The Lacuna of Hermeneutics: Notes on the Freedom of Thought

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Abstract

In this article I argue not only for the value of hermeneutics today but also, and especially, how the crucial gesture of hermeneutics is that of changing the subject for the sake of our today. Surveying briefly the main lines of hermeneutical positions along its history and critiques, and connecting these critiques to the discrepancy between theory and practice, between interpretation and the need to change the world, the article proposes that our reality today, reshaped through globalization and the virtual, is performed as a hermeneutics of history. The challenge for today’s hermeneutics is to work out categories for understanding the present as on-going in a world that tends to capture and distort more and more the meaning of freedom of thought. In the final section, I propose a hermeneutics of the on-going, of gerundive time, partially under the inspiration of Paul Celan, as a response that develops the meaning of the freedom of thought. A defense of nearness and how to think in narrow nearness to the on-going is discussed.

Keywords

hermeneutics – today – gerundive time – freedom of thought – on-going

O voo pensa-se o pensamento voa.1

ORIDES FONTELA

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1 “Flight [of] one thinking one’s thoughts/fly.” Orides Fontela. Poesia Completa (São Paulo: Hedra, 2015), my translation.
In what sense could hermeneutics be grasped as the gesture of turning attention to the today? Since its modern philosophical foundation with Schleiermacher, hermeneutics has been associated with the movement of turning the today back to its history and tradition, to its context, to its forgotten or hidden sources, to the unsaid and unthought. Indeed, Heidegger later coined the concept of “hermeneutics of facticity,” directing a vehement critique against the today. Against Heidegger and also Gadamer, strong critics of hermeneutics, from Adorno to Althusser, from Habermas to Derrida, from Foucault to Deleuze and Rancière, and including literary theorists such as Susan Sontag, have unanimously agreed that the problem of hermeneutics is precisely the one of missing a critical thinking attention to the today. Insisting on the ways in which meaning is inherited and indebted to tradition, hermeneutics is considered a reactionary way of thinking because it misses the critical force of thought, its capacity to break with tradition, to interrupt a heritage and a legacy. Claiming that thinking is interpretation and understanding, hermeneutics would then miss how thinking is above all critique in the Kantian sense of cutting ties with authority, for the sake of changing the today. It misses the appeal to change the tradition which beats within a critical heart. In one way or another, implicitly or explicitly, Marx’s Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: “philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways: the point is to change it” has remained the crucial point of controversy.

Despite attempts to show that hermeneutics is fundamentally a critical project – Schleiermacher’s groundwork was called “hermeneutics and critique,” a groundwork impossible to think without Kant’s critical philosophy – the hermeneutical search for understanding is seen by many as uncritical. Despite those who have argued that, in turning tradition against itself (which Heidegger described as a work of destruction) hermeneutics aims rather at the transformation than the consolidation of tradition, hermeneutical interpretation is seen as a conservative mode of thinking that imposes upon things and reality a saying that silences the language of things, their “tender empiricism” (Goethe, Benjamin). And even when the need to respond and to take responsibility for the traumas and injuries perpetrated by history, both in human existence and in nature, renders the question about the experience of the past one of the

2 Martin Heidegger, GA 63. Ontologie. Hermeneutik der Faktizität (Frankfurt-am-Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988).
most acute questions of our today, hermeneutics is seen by many as a conservative position, carrying the seed of authoritarianism and the shadows of both fascism and totalitarianism. If it is defined as the art of interpreting and understanding, hermeneutics can indeed be brought together with the paradigmatic thoughts for contemporary critique such as those of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, as Paul Ricœur aimed to show, or even with contemporary discourses about the recognition of the other and of otherness, both as individuals or as groups and cultures, as Vattimo insistently proposed. But still, hermeneutics seems to remain too anchored in western European tradition of thought, viewing the other as the other and hence safeguarding the language of exclusion. It seems that whatever defense of hermeneutics might be undertaken, hermeneutics misses rather than embraces the challenges of our today. At the same time, the main hermeneutic questions and issues – interpretation and understanding as dynamics of thought, the discovery that thoughts, ideas and concepts (in short, meanings) are indebted to history and tradition, that facts are already meanings and as such in need of interpretation and understanding, that reality is more a text to be continuously read and reread in a context, full of intertexts and pretexts, and that the meaning of the today is to be found in the tension between the experience of the past and the expectation of a future, to use the language of Reinhart Koselleck – all these issues are now not merely theoretical but are the very way that, today, we experience the today. Perhaps we could say that it is our today that has become hermeneutical, that today hermeneutics describes a mode of reality rather than a way of thinking, understanding, interpreting, or reading reality. Assumed currently as a source for social constructivism and post-structuralism, as a “conservative” consolidation of Nietzsche’s maxim that there are no facts but only interpretations, hermeneutics is also accused of having opened up a path to fake-truths and the battles for ownership of the heritage, legacy and cultural memory of the past that pervade our today. Thereby, hermeneutics seems again in need of being criticized for reducing everything to interpretation and understanding. As a theoretical approach, hermeneutics seems to miss the critical need of our today. As a feature of today, hermeneutics seems to be more than ever in need of a critical scrutiny.

But if hermeneutics became a feature of our today, then it is not missing the today: it is absorbed by it; or perhaps we should rather say that what hermeneutics misses is paying attention to this absorption, to how it is absorbed in and by our today. Perhaps this hermeneutical missing resides in the fact that, today, meaning appears to be so exhausted by interpretation that interpretation becomes empty of meaning, not because it lacks meaning or because
meaning would be hidden or forgotten, but because meaning is too exposed to the work of meaning. Indeed, what seems more and more evident today is that whatsoever meaning can be taken in whatsoever way. We assist everywhere in the process by which meanings are rendered empty by the excess of signification they can receive. It is not only the meaning of history and tradition, of heritage and legacy, of belonging and dependence, that can receive whatsoever signification depending on who, where, when and for which purpose they are named and appropriated: the same happens with the meaning of critique and transformation, when what is being criticized is empowered through that very critique, and continuous transformation keeps transformation untransformed.

This dynamics of circulation of meanings and significations is at the core of our high-techno-economic world. It is the dynamo of globalization. What Heidegger described as *Gestell*, the enframing of technology as the way being gives itself in its own withdrawal, can be considered the first thought of globalization in the way we experience it today, and that the title neo-liberal capitalism aims to express: he was one of the first to seize hold of it philosophically. Thus, what it is called neo-liberal capitalism is not merely the techno-mediatic way capitalist production performs under the power of the image and the spectacle: it is so insofar as the world appears as world through a dynamics of signification in which every meaning can receive whatsoever meaning. Indeed, if the immediate view of the world today and of the today of the world is of a world entirely reduced to monetary relations, it is not because it is reduced to numbers and ciphers, to statistical accounts and to so called data-based evidences. Money is not a question of numbers; it is a question of meaning and signification, a question of values and evaluations. It is in fact a question of rendering everything *equivalent* to whatsoever, which is only possible when everything loses its own meaning and value for the sake of receiving whatsoever meaning and value. It is no longer simply a matter of turning experiences into “things” or “objects.” It is rather a matter of “whatsoevering,” if I might improvise a word in English, everything that is, rendering everything into *Bestand*, into a resource or disposability, to remain in Heidegger’s and Agamben’s vocabulary. Meanings and values must become flexible and fluid, full of “plasticity,” clothed in the beautiful promise of the freedom of “becoming” – otherwise they cannot be “sold,” “traded,” “imaged,” “exchanged”: in short, otherwise they cannot “exist.”

Global capitalism means the globalization of this dynamics of the signification of meaning when labor relations become more and more precarious, and the very nature of labor becomes more and more virtual. By becoming flexible and fluid, appealing to mobility and continuous transformation, meanings and values become empty. *At stake here is the “logic” in which having no meaning and having whatsoever meaning become totally equivalent.* The more meanings
and values can be attributed to being, the less being has meaning. Indeed, the more beings, the less being. When everything can be understood and interpreted in whatever way, understanding and interpretation also lose their meaning, receiving themselves whatsoever interpretation and understanding.

It is within this liquid economy of the continuous transformation and circulation of meanings, which can be called a *dynamics of signification of meaning*, that new forms of populism and fascism, new right-wing positions, and renewed old fundamentalisms of every kind emerge so powerful today. What puzzles is their hybrid form, so that they seem, on the one hand, willing to impose *one* meaning and truth upon reality, to rely on strong and authoritarian figures, and, on the other, to render every meaning and truth “plastic” and ambiguous, to enhance the excess of meanings and truths. They are to some extent responses to the fallen figures of everything – not only of revolution – accomplished by the new liberal order of the world. They are to some extent reactions to the capitalist demand for globalization, the demand of leaving behind all traditional, situated, localized figures and forms, that violent wars of de-traditionalization in all possible senses and meanings promote. This turn to the right can be “understood” and “interpreted” as reaction against the emptiness of meanings and values, as reaction against “political correctness,” as reaction against the reaction of minorities and identities historically oppressed and so forth. However, it is important to keep in mind that these movements are reactions not against the neo-liberal order of the world but on the contrary rude attempts to improve it. But if the dynamo of this order is the rendering exchangeable of all meanings and values, how can we understand the need for stepping back to conservatism and moralism, to authoritarian figures, values and meanings, the re-awakening of the phantoms of the national state, of the power of the state and the military when the huge corporations are transnational without return and national states only serve their purposes? Are we really living in times of “Retrotopia,” to use Zygmunt Bauman’s expression, times looking longingly back to the 1930’s, to historical forms of fascism and totalitarianism? Is this turning right really a reaction? Or shouldn’t we admit that this turning to the right of the world, this stepping back to “tradition,” to the “past,” to “history,” is less reaction than a need from within this very dynamic of rendering meanings and values empty through their being rendered ambiguous and excessive? Is it not rather a way of rendering history empty through history, tradition empty through tradition, and so on? But still, why this need of longing backwards, this need for conservatism? If the neo-liberal order of the world can only work on the basis of this continuous process of re-signification and revaluation, it is this insecurity and ambiguity of meaning and values that has to be conserved and preserved. There is a need to
conserve non-conservation; hence, the very insecurity and ambiguity of meanings, this continuously alternative interpretation and “miss”-understanding, this permanent battle of values and significations that emerges today as an ideological weapon much more effective and potent than the weapons of traditional ideology. Excess of information appears today as a much more effective means of dis-information than mere prohibition of information and censorship, and more and more, we see the combination of both. It seems that we have stepped into another kind of censorship, the that of meaning censuring itself by its excess and ambiguities. Censorship becomes thereby internalized in a much deeper way than under totalitarian conditions, and so it is meaning as such that censors and prohibits itself when it becomes empty through its own excess. We could speak here about sensorship with “s,” using a term proposed by the French writer Bernard Noël, a sensorship accomplished by these dynamics of the signification of meanings.

The compatibility of old ideological discourses, evoking the shadows of historical fascism, totalitarianism, populism and dictatorship, although intriguing, should not surprise us. In a short essay from 1921, entitled Capitalism as Religion, Walter Benjamin saw very sharply that Capitalism not only has the form of a religious cult but is the preservation of the empty form of a cult, that has to be kept empty so that it can receive whatsoever content. It has to preserve this old, known and void form as a “frame,” we could say, here letting Heidegger’s “enframing” join Benjamin, a frame capable of receiving whatsoever material. That may explain why it needs to retain old, known forms, meanings and values: in this way, what is kept is the form of a figure, of a meaning, of a value rather than the figures, the meanings, the values that can fill out the form. These old ideological discourses, today pronounced everywhere, express the internal need of the “system,” so to speak, to preserve and conserve this empty form of figures, of meanings, of values for the sake of assuring the dynamics of the re-signification of meanings and of re-evaluation of values. Following here the thoughts of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy about fascism as “the haunting of figuration,” we could add that today the new faces of old right-wing movements and governments can be considered a new form of fascism, a hybrid form, insofar as they incarnate the longing for empty forms of figures, of meanings, of values: of longing for a frame. They express more the longing for the figuration of the known rather than for

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3 Bernard Noël, Le Château de Cène (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), trans. Paul Buck and Glenda George, The Castle of Communion (London: Atlas Press, 1997).

4 Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe and Nancy, Jean-Luc, “The Nazi Myth,” trans. Brian Holmes, Critical Inquiry, 16, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 291–312.
known figures, more the wanting of a form for the form than for formed forms. Thus, today, it seems that not even the form has a form. What, today, frightens most, is the void of figures for the figure, of a form for form itself, the void of a meaning for meaning and of a value for value. Today the void is transcendental, we could say, putting it in Kantian terms. Facing the anguish provoked by this void, the world longs for strong figurations of a figure, for strong forms for forms. In this sense, the world’s longing is fascist, or rather, the world’s longing is a longing for the fascist longing. To the question of how to exist facing this void, these new hybrid forms of fascism respond with empty forms of the known, whether figures, values or meanings, for the sake of preserving the continuous voiding and a-voiding of meaning.

This dynamics of the re-signification of significations and of re-valuation of values enacts a new form of sensorship – with an “s” as suggested before – and control. At stake is indeed a system of control – when human existence becomes more and more needless and redundant, when the struggle for natural resources becomes more and more aggressive. The control is a “natural” need of power for the expansion of power. And it is to this power of the expansion of power that the new despots of today are dedicated. If the sensorship of meaning through its continuous re-signification and re-evaluation has become the most effective weapon of control it is because it promises the control of what, for millennia of human existence, has been considered its most inalienable right – the right to the freedom of thought. Thus, what is most threatening to any form of despotism and authoritarianism is indeed the freedom of thought. The question about the freedom of thought has been seldom addressed, not just today, but equally in the history of philosophy. During the millennia of philosophical thought, both in the West and in other cultures, thinking has been connected to the experience of freedom. For its capacity of abstract thought, human existence has been considered an existence destined to freedom. There are many thoughts on freedom: cosmological and practical notions of freedom, freedom as release from limitations, bounds and slavery, freedom as self-beginning and autonomy, freedom as transcendent and regulative idea, to recall some Kantian ideas. Revolutionary freedom, freedom of choice, freedom of speech, even the freedom to choose to make oneself a slave, the freedom to obey and to disobey, positive and negative freedom, freedom from something and freedom for something else, freedom of movement and movements of freedom. But despite this, if freedom has been identified with the faculty of thinking, it still remains for us to think what the freedom of thought might mean. An old idealist, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, addressed, in a text from 1793, written for a larger audience and without authorial
signature, a claim for the freedom of thought.\(^5\) Assuming from the beginning that the freedom of thought is the most inalienable right of human beings, Fichte argues that absolute control can only be reached if this freedom of thought is entirely oppressed. But how to oppress this freedom if thought can think freely under the hardest laws of oppression, as Sartre experienced and claimed in his text “The Republic of Silence,” written under the Nazi occupation of France? For the scope of our discussion here, what is interesting in this text by Fichte is how he perceived that a despotic power exercises most oppression when it uses the freedom of thought to oppress the freedom of thought, when freedom is used to oppress freedom. Arguing against tyranny, against all attempts by the government to control the freedom of research in the academy, to use the money of the state as if it belonged to the government and not to the people, and so forth, Fichte’s text shows a surprising relevance. But what surprises most is how little he says about what freedom of thought really means. In two short passages of this essay, he says that it is the capacity “to resist actively this blind mechanism of the association of ideas, in which the spirit is merely passive,”\(^6\) a capacity that separates human thought from animal thought. And in the other he conveys the idea that what freedom of thought means is “free investigation of every possible object of reflection, in every possible direction and without limitation ... without doubt, a human right.”\(^7\) Today, Fichte’s definition of freedom of thought seems more akin to the dynamic of the re-signification of meanings and of re-evaluation of values, and could be seen as a way to confirm how freedom has today turned against itself, how freedom of thought oppresses the freedom of thought.

If Fichte’s definition is insufficient, his question should be nonetheless kept alive. Thus, how to think freely when freedom oppresses freedom, when freedom of choice can hardly be distinguished from “voluntary servitude,” when democracy and anti-democracy are barely separate from each other? How to think freely when the academy more and more serves private and economic interests, having to adjust to algorithmically controlled surveys of quality, and so forth? How to think freely when critical thought nourishes the cultural industry it intends to criticize, when artworks that set themselves against the market are supported and promoted by the market? How to think freely

\(^5\) Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe, Who Have Oppressed It Until Now,” trans. Thomas E. Wartenberg, in James Schmidt, *What is Enlightenment?* (California: University of California Press, 1996), 119–141.

\(^6\) Ibid., 126.

\(^7\) Ibid., 132.
when the ethical and moral vocabulary of freedom can hardly be dissociated from the liberal language of economy, and the philosophical thoughts of becoming and non-substantiality are quickly capitalized by the economic and political demands of mobility, flexibility and plasticity? How to think freely if discourses on freedom reproduce the use of the same mechanisms and strategies they aim to liberate, although from the other side? It seems once again that freedom of thought is missing precisely when discourses on the need for freedom of thought are addressed. The feeling is that philosophical thought – that theory in its large sense of a vision free from prejudices and presuppositions – is imprisoned in the circles of its own freedom. And if, for centuries, it has taken itself as “free” insofar as it can distinguish itself from other ways of making use of the mind and the spirit precisely through subtle and sharp distinctions, it seems that, today, theory can hardly find a path where it can distinguish with clarity the indistinctness and indeterminacy, indeed the ambiguities of our today.

But maybe, precisely in this feeling of self-insufficiency, of being at odds with itself, a chance for thinking precisely the indistinct, for finding even more subtle distinctions than the oppositional and contrastive figures of thought is being given today by our today. Maybe today we have a chance to discover other ways to make distinctions, that even Kant, so capable of defining oppositions, admitted, in The Critique of Practical Reason, would exceed the capacity of philosophy.8 The freedom of thought would then be one of turning attention to this indistinctness and not of turning away from it. To think freely would be rather the freedom of being moved by the need to distinguish the same from the same, more than the same from otherness; to distinguish identity from identity, freedom from freedom, indeed the open from the void, the

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8 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 50: “There is an old formula of the schools, nihil appetimus, nisi sub ratione boni; nihil aversamur, nisi sub ratione mali and it has a use which is often correct but also often very detrimental to philosophy, because the expressions boni and mali contain an ambiguity owing to the poverty of the language, by which they are capable of a double sense and thus unavoidably involve practical laws in ambiguities, and the philosophy which, in using them, becomes aware of the difference of concepts in the same word but can still find no special expressions for them is forced into subtle distinctions about which there is subsequently no agreement inasmuch as the difference cannot be directly indicated by any suitable expression.” [… die Philosophie, die im Gebrauche derselben gar wohl der Verschiedenheit des Begriffs bei demselben Wort inneworden, aber doch keine besonderen Ausdrücke dafür finden kann, zu subtilen Distinktionen nötigen, …] Immanuel Kant. Kritik der praktischen Vernunft A 104. See also, Jacques Rancière’s discussions about homonymy in “Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics” (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
possible from the ambiguous, and so forth. In his very late thoughts, Heidegger
dedicated his attention to the tautology of the inapparent, or inconspicuous as
some translators prefer, and in some fragments dating from the same year of
his death he even suggested the need to develop a thought on the tautophasis
of being,9 of the voice of the same, that sounds, as he also says sameotherly.
Such a thought of the indistinct, of the sameother, is however not the same as
that of constructing new oppositions between, for instance, a good and a bad
void or openness, a positive and a negative ambiguity or possibility, a good or
bad infinity, a proper or an improper meaning of freedom or of subjectivity,
etc. A more subtle way of thinking the indistinct would be to turn existence
towards how it is existing. The expression “how existence is existing” is here
ambiguous. It says both the way in which one exists, and the fact that exist-
tence is existing. The ambiguous expression: to turn existence towards “how it
is existing” indicates how the fact that existence is existing always disappears,
slips away in oblivion, remaining as a lacuna. The fact that “existence is exist-
ing” sounds empty and void, and indeed, what can be done with this “infor-
mation”? But maybe precisely this fact – the fact that existence is existing – is
the most significant, in that it draws our attention to the mode of existence,
to its gerundive mode, which is a strange time and space of suspension, an
enigmatic suspended time and space which is more present than the present,
in which each one is entirely absorbed, having no way out of it. Thereby the
no-way out of our world, the absorption of the today in itself discovers another
meaning. Existence is existing, being is being: there is no way out from this
gerundive mode, which in English is also called a continuous form. But here,
the no way out is the only way out, so to say: it is precisely the most open of
all open forms. It is indeed the most open, emerging as the tension between
the unformed and the formless. Any attempt to find a form for the is-existing,
for the is-being would be totally in vain, since it is nothing, nothing but this
whileness; not the mere ephemeral and instantaneous, which can only be con-
sidered nachträglich, after while, in its afterness. One might come closer to its
meaning when thinking of a drawing while being drawn, something I have,
elsewhere, defined as the sketch.10 The notion of the sketch might however
become even clearer if we consider that the sketch, that is, the being drawn of
line, the drawing while being drawn, asks for a different movement of atten-
tion than the one that is directed to see and seize a figure, a finished drawing,
in short, a formed form, what in generic terms is called a theory. The movement

9 Martin Heidegger Gesellschaft, Jahresgabe 2011/2012.
10 Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, Att tänka i skisser (Göteborg: Glänta, 2011).
of attention one needs to see a sketch as sketch, that is, as a being sketched out, and not as a project for a future form, or as unfinished or even fragmentary form, is the movement of following the being drawn of the lines while being drawn. It is a very difficult movement insofar as one moves eyes and thoughts like a tightrope-walker entirely attentive to each step on a tightrope. This seeing is vertiginous because it sees the while being seen. It could be described as an attempt to see the seeing while seeing, to write the writing while being written, to think the thinking while thinking, to say the saying while saying, what one always does but must forget. The attention needed to follow the gerundive mode of existing, to see the seeing while seeing, this impossible and vertiginous view, is not an attention to what has been forgotten in a vision but to the very forgetting, since otherwise the forgotten would no longer be forgotten. In a tentative way, formulating this attention to the forgotten in such a view of the happening while happening, the French poet Paul Valéry once suggested a method: the method of “finding again the forgotten things looking at forgetfulness” (retrouver la chose oubliée en regardant l’oubli). He even called it the vision of a “lacuna.” We could extend this and call this movement of attention that moves towards seeing the forgetting rather than the forgotten, a *lacunar method*. It is a method different than the hermeneutical one, and thus does not aim at bringing the today back to the experience of the past moved by a project, a desire or the expectation of a future; it does not aim to seize the today by bringing it back to the un-thought in the already thought. The aim is rather to turn attention to the forgetting, to the dis-attention and oblivion, to their happening.

The question is therefore that of turning attention to how existence is existing, forgetting, dis-attending, distracting itself from itself; it is a matter of turning attention to the gerundive mode of existing, to how the being-drawn of the lines of existence is indeed being forgotten while drawing but, in this oblivion, becomes more present than the present. It is an attention that brings us close to a thought of the informal, to the impossible thought of the formless without any attempt to direct itself or to achieve a form. Indeed, it comes close to a thought of the informal as what is between the unformed and the formless, a thought to a certain extent close to the plastic thoughts of painters like Fautrier and Dubuffet and their poetics of dis-attention and distraction; a thought close to the poetic thoughts of Paul Celan, this great lacunar poet, who thought poetry as

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11 Paul Valéry. *Oeuvres*, vol. 1 (Paris: Pléiade, 1957), 933.
12 Ibid.
The trumpet part
Deep in the glowing
Lacuna
At lamp height
In the time hole:

Listen your way in
With your mouth.13

What the lacunar method proposes is a thought of the “open and void” in which we may speak with things, with one another. Not about things, not about others, nor about oneself, but with things, with others, with oneself, in a way that what is being seen is the eachness of each thing of each one, of each other. A thought of the open and the void searches out the minutiae of things, shrinking existence to what really counts, restraining it to tight paths and passages, to a step by step on the hovering line of existence existing, a bringing close of existence to its gerundive mode – to its brute, nude fact: that it is existing. Paul Celan used a musical term to describe this attention to the is happening of each thing, each one happening, he uses the term Stretto, in his German, Engführung. In music, Stretto means a close succession or overlapping of the statements of the subject in a fugue, especially in the final section. Instead of proposing a poetics of expansion, Celan proposes quite the contrary. As we read in his “Meridian” discourse: to the question, “Should art expand and enlarge?” His answer is: “No. But one should go along with art in the narrowness that is one’s own” (in German, “in deiner allereigenste Enge” [“Die Kunst erweitern? Nein. Sondern geh mit der Kunst in deine allereigenste Enge”]).14 The German word for narrowness is eng, a word coming the Greek engus, which did not have the fate of expansion of its contrary, the Greek word for distant, telos, which became the prefix of almost every word of our senses and thoughts. In this passage, Celan proposes another kind of path, the path of narrowness, an

13 Paul Celan. Poems, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press, 2007).
14 Paul Celan, The Meridian. Final Version – Drafts – Materials (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).
engnigmatic path, we could say, a thought that goes along with the narrow line of the is-existing of existence. Maybe this thought that is so narrow, so engnigmatic, that it is no more than the “flight [of] one thinking one’s thoughts/fly” (citing the epigraph by the Brazilian poetess Orides Fontela) is what might be meant today by a free thought. It could mean a thought walking step by step in the narrow line of the is-existing of existence, a matter of rendering each one a presence for each one.