geometrical experience begins with, but just presupposes it, stating that the first geometers “have to do with” the shapes and figures of spatiotemporality. How should such “having to do” be possible if not by looking at the shapes and figures of “pure bodies”? Husserl probably omits mentioning perceptibility, because his main concern is the very possibility of geometrical “idealization,” and as to this shapes and forms such as lines and angles are certainly more relevant than their sheer visibility. Geometry originates in the intuition of structures, which, though visible, are not regarded in their visibility. Husserl, as it seems, affirms the particular geometrical perspective and thus, missing a decisive point of his own conception, only partially grasps the original objectivity of the lifeworld.

Such partiality of philosophical descriptions is, at least to a certain degree, unavoidable. Following Husserl’s methodological considerations according to which origins are accessible only in reference to an “immanent structure of meaning” that includes them, one has good reason to assume that the original objectivity of the lifeworld cannot be grasped as if it were independent from more or less fully developed structures, and also not in reference to every “immanent structure of meaning.” As it seems original perceptibility withdraws from the meaning structure of geometry, and therefore, in line with Husserl’s discussion of geometry, one must figure out a particular practice in the context of which original perceptibility is discoverable and factually discovered. This context must be such as to be concerned with perceptibility, and very likely not with perceptibility just on the whole, but with particularly intense modes of perceptibility.

As to the objects that form the origin of geometry, the mode relevant is visibility, and especially concerned with visibility are the visual arts, as already their name indicates. These arts are more or less reflected formations of visibility, and accordingly experiencing visual artworks means to more or less intensely encounter visibility.

Visual arts form visibility at any rate. However, such formation can be either realized just as an effect subordinated to other intentions, for instance to the intention to represent something by depiction, or visibility can be an artist’s main concern. In this case an artist’s work would be devoted to the visible as such, so that the artist’s production would be, and also enable an experience of visibility. Such is the work of many modern painters, but, as Merleau-Ponty highlighted in a brilliant essay, most prominently the work of Paul Cézanne, who was first to programmatically conceive

³⁵ Husserl (1962a, p. 385).

painting solely as realization of visibility.³⁶ Cézanne spoke about his conception of painting and about his work in conversations recorded by the poet and art critic Joachim Gasquet, and he did so in a way that is extraordinarily helpful for understanding the visual experience of original objectivity.³⁷

As a condition for experiencing pure visibility Cézanne mentions the lack of intentions. As he says, an artist must be nothing more than a receptacle for sensations; the artist's will must be still and all prejudicial voices in him must have become silent. Then the motive, in case of Cézanne's explanation a contemplated landscape, would inscribe itself on the "photographic plate" the artist's mind has become.³⁸ Contemplating a landscape, the artist would not discern anything meaningful like houses, trees or mountains, and neither would he see roads or ways that could be taken in order to reach another place. Instead of understanding what is there before his eyes, the artist would see nothing but colors.

One may wonder whether such an unintentional view, devoid of all meaning, is at all possible. How should one be able to forget everything one knows about the world and become like a camera, a technical device that merely registers light waves? One can respond to this question with a phenomenological consideration, namely by interpreting the artistic attitude that Cézanne attempts to describe as a special version of what Husserl calls *epoché*. As Husserl points out in *Ideas I*, phenomenology originates with a particular change in attitude by which the normal or "natural" trust in the reality of the world becomes ineffective.³⁹ However, reality is neither doubted nor denied, but just neglected, in a word: with the change of attitude it has become irrelevant as to its meaning. The specific view of a painter as described by Cézanne, can be understood in such a way – as a view disregarding the historical, social, practical or technical meaning of the world and concentrating on color as its perceptible appearance.

Admittedly, such a view very likely cannot readily be adopted. Rather it needs exercise and patience and therefore may even not be generally realizable. However, this is no reason for doubting its very possibility. This very possibility is confirmed by the art of painting, more precisely by artworks that, like the paintings of Cézanne, are nothing but mere appearance. Certainly, something could be identified as a depicted "subject" of a painting, for instance the *Montagne Sainte-Victoire*, which Cézanne often took as a motive, or interiors with fruit and vessels displayed on a table, even portrayed people. However, in Cézanne's paintings all this emerges from color – from the paint applied to the canvas by uncongested brushstrokes. Contemplating such a painting and not only registering it, one would see this emergence, and would not pay any noteworthy attention to the painting's "subject" as such. Cézanne's paintings do not refer to the shape of a mountain, to the shape of fruit and vessels or to that of a human being but are realizations of visible appearance. These paintings actually are such appearances, and therefore with the paintings identifiable shapes can emerge as integral moments of the painting itself.

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty (1996).

³⁷ Figal (2010, pp. 212–230); Figal (2015b, pp. 168–182).

³⁸ Translations from Figal (2015b, pp. 168–169).

³⁹ Husserl (1976, pp. 65–66).

4 4.

If paintings have a character as just described, then they are something originally visible and in fact something visible of a specific kind. As specific realizations of original visibility, they are not just originally visible, but show and thereby intensify original visibility. As to such paintings there is no need to adopt an attitude as described by Cézanne and to make attempts of abstracting from the meaningful world in order to see the world in its mere visibility. Rather, such a change of attitude is initiated by a painting itself, and one can immediately see that, provided that one is able and willing to really contemplate a painting instead of focusing it in a historical, economic, social or technical respect whatever.

If the foregoing considerations can be generalized, so that artworks in general can be understood as primarily perceptible and to this effect as “aesthetic,” the result of these considerations would be of crucial importance for how to conceive life in the lifeworld and thereby the lifeworld as such. And if, moreover, the intensification of perceptibility as exemplified by the visibility of paintings, can be conceived as the specifically “aesthetic” character of artworks, one could conclude that this character is decisive for a lifeworldly life. Why then should one follow Blumenberg and exclude all aesthetic objects from the lifeworld?⁴⁰ Rather, for the sake of transparency, lifeworldly life should be devoted to the experience of the beautiful – given that the term “beauty” designates intensified original perceptibility. There is good reason to assume that this is the case; one must only recall Plato’s definition of beauty as what “most brightly shows itself (*ekphanéstaton*)” and add that such intense appearing can only be recognized in contemplation.⁴¹

Assuming that aesthetic experience is regarded as an exception, if not as reserved to a more or less exclusive aestheticism, one very likely would find the conclusion just drawn strange. However, one should not restrict the canon of beautiful things all too rigidly. Certainly pictures, sculptures, poems and pieces of music can be beautiful, but also buildings, gardens and vessels, also crafted things and industrially produced design objects. In any case the range of human-made beautiful things does not only include masterly artworks, but quite different objects of different aesthetic quality. So, aesthetically significant objects are widely present in the lifeworld. They also function as a measure for assessing things that are aesthetically neutral or definitely not beautiful and thus, as it were, underline their importance.

Attempts to cover the full range of the beautiful in the lifeworld would need a more extensive discussion. Therefore, the following considerations concerning this topic will be concentrated on the visual arts, which, as hopefully will become clear, are especially appropriate for demonstrating the lifeworldly ubiquity of the beautiful. Artworks like paintings or sculptures are not only exhibited in museums, but also in public buildings or, as to sculptures, at public places, and especially paintings, drawings or prints also often form part of private homes. In any case such artworks essentially contribute to the character of rooms public or private and thus essentially determine life in these rooms. However, such contribution is different from that of

⁴⁰ Blumenberg (2010, p. 70).

⁴¹ *Phedrus*, 250d (Plato 1901).

things or materials that more or less inconspicuously blend in an ensemble of colors, textures and forms and, together with the light and sound of a room, make the all-over synesthetic impression called "atmosphere."⁴² Even artworks that do not show off stand out of their surroundings. They draw attention and thus provide the possibility of contemplation that as such determines a room even if it is not realized. A room thus determined by artworks has what could be called a contemplative atmosphere; contemplation as a basic possibility of human life is as such present, and that very likely would affect those who sojourn or live in such a room, provided they are not ignorant of what they could see.

Crafted things and design object are different from artworks like paintings or drawings, insofar as they are not made for mere contemplation, but for everyday use. Being useful in whatever way they primarily blend in contexts of practical life, and as Heidegger holds in *Being and Time*, they therefore do not draw any attention, but have their particular relevance and significance in manifold relations to other things and ultimately to the aims of human practice.⁴³ However, one must not follow Heidegger's reduction of useful things to usefulness and thus assume that a contemplative aspect is necessarily excluded from use. Tools, electrical devices, and even more tableware and furniture are not just for use, but also are touched and viewed and thus aesthetically experienced.

The aesthetic qualities of useful things differ from those of artworks. Such qualities must be compatible with use, however, without being just a decorative addition without any relevance for use. They must form, as it were, the perceptible side of usefulness that is recognizable in its beauty and thereby is more than functionality. Beauty and functionality must not be identified. A chair for instance can be comfortable and thereby functional, but without any elegance and beauty. Contrary, a chair would not be called elegant and beautiful without apparently promising comfort. Both sides then must fit together so that an object like a chair can be convincing on the whole. Nevertheless, it is by its aesthetic qualities that an object forms part of particular surroundings, which not only allow different activities, but offer a place where one just would like to live.

The difference between artworks and useful things just pointed out should not be taken as a strict alternative. There are things in-between – neither artworks merely to be contemplated nor beautiful useful things like pieces of furniture. Such are for instance products of ceramic art and especially those of Japanese tea ceramics.⁴⁴ In Japanese tea culture a tea bowl (*chawan*) made by a master artist, is regarded as an artwork of special significance, even as an artwork of higher grade than a masterly painting. Nevertheless, it is made for use during traditional tea gatherings. However, such use does not impair the art character of a tea bowl. Use in this case rather is a kind of contemplation. Holding a tea bowl in one's hands one would experience its shape and surface, and drinking from it one would experience the particular character of its lip. After tea has been served, the tea bowls would be cleaned and then displayed on a purple silk cloth spread on the tatami mat-covered floor of a tearoom and

⁴² Figal (2015a, pp. 220–229).

⁴³ Heidegger (1976, pp. 90–97).

⁴⁴ Figal (2019a).

thus presented for contemplation, which again would include the possibility to take a bowl with one's hands. The example shows that use is not in every case a self-centered disposing of something in order to pursue one's interests and to achieve one's aims. Rather use can be an activity expressing recognition and respect of something. This is by no means restricted to a particular culture such as the Japanese tea culture. Every pertinent human practice can be a way of devoting oneself to something objective and of perceiving it as what it is in itself.

So far, artworks have been discussed that are things or objects; they are more or less stable, self-contained, inanimate, middle-sized entities that one has in front of oneself so as to look at.⁴⁵ However, buildings are no objects of that kind. Other than things, they cannot be handled, and mostly they cannot be transported to other places, but instead coalesce with the places at which they were constructed. Moreover, buildings can only be adequately experienced both from outside and inside. For entirely experiencing a building one must step in, and after that one would be surrounded by it. Inhabiting a building one would constantly feel its surrounding character, and one would more or less clearly realize that a building does not only house oneself and possibly other persons, but also the things one aesthetically and also practically lives with. So, buildings, and especially residential ones, are comprehensive manifestations of the lifeworld, and, accordingly, living in a lifeworld can generally be understood as habitation.⁴⁶

Given that buildings have such a particular significance for the lifeworld, one has good reason to assume that the aesthetic quality of buildings is of comparable importance. With this quality the world character of the lifeworld as such would appear – the openness, in which perceptible things and perceptual experience are correlated in particular ways. However, being such openness, the lifeworld is difficult to grasp; it is inconspicuous, and not so only because of its primordial perceptibility in general, but especially because of its hardly perceptible openness. Accordingly, this also holds true for the beauty of buildings.

However, attentively experiencing buildings that are regarded as beautiful, one can find out that the beauty of such buildings is atmospheric in character. It is a surrounding beauty, interplay of colors and textures, of light incidence and acoustic qualities, of views and perspectives, proportions and extensions. With such interplay one would experience the openness, but also the sheltering character of a building, and one would possibly see, how a building enables habitation, and does so first of all as a perceptible and thereby primordial manifestation of space. With architectural beauty the lifeworld can be experienced as the perceptual openness of human life.

5 5.

Recognizing that human life is ubiquitously determined by buildings, useful things and also by artworks, one would refrain from marginalizing the relevance of the aesthetic so far discussed. If beautiful things as intensifications of the aesthetic in the

⁴⁵ Figal (2015a, pp. 89–98).

⁴⁶ Figal (2015a, pp. 191–209).

broader sense allow a clearer experience of the lifeworld they essentially contribute to the lifeworld's transparency. Disclosing the fundament of every lifeworldly practice, aesthetic objects and especially artworks reveal what in most practice, including the sciences, remains concealed. However, this should not give reason to regarding the arts as superior to the sciences or other forms of practice. As Husserl has convincingly argued, the sciences have their own legitimacy just in the way they are; without abstracting from their lifeworldly fundaments they could not be, what they are supposed to be, but would lose their specific potential. However, because the sciences do not reveal their own partiality, they need complementary modes of discovery, which necessarily withdraw from scientific explication. The "crisis of the European sciences," to repeat, is not caused by the sciences as such, but by the fact that the "worldview of modern human beings" was exclusively determined by the "positive sciences" and thus "turned away from the questions decisive for authentic humanity."⁴⁷ According to Husserl, philosophy – more precisely, phenomenology – should counteract such reduction, and especially so by elucidating the lifeworld as fundament of the sciences. However, as hopefully has become clear with the foregoing considerations, phenomenology is well advised to address itself to the task Husserl has assigned it by devoting itself to a reflected contemplation and description of the arts.

In doing so, phenomenological thinking could also take up an issue that has concerned philosophy ever since its very beginning, namely the distinction between real entities and appearances that only seem to be the real. However, in line with Husserl one would not, like Plato, regard the ideas as truly being or, like Aristotle, an eidetically determined being-ness, but the perceptible, the original givenness which, as original appearance, can be contrasted to secondary appearances – images, constructions, assertions that, when examined more closely, prove to be unsustainable and even deceiving.⁴⁸ The original appearances constituting the lifeworld thus would function as a critical measure for fictions in speech, writing and images that form a self-contained world of their own. This does not mean that original appearances could guarantee the truth. Rather truth has to be discovered, not at least by critically examining different claims of truth. However, original appearance would in the end provide the only fundament for such examination. As Merleau-Ponty writes, seeking the essence of perception is tantamount to declare that perception is not presumed as true, but for us defined as access to truth.⁴⁹ So, again, the lifeworld proves to be the horizon of human cognition and insight.

As such horizon the lifeworld cannot be subjective, as Husserl holds, but must encompass the subjective and the objective. However, taking up Husserl's conception in conceiving the lifeworld as basically aesthetic, one must even add that the objective is of more importance than the subjective, because aesthetic experience, both in the broader and the specific sense, primarily is "having the world" in "authentic presence." So, reconsidering Husserl's conception of the lifeworld results in what can be called an objective turn.

⁴⁷ Husserl (1962a, pp. 3–4).

⁴⁸ Figal (2019b, pp. 43–108).

⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. xi).

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