

FIGURE, LIMIT AND THE CLASSICAL WORK OF ART

The first manifestations of Heidegger's interest in the question of art are usually situated in the mid-thirties. His essay on *The Origin of the Work of art* in its consecutive versions as well as his courses on Nietzsche witness this interest. Nevertheless, the notion of figure (*Gestalt*), which is of great significance in the context of this paper, does not appear for the first time at this later stage of Heidegger's philosophical itinerary.

The 1927 course on *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* already offers a treatment of the *Gestalt*. In the first part of the course Heidegger examines the traditional theses on Being: the thesis proper to Greek ontology, that of medieval ontology, finally, the modern thesis on Being, where Kant takes central stage¹. It is while examining the medieval thesis on the unity of essence (*essentia*) and existence (*existentia*) that the question of the figure arises. Εἶδος, γένος, φύσις, ὁρισμός, but mainly μορφή are the fundamental metaphysical concepts delimitating the essence (οὐσία). Μορφή is not only the figure in space, but the set of characteristics proper to a being as such: its *Gepräge*. To give a figure is to provide that which is produced or has been produced with its proper evidence (*Aussehen*): the εἶδος is founded upon the figure, the μορφή.

For Heidegger what is essential to Greek ontology is the foundational relation of the essence (εἶδος) to the figure (μορφή). Later on, it is once more in the context of an interpretation of Aristotle's *Physics* that this pair receives a thorough analysis. In interpreting the determination of the μορφή as εἶδος we can say: μορφή is «appearance», more precisely, the act of standing in and placing itself into the appearance. Μορφή means in general: placing into the appearance. Μορφή is not an ontic property present in matter, but a way of being². The essence (εἶδος) and the figure (μορφή) include everything that belongs to the being in question. They thus constitute the limit of that which

1. On the unique place of this course in the development of Heidegger's genuine «repetition» (*Wiederholung*) of the Greeks: R. BERNASCONI, Repetition and Tradition: Heidegger's Deconstructing of the Distinction between Essence and Existence in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, in: T. KISIEL/J. VAN BUREN (ed.), *Reading Heidegger from the Start. Essays in His Earliest Thought*, New York Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 130-132.

2. On the Essence and Concept of the Φύσις (1939) in: W. Mac Neill (ed.), M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, Cambridge Mass., Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 211.

determines being as something already completed (*fertig*), the Greek τέλειον or the Latin *perfectio*. The activity of giving a figure, of producing (*Herstellen*), is the fundamental attitude of the Greek *Dasein*. What nevertheless fails to become evident in this analysis is the historical dimension of the question taken within the frame of the history of metaphysics as a whole. In the same terms, later on, in the 1931 course, while treating the concept of force (δύναμις) in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Heidegger comes back to the question of μορφή, along with that of ποίησις, when he seeks to explain Aristotle's definition of δύναμις as ἐπιστήμη ποιητική. The classical Greek, Platonic – Aristotelian, interpretation of production (ποίησις) is that out of which the basic notions of philosophy have grown³. Heidegger goes on to give the main features of the Greek notion of production. What is produced in ποίησις is an ἔργον according to an εἶδος, an outward appearance seen in advance. *Telos* is the ἔργον of the εἶδος. The end is not the simple interruption, but the inner boundary of the ἔργον. To produce something is in itself to force it into its boundaries so much that this being-enclosed is already in view in advance along with all that it includes and excludes. What is form delimited from? Matter is the boundless, shapeless substance from which a being emerges. Matter (ὕλη) is the boundless (ἄπειρον):

«Precisely because the definitely demarcated material is tailored on the basis of ἔργον, precisely for this reason, it likewise stands as unbounded over and against the εἶδος. Both are directed away from another and yet toward one another; thus there is an opposition, and that is to say, a facing one another which is necessarily mutual — a neighbourhood, and indeed one whose extension is the farthest...» (118-9).

All beings are produced out of the inclusion and exclusion of the two elements. Limit and completion, exclusion and setting-into-a-form, that is, the contrariness (ἐναντιότης) inherent to the couple matter-form, are the main terms in which ποίησις is to be understood. Consequently, the notion of being as being-produced constitutes the very core of Greek ontology.

II

The same lexikon of the figure reappears in the 1933 Rectoral Address, even if, in this context, it is Ernst Jünger's figure of the worker (*Arbeiter*) that serves as a starting point. The powers that form the world (*weltbildenden Mächten*) bring forth a process of figuration (*Gestaltung*) viewed as a «being-at-work». This second aspect of Heidegger's treatment of the form as the consecration of

3. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ 1-3. *On the Essence and Reality of the Force*, Bloomington/Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 117.

the metaphysics of presence is not irrelevant to the first one: infact, it constitutes its very basis⁴.

In the 1936 lecture course on *The Will to Power as Art*, Heidegger designates the main stages in the history of Western aesthetics. In order to consider art in Nietzsche «as a configuration of will to power, which is to say, as a configuration of Being in general»⁵, we have to situate it in the history of Western aesthetics. Greek art is the first stage in this development, even before its actual theorizing in terms of aesthetics. In his schematisation of the stages through which Western aesthetics unfolds, Heidegger determines Greek art as the second moment in its genesis corresponding roughly to classical philosophy – Plato and Aristotle. It is here that the notion of figure appears in its most decisive role. In fact, the pair ὕλη-μορφή organizes the whole space of Greek art, but also in some sense of the Greek worldview in general: the predominance of the μορφή is founded upon the ἰδέα and the εἶδος in Plato. In order for Plato to interpret the «beingness» of beings as ἰδέα, not only is the experience of the ὄν as φύσις necessary, but what is equally necessary is the unfolding of the question under the guiding thread of the counterhold of τέχνη. The couple τέχνη - φύσις in Aristotle offers the fore-grasping for the interpretation of beingness as the σύνολον of μορφή and ὕλη, whereby that differentiation (*forma-materia*, form – content), which dominates the whole of metaphysical thinking with Hegel, is established⁶. In order for beings to distinguish themselves from other beings, they have to be arranged according to their inner and outer limits:

«what limits is form, what is limited is matter. Whatever comes into view as soon as

4. The 1933 Rectoral Address constitutes in this respect a first moment in a major shift in Heidegger's questioning of the figure and, more generally, that of *techne*: «We indeed find in the Address a major correction to the hierarchy of the ranks of active life as articulated in *Being and Time*, a major correction as far as τέχνη is concerned. Τέχνη, which was formerly narrowly confined within the inauthentic and fallen realm of everydayness, now suddenly climbs to the top on the ladder of authenticity...» (J. TAMINIAUX, *The Origin of the Work of Art* in: John Sallis (ed.), *Reading Heidegger. Commemorations*, Bloomington/Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 395-6).

5. *Nietzsche*, vol. I, New York, Harper & Row, 1991 (1979), p. 79. On the complex relation between the 1936 lecture course and the essay on *The Origin of the Work of Art*: R. BERNASCONI, *Heidegger in Question. The Art of Existing*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1993, pp. 102-105.

6. *Contributions to Philosophy. From Enowning*, 97, φύσις (τέχνη), Bloomington/Indianapolis Indiana University Press, Bloomington/Indianapolis, 1999, p. 134. Nevertheless, in this very instance, Heidegger acknowledges both the «end» or exhaustion of art in the way Hegel seemingly announces it and at the same time inaugurates its non-figurative but sounding or musical reestablishment in the context of his eschatology in *Being* (G. APOSTOLOPOULOU, *The Determination of Art after the «End of Art»*, *Annals for Aesthetics. Proceedings of the Symposium on Aesthetics The Question of Art in the Contemporary Word* held at the University of Ioannina in October 1998, 40 (2000), p. 66).

the work of art is experienced as a self-showing according to its εἶδος as φαίνεσθαι, is now subsumed under these definitions. The ἐκφανέστατον, what properly shows itself and is most radiant of all, is the beautiful. By way of the ἰδέα, the work of art comes to appear in the designation of the beautiful as ἐκφανέστατον»⁷.

Techne in its double significance of art and craftsmanship is innerly structured by the conceptual pair of matter and form. An extended analysis of this issue takes place in the first section of the essay on *The origin of the work of art*: from the pair ὕλη-εἶδος to the medieval *ens creatum* made up of *materia* and form (*forma*) and from there to the modern, Kantian as well as idealistic-Hegelian, pair of matter and form inherited from medieval philosophy, these conceptualizations of the «thingness» of a thing (*Ding*) fail to reveal its very essence. The «thing» *par excellence* is the Greek temple. But this exceptional «thing» is not abandoned to indefiniteness. On the contrary, the Greek temple is the gathering place of the World and the Earth, the meeting point of all dimensions proper to human existence and to the beings as a whole. The temple is not situated in an indifferent place but stands in the entrails of the valley. The temple and its enclosure do not disappear in the infinite space but, on the contrary, they dispose and bring all around it the unity of the relations and events that constitute a historical people. The temple opens up a World (*Welt*) and establishes it on the Earth (*Erde*). As a work (*Werk*) the temple is the place of the strife between them. Our claim is that Heidegger's interpretation of Greek art is grounded upon a clear conception of the figure as what is defined by a limit (*Grenze*). The classical work of art stems from a «pro-duction» (*Her-vor-bringen*) which is appropriate for a specific revealing of the truth and ends up with the constitution of a figure⁸. It is precisely by this belonging to the limit as what does not constrain, but on the contrary brings to a self-concealing appearing, that μορφή in Greek art is to be distinguished from the modern view of the figure as what is essentially unlimited.

In *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), whatever institutes itself in its limit by accomplishing it, and thus constitutes itself, has a form (μορφή). The figure in the Greek sense of the term constitutes itself by holding-itself-in-a-limit

7. Nietzsche, vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

8. Nevertheless, this interpretation is not univocal as Heidegger's reading of the classical art. As G. APOSTOLOPOULOU notes, Heidegger refutes the traditional rationalist anthropology of the Greek art and perceives the «classical» as belonging to the very structure of the *Dasein*, thus the questioning on art and that on Being itself reestablishes the meaning of art as a whole to the extent that the provenance of the latter is no more the past but the future, that is, the openness of the History of Being. By lying beyond the history of metaphysics determined irrevocably by its Greek origin, the classical art overcomes aesthetics conceived as a metaphysics of art. It thus paves the way to relating art to truth. (Heidegger and the Revision of the Classical, *Annals for Esthetics. Edition of the Panagiotis and Effie Michelis Foundation in Collaboration with the Hellenic Society for Aesthetics*, 35, 1995, pp. 106-108, in modern Greek).

which is an opening-out. When talking about modern technology, Heidegger will use the term of the «gigantic» (*Riesenhaftes*) to characterize its unlimited power. A first reference to this notion takes place in the *Contributions to Philosophy*, where Heidegger determines the «gigantic» as the alteration of quantity into quality. But here it is not a matter of reversing one category into another or of a dialectical mediation of the forms of representation; rather it is a matter of the History of Being. This reversing is prepared for in that beingness is determined in terms of τέχνη and of ἰδέα. Re-presenting and bringing-before-oneself include the «how far» and «to what extent», i.e., that which refers to distance in relation to beings as objects - without thinking of certain spatial things and relations⁹. This same theme will become later on in the Nietzsche-courses, the very core of Heidegger's critique, of modern technology and of its differentiation from Greek τέχνη. From this point of view, the «gigantic» would be the ultimate moment in modern metaphysics operating through an anthropomorphism, that is, the tendency to structure the world according to the image of man (μορφή ἀνθρώπου). For Heidegger, in Nietzsche's attempt to dehumanize Being, we have to see nothing more than an inversed case of anthropomorphism:

«The humanization of beings as a whole is not slighter here but more massive, not only in scope but above all in kind, inasmuch as no one has the slightest inkling concerning such humanization. This gives rise to the initially inexpugnable illusion that no humanization is at play. But if humanization pertains to world interpretation ineluctably, then every attempt to dehumanize humanization is without prospect of success»¹⁰.

Contemporary technology is the actualization of the anthropomorphic tendency proper to modernity¹¹. Consequently, Heidegger's interpretation of the figure is not a unilateral one. In fact, there is a whole lexikon of the figure which goes beyond metaphysical connotation. It appears in terms such as contour (*Gezüge*), fissure (*Riss*), tearing to openness (*Aufriss*). The essay on *The Origin of the Work of art* brings those terms together. We could then talk about an entirely new dimension of the *Gestalt*, which does not refer directly to the form-matter couple and its foundation, that is, the εἶδος in metaphysical idealism¹².

9. *Contributions to Philosophy. On Enowning*, op. cit., p. 94. The «gigantic» is proper to «machination» (*Machenschaft*). On the issue of what exceeds or goes beyond limits, ending up in the figureless: M. HAAR, La mise en oeuvre de la démesure, *Revue Epokhe*, no 5, special issue: «La démesure», Grenoble, Jérôme Millon, 1995, pp. 50-66.

10. Nietzsche, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 100.

11. GA 66, op. cit., p. 160.

12. A similar analysis takes place in the recently published vol. 66 of the *Gesamtausgabe* entitled *Besinnung* (p. 369). In Heidegger's history of Being, μορφή and ἰδέα (*Gesichtetheit, Sichtsamkeit*) are viewed together as an early stage in the history of metaphysics (GA 65, p. 208).

The remarks of J. Derrida and P. Lacoue-Labarthe, among others, on this point are clarifying. In J. Derrida's terms, this *lexikon* is present in Heidegger's intense reflexion on art since the mid-thirties and till the late-fifties, in an essay such as *On the way to language*¹³. As for P. Lacoue-Labarthe, he claims that there is a transcription of Dasein's existential structure of being-in-the-world in the *lexikon* of image, configuration and prototype, that is, in that of ἐνέργεια¹⁴. In the essay on *The origin of the work of art*, the «being-at-work» (*Ins-Werk-setzen*), the figure (*Gestalt*) is referred to a «poemtical project coming from Nothing». Since this first account, and in a much more systematic way, in the *addendum* to the essay written in 1960, the figure (μορφή) is said to belong to the conceptual array of «positing» (*setzen/stellen*), closely related to the Greek θέσις. Contrary to the act of posing, truth is left to its emergence (*sein lassen*). *Fest-stellen*, the act of constituting by immobilizing being in its secured permanence, belongs also to the sphere of positing. The suffix *fest-* demarcates the being by a limit, it brings it to the layout of a line. Limit here does not mean restriction in the negative sense of the term, but the bringing-forth to the appearance of something present-at-hand which has been produced (*Her-vor-bringen*): it is in this sense that the Greeks meant ἐνέργεια. Instead of circumscribing the ἔργον within the confines of a predetermined whole, the limit (πέρας) liberates the ἔργον to the openness of its presence. Πέρασ is not limit in the sense of the outer boundary, the point where something ends. The limit is always what limits, defines, gives footing and stability, that by which and in which something begins and pertains. Whatever becomes present and absent without limit has *of* and *by itself* no presencing and devolves into instability¹⁵.

(III)

Drawing from our analysis till now, what seems to be the key term in Heidegger's discourse on the figure is the limit (πέρας). In the lecture courses

13. «... Le «il faut» de cet engagement est en chemin vers ce qui, dans *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, rassemble entre appropriation et dé-appropriation (*Ereignis/Enteignis*), le pas, le chemin à frayer, le trait de frayage (*Aufriss*) et le langage (la langue-parole: *Sprache*), etc. Ce qui, plus loin dans le texte, ajointe tout le jeu du trait (*Riss, Grundriss, Umriss, Aufriss, Gezüge*) à celui de la stèle, de la stature ou de l'installation (*thesis, Setzen, Besetzen, Gesetz, Einrichten, Gestalt, Ge-stell*, autant de mots que je renonce ici à traduire) appartient à cette loi qui enjoint le cercle à l'ouverture thématique de *L'origine...*» (*La Vérité en peinture*, Paris, Flammarion, 1978 p. 39). The fissure would be the element from which form emanates (Le retrait de la métaphore, *Poésie*, 4-7, 1978). Also about the term of *Riss*, as well as those related to it of *Schlag* and *Prägung*, in Heidegger's analysis of the art and the language: *Psychè*, Galilée, Paris, 1987, p. 446.

14. P. LACQUE-LABARTHE, *Heidegger, Art and Politics. The Fiction of the Political*, Cambridge Mass., Blackwell, 1990, pp. 53-59.

15. On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις, in: *Pathmarks*, op. cit., p. 206. See also: *Heraklit*, GA 55, p. 301.

on Hölderlin's hymns «Germany» and «The Rhine», the true frontier, the real configuration, that is, what is originally strengthened and founded unfolds only if it is retained excess a calm mastery of the immoderation. The true frontier is the limit that makes a figure out of the shapeless matter¹⁶. In the 1942/43 course on *Parmenides*, Heidegger goes back to his earlier analyses thus developing once more some critical notions such as that of the limit. The horizon in which this analysis is held is that of truth as unconcealedness (ἀλήθεια) and of concealment (λήθη). An array of terms such as action, hand, word, hand-writing, «indicator» (τέκμαρ), city (πόλις) are treated thoroughly here. From concealment and oblivion, taken from Pindar's *Odes*, to the πράγματα and, from there, to the hand that indicates (*zeigt*) by disclosing what is concealed, Heidegger's analysis opens up a whole new conceptual space. It is precisely in the explanation of this «indicator» that the term πέρας appears not as that at which something stops, but that in which something originates: «Where demarcation is lacking, nothing can come to presence as that which is»¹⁷.

Limit as viewed here is not a negative delimitation but a positive determination of the figure. The difference between the Greek and the modern sense of the limit lies precisely in its relation to truth. Ἀλήθεια as unconcealedness is to be distinguished from truth in the sense of rectitude from which the dimension of concealment is absent:

«Λήθη, oblivion, is the concealment that lets the past, the present, and the future fall into the path of a self-absenting absence. And with that it sets man himself away into concealedness in relation to this withdrawal, precisely in such a manner that this concealment for its part does not, on the whole, appear. Λήθη conceals while it withdraws. It withdraws while, withholding itself, it lets the unconcealed and its disclosure lapses into the «away of the veiled absence»»¹⁸.

The indicator (τέκμαρ, *Zeichen*) in the modern sense of the term does not imply any notion of finitude, but only the provision of an «intermediate» stage within the «limitlessness» of the ever increasing successes and concerns». On the contrary, in Pindar's poetic expression of the signless cloud (ἄτέκμαρτα νέφος), «the cloud that also withholds its own presence, is an absent concealment that does not show itself»¹⁹.

Concluding, it is essential to point out that Heidegger's interpretation of

16. D. JANICAUD, The «Overcoming» of Metaphysics in the Hölderlin Lectures in *Reading Heidegger. Commemorations*, op. cit., pp. 383-391.

17. *Parmenides*, Bloomington/Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 82.

18. *Ibid*, p. 83. Cf. *The Essence of Truth. On Plato's Cave Allegory and Thaeetus*, London/New York, Continuum Books, 2002, pp. 32-39.

19. *Parmenides*, op. cit., p. 82.

Greek art is based on a clear conception of the figure (*Gestalt*) as what is defined by a limit (*Grenze*). The classical work of art stems from a «production» (*Her-vor-bringen*) that is conformed to a revealing of the truth, while ending up in the constitution of a figure. It is precisely by this belonging to the limit, as that which does not constrain but on the contrary brings to a self-concealing appearing, that the figure in Greek art is to be distinguished from its modern view as what is essentially unlimited: while talking about modern technology, Heidegger will use the term of the «gigantic» (*Riesenhaftes*). The rich lexikon used by Heidegger to qualify his approach to Greek μορφή witnesses this differentiation. He designates the figure in terms of contour (*Gezüge*), fissure (*Riss*) or tearing to openness (*Aufriss*). If the figure in modern times is determined by its unlimited essence, ending up in the «gigantic», the figureless, the classical figure is constituted by its very limit, it is essentially limited in its essence. But the limit (πέρας) is designated in the 1942/43 course *Parmenides* not as that at which something stops, but that in which something originates, precisely by being formed in this or that way, i.e., allowed to rest in a form and as such to come into presence. Consequently, the classical work of art, taken as the initial point of Heidegger's questioning, renders manifest the ontological premisses of art.

G. MAGGINI
(Ioannina)

ΜΟΡΦΗ, ΠΕΡΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΟ ΚΛΑΣΙΚΟ ΕΡΓΟ ΤΕΧΝΗΣ

Π ε ρ ί λ η ψ η

Τὸ ἄρθρο πραγματεύεται τὴν ἐρμηνεία τοῦ κλασικοῦ ἔργου τέχνης ἀπὸ τὸν Μάρτιν Χάιντεγκερ στὶς διαλέξεις τοῦ 1935-36 γιὰ τὴν *Προέλευση τοῦ ἔργου τέχνης*. Τὸ κύριο ἐπιχείρημά μας εἶναι ὅτι ἡ χαϊντεγκεριανὴ ἐρμηνεία τῆς κλασικῆς τέχνης βασίζεται στὴν ἀντίληψη τῆς *μορφῆς* ὡς αὐτὸ ποὺ προσδιορίζεται ἀπὸ ἓνα ὄριο (*πέρας*). Τὸ κλασικὸ ἔργο τέχνης ἔχει τὴν προέλευσή του σὲ μιὰ «παραγωγή» (*Hervorbringen*) ποὺ προκύπτει ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκάλυψη τῆς Ἀλήθειας καὶ καταλήγει στὴ συγκρότηση μιᾶς *μορφῆς*. Ἡ *μορφή* προσδιορίζεται ἀπὸ ἓνα *πέρας* ὡς αὐτὸ ποὺ δὲν περιορίζει ἀλλὰ ἀντιθέτως ὁδηγεῖ στὴν «κεκαλυμμένη ἐκκάλυψη» τοῦ πρόχειρου (*vorhandenes*) ὄντος. Ἀντὶ νὰ περιχαρακῶναι τὸ ὄν μέσα στὰ ὄρια ἑνὸς προδιαγεγραμμένου ὅλου, τὸ *πέρας* ἐλευθερώνει τὸ ἔργον στὴ διανοικτότητα τῆς παρουσίας. Οἱ ἀναφορὲς στὴ *μορφή* ἐπιστρατεύουν ἓνα πλούσιο λεξιλόγιο (*Gezüge, Riss, Aufriss*). Στοιὺς ἀντίποδες τῆς *μορφῆς* ὡς αὐτὸ ποὺ συγκροτεῖται ἀπὸ ἓνα *πέρας* θέτει ὁ Χάιντεγκερ τὴ νεωτερικὴ τεχνικὴ ποὺ κυριαρχοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ «γιγαντιαῖο» (*Riesenhaftes*) καὶ προσδιορίζονται μεταφυσικὰ ἀπὸ ἓνα θέτειν (*Stellen*). Στὴ συνέχεια, τὰ ἐρμηνευτικὰ σχόλια τῶν Ζὰκ Ντεριντὰ (*La vérité en peinture*) καὶ Φ. Λακὸν-Λαμπάρτ (*Typographies*) μᾶς δίνουν τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ διερευνήσουμε περαιτέρω τὴ σχέση *μορφῆς* καὶ κλασικοῦ ἔργου τέχνης στὸν Χάιντεγκερ. Τέλος, γίνεται ἀναφορὰ στὴ σύντομη ἀλλὰ καίρια ἀνάλυση τοῦ ὄρου *πέρας* στὶς πανεπιστημιακὲς παραδόσεις τοῦ 1942-43 γιὰ τὸν Παρμενίδη.

Γκ. ΜΑΓΓΙΝΗ