

# Introduction

This book presents thoughts of exile from within, trying to grasp the *experience of time* from within existence in exile. It is a book that aims to do something difficult, namely, to think from the experience of exilic time and not simply about concepts and ideas about time and exile or about personal or collective narratives of exilic experience. It departs from the impact of the time we live in today, but, unlike many other books and discussions of exile, it does not focus on the experience of being outside and displaced. It dedicates its attention rather to the experience of existing inside the outside and to the sensing and senses of time that emerge within exilic experience.

We live today times of the excess of exiles. In the last decades, a huge amount of theoretical literature about exile has been published, and the subject of exile is doubtless a question of increasing political, social, and humanitarian actuality and urgency. Exile has been discussed both empirically and transcendently, both as human condition and as historical condition and as juridical-political and as psychological-affective issue. It is an old trope in Western culture and has been treated throughout the history of philosophy both implicitly and explicitly. Ontologically, exile has been defined as the movement of all existing things that, as existing, is what comes out of a common ground of being, either nature or God. The “ex,” *out of*, that defines exile, is already imprinted in the Latin word *ex-sistence*. But if all existence is a kind of exile from the common ground of nature, of Being or of divine creation, the way existence has been thought and experienced focused mainly on its being-there, its “-sistere,” “*stans*” or “instances,” that is, its standing. The attention to the “ex,” to the exilic condition of existence, has been more explicitly emphasized

when the question about human existence was brought under scrutiny. Exile, therefore, has been conceived existentially as the proper of human existence qua movement and has been considered what most properly marks the *human* condition. Seneca insisted that human soul is exilic to such an extent that it can never remain where it is, needing to disseminate itself everywhere. And this is true to such an extent that the human soul cannot be exiled from its constitutive exile; thus, nothing in the world is alien to human existence.<sup>1</sup> He explicitly connected human exilic condition to the human struggle for universality. Acknowledging how the human soul is an excess of exile that cannot be exiled from its exilic nature, Seneca summed up ancient views on how the philosophical search for a universal viewpoint and truth presupposes an exile or a flight from the known and owned. For the purpose of exposing this argument, Plutarch, for instance, wrote his famous essay *Peri fugés, De exilio, On Exile*.<sup>2</sup>

These views on exile as constitutive movement of human existence have been present in Greek and Latin traditions since ancient times. In the *Odyssey*, Homer presented the mythological version of what would later define the movement of human existence as the longing for the freedom of truth and the truth of freedom: in this version, human existence is an odyssey, the movement of departing from the known, adventurously traversing the unknown, and coming back to the known transformed by the unknown. This *Odyssey*-like trajectory has been used for centuries to define both the movement of consciousness and of exile, reaching modern times in Hegel's attempts to describe the phenomenology of the spirit and Schelling's views on the "Odyssey of the Spirit."<sup>3</sup> Thus, for both, the trajectory of the Spirit is essentially exilic. It is found as well in the description of the platonic cave as the very structure of philosophical *paideia*.<sup>4</sup> With slight variations, this exilic scheme is operative in the neo-Platonic heritage of Christian tradition through which human existence is described as the movement from exiting [*exitus*] God, living a worldly existence in dispersion and disquiet [*cura*] and searching for return [*reditus*] to divine unity through grace.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, exile marks even more emphatically the Jewish tradition insofar as it defines not only the fate of a people but also the very meaning of being a people. This fate and meaning are anchored by the heavy accent of expulsion and persecution of exile, which renders discourses on the "wandering Jew" both ambiguous and problematic.

Franz Rosenzweig insisted that the Jewish people can be called the “eternal people,” “the people that becomes the people, as in the dawn of its earliest times so later again in the bright light of history, in an exile.”<sup>6</sup> In regard to the Jewish religious tradition, to its history and culture, exile is what guarantees that the Jewish people “is a people only through the people.”<sup>7</sup> Defining the condition from which the Jewish people can be a people and further can understand itself as eternal life, exile marks not only the way human existence exists but in which sense it can exist as a people without defining its being on the basis of its belonging to a territory.

Until modernity and mainly through the heritage of ancient Greek, Latin, and Christian tradition, the exilic scheme of human existence, proposed by the philosophical tradition, was marked by the promise of a return to home, to Nature, to God. It was marked by nostalgia. We could say more simply that, before modernity, human existence was philosophically conceived of as existence in exile but an exile that keeps promising the return. Modernity understands itself as historical exile. In modernity, exile becomes itself a historical condition. Modern existence is a no-longer existence, no longer “Greek,” no longer “religious,” no longer bound to tradition and authority, as Kant announced, but an existence continuously breaking with its own past. It is existence in *renaissance*, in *reform*, in *revolution*. In this sense, modernity is grounded in an exile without return, thus every “return” described in modern terms, is return to an invented, constructed and forged beginning or origin. Modern promises are other than those of the Ancients: they are promises of revolution, of grounding what had never before been had or seen, either in the encounter with the New World or in the forging of new forms for the world. At the same time that philosophy wants and longs for a home everywhere, recalling Novalis’s famous quote—“Philosophy is homesickness, the urge to be at home everywhere” (*Die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh, Trieb, überall zu Hause zu sein*)<sup>8</sup>—exile is romanticized as the necessary suffering condition of creation and conquest. Exile without return, as the common English saying goes—“You can’t go home again”<sup>9</sup>—is the structure of modern concepts of *Bildung*. In postmodernity, though, exile becomes a condition of the world. As a condition of the world, exile knows the extreme form of exile, not only without return but also without departure. It is exile without departure and also without arrival. This appears very clearly in the second generation

of histories of exile, in the children of exile, who have never known the “before” the exile and continue to experience the denial of an “after.” In this extreme form of exile without departure and without arrival, without promises of return or arrival, exiled existence becomes existence haunted by the violence of the extreme, what includes, of course, extreme forms of violence. Exiled existence is existence at the edge, at the frontier, continuously touching the frontiers and edges of existence.

According to this sketchy history of the expansion of the concept of exile from a juridical-political concept to ontological, historical, and epochal concepts, in which exile defines not only a *conditio humana*, but also a *conditio historica* and further a *conditio mundana*, two dimensions are continuously intertwined: the concrete juridical-political experience of existing *in* exile and the existential-historical-ontological understanding of existence *as* exile. In all these formulations, exile is understood on the basis of the ecstatic ilic scheme of movement, grasped as an ecstatic change from-to. Described as the torment of loss or as a resource for creation, exile has been grasped for centuries as the narrative of a cut, of an interruption or of a caesura that separates in more or less absolute ways a before from an after, an origin from a destination. Existence in exile, then, has been understood as existence in the cut that separates and interrupts the continuity of a before and an after. Thus, what is interrupted here is the continuity of time itself. This continuity is interrupted because the no-longer-being of the past and the not-yet-being of the future not only remain always present but become even more present than the present, not solely in the sense that the present would dim or fade away under the overexposure of past memories and future expectations. The point to be made here is rather that exile interrupts any experience of time as continuous succession of before and after, the very measure of the movement of this flow, precisely because, in exile, existence is suspended in the *between*. As such, it can be said that exile is the experience of the *epokhé* of existence. It is a countertime in the time of existence and in existing time. Countertime means here *both* another time in the order of time *and* something other than the order of time, as Werner Hamacher shows quite clearly in one of his last essays published in English.<sup>10</sup> As existence suspended in the between, exile can indeed be considered untimely existence in time.

But how to conceive of and find an adequate formulation to describe the experience of exile from within, that is, from exile while exiling, indeed an experience from the while while whiling, so to speak? In question is no longer “time,” neither a tense, nor a “voice”—not even the middle voice—but a verbal tension, which is the proper experience of what grammarians call the “gerund.”

The term “gerund” derives from the Latin verb *gerere*, which means to carry on, bear, bring forth.<sup>11</sup> The fundamental meaning is of an on-going action, without provenance or destiny, without a beginning or end. Grammarians define the gerund as a verbal noun because it has the property of acting both as a verb and as a noun, being a kind of “halfway” between both.<sup>12</sup> It is close to the present participle, and traditional grammar sometimes considered them as synonymous. Besides the gerund, the Latin language and grammar also knew another form of verbal noun, very close to the gerund, called “gerundive.” Those forms are also called nominal forms of the verb or verb nouns insofar as they do not carry any mark of temporal or modal flexion, assuming characteristics of a noun even though they are not nouns. They are, in this sense, also very close to the infinitive. Gerundive forms reject articles and work, so to speak, as nouns against substantivization. The distinction between the gerund and the gerundive in Latin is not easy to explain but can be described as following: the gerund is a verbal noun, always *active* in force, having the infinitive in the nominative case, and the other cases formed with a *-nd* to the present stem of the verb. The gerundive has more the function of a verbal adjective, passive in force, formed by *-ndus* and related forms added to the stem of the verb.<sup>13</sup> According to French grammar, verbal nouns ending with *-ant* are called *geróndif*. Grammarians have great difficulty in accounting for this difference, above all because the gerundive disappeared in Latin, and some modern languages tend to use infinitive forms to render its meaning.<sup>14</sup> Some grammarians want to read in the gerundive a kind of *participium necessitatis*, in which a mandatory meaning and a futural sense of “having to be” seem to be implied. In contemporary English grammar, the gerundive is difficult to discern, but a possible way of rendering it would be with “to be- done, read, said,” and so on. In languages such as Brazilian Portuguese, however, where gerundive forms are abundant and appear in multiple uses, the main sense of these forms is the expression of a continuous action, without any

idea of fulfillment, achievement, or end, being thus also understood as a nonfinal verb. Gerundive forms are fundamentally performatives, describing an action while acting. I will use both expressions “gerund” and “gerundive” (time or temporality) to express the on-going and whiling in the between and not the grammar uses of it as verbal noun.

What I am trying to stress here differs from some recent reflections<sup>15</sup> on the gerund and gerundive that can be read for instance in Samuel Weber’s discussions on “theatricality as medium”<sup>16</sup> and in the beautiful thoughts by Pascal Quignard on “the image that is lacking in our days.”<sup>17</sup> Paying attention to the gerund and present participle as the grammatical hallmark of a certain meaning of “theatricality,” Samuel Weber considered these modes to be the ones in which presence is suspended, letting appear an interval that links and separates what is presented and the presentation, constituted by a series of repetitions, which are modes of disjunctive “goings-on” that anticipate the future remembering the past.<sup>18</sup> Describing the gerund and the present participle in these terms, Weber still “reads” it from the viewpoint of a temporal sequence; even if the main focus is the way the present gives itself in this sequence. For Pascal Quignard, the question is not about the anticipation of the future remembering the past but of “being before a to be done” [*étant devant être fait*], insofar as the focus of his musings on the gerundive is the Latin mural painting, which he recognizes as the painting of the image that is lacking in the image. For him the gerundive is always saying “*devant*,” which in French can mean “before” in the sense of in front of, but also “having to,” and, last but not least, is a form in which the gerundive form *-ant* is always present. The act of seeing an image is therefore intrinsically gerundive, car it is a “*devant devant devant*,”<sup>19</sup> a difficult phrase in his short chapter that maybe could be rendered with “having to be-being in front of, or ahead of itself.” The main sense Quignard acknowledges in the gerundive is the imminence, the “ambush” of being, the “scopic instant” as he also calls it. But also here it is the future and the infinite that seem to define the gerund and its gerundive tension.

Even if these aspects definitely can be attributed to the “gerundive” and the present participle mode of being, what seems to me decisive is, nonetheless and above all, the type of movement that constitutes the verbal tension in a between and a meanwhile, a movement enigmatically without movement, that can only be

conceived of when the scheme of movement as a change from-to is somehow forgotten. This is in my view what defines time in exile.

The main thesis of this book is that the meaning of exile is to be grasped from the gerundive sense of present, which differs and exceeds the present and its modes of presence. As such, the meaning of exile is not conceived from the ecstatic scheme of movement as change from-to, where a view towards the before and after, with their emphasis on mourning and memories, on broken utopias and futures, and on losses and frustrations, directs attention away from the core of exile—namely, from the suspended existence in the between and in the meanwhile.

Fixated on the ecstatic scheme of movement as a change from-to, and on the consequent focus on displacement, discourses and philosophies of exile become inattentive to what Walter Benjamin once called “the perceptive now” and that we could extend in terms of “the perceptive now of exile.” They remain indifferent to how exile gives itself to view from *within*, that is, from its experience as an immense struggle for presencing. Inattentive to how existence in exile is suspended in the between and in the meanwhile, theories and discourses on exile become blind as bats facing the light of a simple truth, to use an image by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*.<sup>20</sup> The simple truth of exile—that is, how it shows itself from within itself, from its experience—lies in the between-existence it exposes one to, neither here nor there, neither in the before nor in the after, not even exile nor asylum, but a disquieting interstice, an existence at the edge, at the frontier of existence.<sup>21</sup> Time in exile is the time of existing-between and in the meanwhile, time in which a sense of present more present than the present exposes itself. What emerges here is a nearness closer than proximity, a fragile groundlessness, insofar as it can find a ground neither in the past nor in the future. Neither before nor after, thus neither-nor defines exiled existence as a *neuter*; neuter, which in Latin means “neither . . . nor,” but never “neutral,” thus in exile nothing can remain neutral or indifferent. What marks the neuter—neither-nor—of exile is however not so much what is negated—as for instance the here or there, the before or after—but the hyphen and the mode of its presence. In the experience of being neither-nor, one experiences being not as nothing but as is-being. Existence in exile is, above all, existence exposed to the uncanny is-being, to the bare “is-existing”; an odd expression in English that

aims to express the gerundive mode of being in exile. It is existence unable to rely upon what it was or on what it can, could, or would be, having nothing to rely upon except the is-existing. It is existence in gerundive. In exile, existence is complete insecurity; thus, the only thing that remains is not even language, as Hannah Arendt affirmed,<sup>22</sup> but merely the “is-existing.” This bare, unsheltered, exposed, and exposing “is-existing” is indeed the only place and time of exiled and exilic existence, a place without a place, and a time without time, a groundless ground to exist. Rather than a question of space and time, existence in exile poses the question of the between and the meanwhile. Existence in exile is indeed existence in disquiet. Every existence in exile is a kind of *Book of Disquiet*, to recall the title of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa. The is-existing, upon which existence in exile is sustained, is indeed without exit; thus, it is not possible to escape from this placeless place and timeless time. Is-existing shows itself as the moving placeless place and timeless time from which no one can be moved away. Is-existing, the gerund of being, means an excess of nearness, a too-excessive nearness that can hardly be borne or carried out; if images of the past and of the future appear to be so emphatic in exile, it is because the groundless is-existing is too unbearable, too overwhelming to be carried out, like a shivering bird in the hand. This trembling nearness of the is-existing can be called *presencing*. Indeed, shivering *presencing* is what human reality can hardly bear and stand.

To pursue this thought of exilic existence as existence suspended in the between and meanwhile, as the thought of the is-being and its gerundive temporality, I propose a reading conversation with three authors that provide elements for a thought of gerundive time, however, in quite distinct paths. The three authors are Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, and Clarice Lispector. If Heidegger and Blanchot can be read as thinking and writing time and being in the excess of a withdrawal, Clarice (known simply as Clarice in Brazil, without any need to add a family name) can be read in turn as a writing of time being, as gerundive writing. What must be strongly emphasized is that the purpose of this book is to establish a conversation *with* these three authors about the exilic experience of time and not to give an account of their thoughts or even less of a conversation among them. My focus is *not* on how and to what extent Heidegger, Blanchot, and Clarice are interconnected but on their

thoughts on the problems I proposing discuss. Of course, there are strong connections among these authors, but I aim to bring their voices as partners in my search rather than to search for their connections and disconnections regarding a problem. The constellation of these authors concerning the question about the sense of time in exile may appear odd. Neither Heidegger nor Blanchot is an author of exile, in the sense literary research on exile has rendered canonic.<sup>23</sup> In many aspects, they are the opposite. Heidegger is an author of rootedness and never speaks of exile. Blanchot, who does speak of exile, is, nonetheless, an author of not-departing, not in the trivial sense that he has not left France or his language but for a writing that goes continuously back and forth, affirming and negating each affirmation and negation at the same time, assuming the task of not-departing as the only way to overcome fate and language. They are, nonetheless, decisive authors in regard to a thought of time that breaks with the rigid chain of chronology and presence and that addresses the essence of time in terms of absence and withdrawal, of ecstasy, and of the event. The thoughts of Heidegger and Blanchot have indeed provided an important basis to contemporary discussions about the meaning of exile and the writing of exile, in which the sense of exile as excess of loss and withdrawal of presence have been emphasized. Clarice Lispector, whose work has become the object of increasing interest and study in the last years, has a different position in this constellation. Despite being herself a child of Jewish exile, she never made exile one of her literary tropes, developing a literature that can be most precisely described as the writing of gerundive time. If Heidegger and Blanchot can be read as thinking and writing time and being in the excess of a withdrawal, Clarice (known simply as Clarice in Brazil, without any need to add a family name) can be read in turn as a writing of time being, as gerundive writing.

These three authors share several figures of exile, but in very different modes. They have the *neutre*, the neither-nor, which is a mode to formulate the between and meanwhile at stake in exile, as explicit figures of their thought and writing, but in very different senses. The three think throughout the “it,” “Es” in Heidegger, the “il” in Blanchot, “it” written and pronounced in English in Clarice who lets this foreign pronoun enter into and encroach upon the Portuguese language. Three ways of thinking stepping: in Heidegger, stepping beyond by stepping back, *der Schritt zurück*; in Blanchot,

stepping not-beyond, *le pas au-delà*; and in Clarice, the steps in the being-on and in and never beyond. Three ways of thinking the way: Heidegger's thoughts on the way conducting nowhere, *Holzweg*; Blanchot's thoughts on the way of the no way, and Clarice's thoughts on the sway and swing. Three thoughts of the excess, with different thoughts of the excess of being, and three approaches to presencing: Heidegger almost approaching presencing as time in gerundive; Blanchot avoiding every thought of presencing but seizing its decisive absenting; and the thought and writing experience of time being in the gerundive in Clarice's literature, in which the excess is itself exceeded. If Heidegger is a philosopher that can be considered the "philosopher of philosophy," Blanchot is more of a theoretical writer, in between philosophy and literature, and Clarice is a writer writing all the time the coming to writing, near the "wild heart" of the is-being. Even if the book will not focus on questions of gender, one should not forget that two men and a woman form this reading constellation. Moreover, this constellation gathers a German and a Frenchman, with the historical and political implications of these citizenships and of their political positions, and a Jewish Ukrainian who emigrated to Brazil as a very young child before World War II; a philosopher searching to overcome philosophy, a theoretical writer trying to overcome both theory and literature; and a writer not trying to overcome anything. Two family and tradition names—Heidegger and Blanchot—one given name, Clarice. And, last but not least, they present very difficult modes of writing, for they are all three excessive and very demanding writings, challenging readings, writings that are already readings, near to saturation, deeply performative and "afformative" (Hamacher),<sup>24</sup> rendering impossible interpretative methods and the control of memory, insofar as all the three writings tend to erase themselves through the very writing, and the reading must learn to read as the movement of an approaching, and thereby to be totally disarmed, knowing that it can only approach and never be close. Represented are three experiences of thinking writing that demand we think and speak in the difficult language of translation; thus, even if Clarice is for me literature in my mother tongue, she writes with a foreignness as if it were in translation.

An underlying thread that brings Heidegger, Blanchot, and Clarice together in relation to the question of the book is the relation between philosophy and literature, an explicit question for

both Heidegger and Blanchot and an implicit intertwining in the work of Clarice. In her work, this question appears precisely when it no longer is at issue. What brings together philosophy and literature is not in the first instance the relation between the poetical and the conceptual or abstract (Valéry),<sup>25</sup> but the event of thought in language and of language in thought. Because one is so intrinsically connected to the other, to the extent that one should rather say that one is already the other, the logic of causes and effects, the logic of “therefore” is not capable to account for it (“I think therefore I speak” or “I speak therefore I think,” are unsuitable formulations), and the temporal sequence of a first followed by a second appears untenable. Heidegger, Blanchot, and Clarice, are authors for whom the awareness of the enigmatic intertwining of thought and language appears in the experience of thinking in language, of thinking being language and language being thinking. These three authors, in very different ways, are not only attentive to but somehow obsessed with the *experience of thinking in language*, with the event and happening of thought and language, and not only with a reflection about the relation between thought and language. To be thinking, to be saying, to be writing, to be reading—these experiences are nothing but experiences of gerundive time, of thinking of thinking, saying, writing and reading *while* thinking, saying, writing and reading. In the very experience of the event of thought and language, indeed of thinking in language and of the language of thinking, elements for thinking the gerundive mode of time, experienced from within exiled existence, can be found. Because these authors are, at different levels and in various degrees of intensity, approaching and immersed in the difficult attention to thinking, saying, writing, and reading the “while” [I am] thinking, saying, writing, and reading, they can be considered thinkers of the experience of gerundive time, thinkers of experience from within.

This book is structured in the following way. The introduction presents a discussion about the general aim of the book, followed by introductory remarks about the meaning of exile. The second chapter lays out thoughts about the times we live in today, taken as times of excess and of exile. It frames the hermeneutical situation of our today and the urgency for thinking otherwise the experience of exile as a matter of gerundive temporality. It deals with the need to reformulate basic presuppositions that orient most theories and literature of exile, namely, that exile is structured by the change from

a place to another, that it is a cut and interruption of the continuity of time, and that memory is anchored in the past. Questioning these presuppositions, the chapter opens up the necessity to engage with gerundive temporality, the temporal movements of the between and of the meanwhile, in the search for a thought of exile from within. In the third chapter, a conversation with Heidegger aims to show how his thoughts on the ecstasy of time come to a point that almost touches the question of the gerundive mode of time. This happens in Heidegger's late discussions about presencing, whiling, and abiding. It could be said that Heidegger is on the verge of thinking in the gerundive. Investigating why he did not reach this thought, it appears that what prevents him for thinking in gerundive is the thought of the withdrawal and of overcoming, always operative in his ideas of ecstatic time and being. The fourth chapter engages in a discussion with Maurice Blanchot, following out his concerns with the figure of withdrawing and of the outside as tension between time absent and time present. If Blanchot explicitly attempts to avoid the Heideggerian path of Being, he did keep and even accentuated the thought of the withdrawal and of the excess, as the only mode of presence. Also in Blanchot, it is possible to observe how he comes close to a thought of gerundive time precisely in the reluctant way he addresses the problem of the presencing of time and affirms presence as withdrawal. It is, however, the way he connects the figure of the outside with the dynamic of withdrawing and absenting that distances him from gerundive time. The fifth chapter presents a reading *with* rather than *of* Clarice Lispector, particularly with her novels *The Passion according to G. H.* and *Água Viva*, which shows how Clarice is a writer of and in the gerundive mode of time. For what the former thinkers almost touch upon—namely, a thinking-saying-writing-reading experience of time in the gerundive—is in fact the quintessential element of Clarice's work. At the end, in lieu of a conclusion, a discussion about what it might mean to dwell in the between and meanwhile of exile, and how one might formulate the sense for a home in gerundive.



Because the gerundive mode of time in exile is in question, the experience of the is-being while it-is-being, this reading will thus attempt what I propose to call an “approaching reading” of some passages of

these authors of extreme per-a-formative writing. By “approaching reading,” I understand a reading that is somehow closer than close reading in the sense that it aims to follow the formless movement of how the text is writing down how it is being read.<sup>26</sup> It is a reading in a certain sense more similar to how a drawing is “read,” that is, seen, following its being-drawn by the drawn lines. Approaching reading is a double reading, a reading to the extent that one designates and to the extent that one cannot designate, a reading “searching and not finding that what I did not know was born, and which I instantly recognize,” to quote Clarice. “Approaching reading” should be understood here as a reading attentive to the approaching of a thought in language and of the language of a thought. It is a reading immersed in the attention to the approaching of thoughts in words and words in thoughts. The approaching reading proposed in this book is neither a “close reading” nor a “comparative reading” of Heidegger, Blanchot, and Clarice. It is a way—a “method,” we could say—to approach the approaching of a coming to thought, to language, to writing, the approaching which expresses the gerundive mode of time of the “is-being.” Because the main thesis of the book is that in exile, time is experienced as gerundive and that gerundive time is not a present tense but the tensioned meanwhile, itself back and forth being neither back nor forth—what the awkward expressions in English “is-being” and “is-existing” aim to call attention to—it can be said that the whole book is about approaching the meaning of an approaching, of the imminent, of the “about to” happen and be, that so deeply and painfully marks existence in exile and the experience of time in exile.