
ARTYKUŁY

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The Violence of Writing

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Abstract

In this article, the author offers a systematic reflection on the violence of writing, drawing inspiration from Jacques Derrida's remarks in *Of Grammatology*. However, Derrida's philosophy is not in primary focus here; rather, the theme of the violence of writing is. First, a phenomenological reflection is undertaken on what the article itself is, in the context of the cultural conditions it must fulfill in order to exist at all as a scholarly work (i.e., to be published). In the next step, the author examines the philosophical meaning and validity of these conditions, referring to the history of European culture and the concept of humanism. Finally, the ontology of writing and the metaphysics of presence are discussed, as they have been accused of legitimizing violence on numerous accounts in 20th-century philosophy. Is this because metaphysics serves the power of writing? In conclusion, the question arises as to the possibility of doing philosophy other than in writing.

Metaphysics has constituted an exemplary system of defense against the threat of writing. What links writing to violence? What must violence be in order for something in it to be equivalent to the operation of the trace?

(Derrida, 1997, p. 101)

Rousseau and Levi-Strauss are not for a moment to be challenged when they relate the power of writing to the exercise of violence.

(Derrida, 1997, p. 106)

For writing, obliteration of the proper classed in the play of difference, is the originary violence itself: pure impossibility of the ‘vocative mark’, impossible purity of the mark of vocation.

(Derrida, 1997, p. 110)

Anterior to the possibility of violence in the current and derivative sense, the sense used in *A Writing Lesson*, there is, as the space of its possibility, the violence of the arche-writing, the violence of difference, of classification, and of the system of appellations.

(Derrida, 1997, p. 110)

[W]riting cannot be thought outside of the horizon of intersubjective violence (...).

(Derrida, 1997, p. 127)

[I]f writing is to be related to violence, writing appears well before writing in the narrow sense; already in the difference or the arche-writing that opens speech itself.

(Derrida, 1997, p. 128)

Toward the Phenomenology of Scientific Writing¹

Before I interweave the aforementioned excerpts from Jacques Derrida’s landmark writings with my considerations that follow, I will elaborate on them as I see fit, while also approaching them critically, without offering a separate philological and philosophical appraisal. Instead, I will examine what happens here—or rather, what appears here. This, however, does not imply that I want to begin *outside* writing. This is impossible for several reasons, particularly because my undertaking here is to publish a scholarly *paper*. I say this not for reasons of administrative particularity—which is always offensive to philosophy—but because I feel compelled by the enormity of *the matter itself*. When set in characters, my thoughts here are

¹ My cordial thanks to Tomasz Pałkowski for his translation of this essay from the Polish manuscript.

text indeed, understood as the primary area of appearing—a slit through which truth shines, bringing into view, out of the ontological murk, something that once was, for example, babble, total hogwash, or a cunning lie. It thus appears, first, as a text of a very specific type. This text exists only because there are other texts to which it refers. We read here what has already been written. Among all that happens here—constituting the original stimulus eliciting from us a certain attitude and an almost imperceptible series of reactions that trigger and direct our thinking—we encounter *our first* phenomenon: namely, the fact that we are dealing with writing that springs not from some absolute source but from concrete quoted material (Derrida's *Of Grammatology*), presented as “the word of another,” as something that was written earlier and thus takes precedence. Our seeing the obviousness of this fact—its banality, normality and hence its apparent elusiveness—should constitute the first foothold and the path to follow in our reflection here. In opposition to many other methods of philosophical enquiry, *this* reflection claims, rightly or not, to be focused on “things themselves” and to give a faithful account of the encounter with phenomena in their undiluted form and the immediacy of their givenness. The fact that our thought, set in letters here, is the first phenomenon calls for what might be more accurately termed a *phenomenological* reflection—that is, its first question, which must seem like a spoiler or a spanner in the works: What is this text? Why are we writing and reading it now? Although this question appears in the form of the text you have just read, its uniqueness lies in the fact that—as is typical of many philosophical reflections that turn back upon themselves—by virtue of its questioning power it prevents thinking from being diluted in *what* it says, drawing our attention instead strictly to the form of its presentation (to *how* it says it).

Nevertheless, paying attention solely to the form of presentation is not very common in philosophy. Indeed, before philosophy became a measurable result of academic endeavors pursued in a strictly regulated form, which was designed to transmit only proven and secure knowledge—typically in the form of “philosophical routine” with a political and scientific slant—philosophy relied on reflection and chose its own means of communication. Even if the latter, through the prism of historically oriented academic studies of philosophy, is confined to choosing between specific literary genres, this very fact shows how important it is to ask about the manner of presentation, not only in terms of investigating the truth but also in terms of its

presentation. In order to reduce the sense of peculiarity pervading our considerations (though it seems peculiarity should not be altogether eliminated from a philosophical text), let us recall that *phenomenology*, chosen here as a style of philosophical thinking, refers to this “how” in multiple ways, making our preliminary remarks here well-motivated precautions that serve to shield philosophical thought from the looming specter of dogmatism, lurking not only in the dark recesses of irrationality but also in indisputable, functional, and pragmatically justifiable “enlightened” practices of the public creation, transmission, and storage of academic knowledge. For not only is the object of phenomenology (phenomenon) a certain *way* of encountering and gaining access to something (Heidegger, 1999, § 13), a certain *way* of appearing and the being of what is (Heidegger, 1996, §7), but also, as Eugen Fink puts it, the “absolute medium” (Fink, 1958, p. 120). It follows that the corresponding philosophical reflection and the manner of its expression are a consistent attempt at thinking about philosophy primarily and critically as a *way* of being and taking cognizance. Contemporary phenomenology, conscious of its successes and (even more) of its failures, knows no principled approach conceived in dogmatic terms. As a *media philosophy*, phenomenology cannot, by definition, be solidified in the final and inscrutable—first or last as such—since all it has at its disposal to reflect on the medium-like nature of experience is transitional and somewhere “in between”. Phenomenology is thinking in passing, in motion, and through mediation.²

So what do we learn from this *phenomenology of writing* written here—that is, that which we find the closest and most obvious at the moment, and which has constituted, for quite some time now, the “natural” philosophical locus for thought and expression? Of writing, which, as the medium of *this* philosophical reflection, instantly grabs our attention and has framed the violence mentioned in the title of my essay in a way that, perhaps, has deprived us (or itself) of the opportunity to touch its extratextual form. Have we not had enough of *this* violence to know what violence as such is?

Let us reiterate what we have just said, this time pointing to a *compulsion*, as it were, to treat violence philosophically in its most familiar form as a textual phenomenon that points to—as implied by Derrida’s quotations

² This understanding of phenomenology results from the radicalisation of its principle of “persistence in questioning” (Plotka, 2012; Sobota, 2023).

recalled at the beginning—its underlying principle of writing, or even Writing. If “first philosophy” can manifest an irrepressible, radical ambition to open up—in a totally assumptionless manner—to the truth of what appears, its contemporary, phenomenological variant does precisely that, assuming the role of a media philosophy, whose first and foremost obligation is to reflect on *the way* it shows itself as a *medium* within which the phenomenon appears. Interestingly, during the constant radicalization of this reflection—most vividly exemplified, as we believe, by the legitimate correction of phenomenology carried out by the young Heidegger from the vantage point of the philosophy of life and the philosophy of existence (Sobota, 2012–2013)—phenomenology debunks the myth of the disinterested observer, seeing in this figure the creation of the dominant theoretical stance that would not be possible without the popularization and interiorization of *literary practices*. Paradoxically, phenomenology also admits to its liberating involvement in the constitution of the phenomenon by virtue of being together, feeling together, and working together (intersubjectivity)—in the community of experience and common being in the world. This primordial situation proves that phenomenology cannot be practiced purely theoretically, “on paper,” as a practice that has come to seem “natural” to philosophy, from a moment during its historical development that was intertwined, in one way or another, with the advances of communication technology. The Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian radicalization of phenomenology led to the understanding that it is not a theoretical activity but a totally performative one (Cimino, 2013)—that is, one that somehow “creates” the thing to be cognized. This happens during cognition, consistently with the radically interpreted postulate of assumptionlessness, which rules out the reception of anything that is *already* given—even the phenomenon itself. This leads to a liberating insight into our own ways of capturing and presenting phenomena, which starts with the concrete *situation* that confines the cognizing phenomenologist, dictating its own conditions. As it happens—and this is no coincidence, as we shall see—our current situation, which is itself a phenomenon, is circumscribed by this specific writing practice and its historical, cultural, and philosophical conditioning—the practice in which both its subject and the approach to it taken by the cognizing person (author) and the recipients of the message (readers) are constituted. And there are many indications that this situation has a lot in common with the issue of violence. The basic question is this: Why is it so?

The answer to this question emerges through the invocation of several self-evident considerations that define our present situation and constitute the conditions of possibility for our scholarly activity here. Peer review practices, academic journal formats, and systems of knowledge evaluation are not—as is, moreover, well-known—neutral instruments for organizing science, but rather, in the spirit of Foucauldian discourse analysis, technologies of power that regulate the conditions under which academic utterance becomes possible. They do not merely select knowledge; they actively produce it by normalizing specific modes of writing, thinking, and truth legitimation. Peer review functions as a paradigmatic *dispositif*: a mechanism of control that determines who may speak in the name of science and under what conditions. The anonymity of reviewers intensifies power asymmetries—the author is subjected to evaluation, while the criteria of that evaluation often remain opaque and historically contingent. Categories such as “originality,” “contribution,” or “methodological rigor” are presented as objective, yet in practice they reflect dominant paradigms and institutional interests. Review does not so much uncover truth as establish what, at a given moment, may be recognized as knowledge. A similar function is performed by the academic journal format itself. Structural requirements (abstracts, the IMRaD model, word limits, citation styles) operate as instruments of discursive normalization. They privilege a particular type of rationality—concise, distanced, and impersonal—while marginalizing speculative, narrative, or affective forms. The journal is not merely a vehicle of content but an institution that selects what and who is to become visible: publication in a given venue positions the author within academic hierarchies, often independently of the epistemic value of the work itself. Contemporary evaluation systems—impact factors, h-indices, and ministerial scoring schemes—further intensify this process through the quantification of discourse. Knowledge is transformed into measurable capital, and scholarly activity is subordinated to the logics of productivity and competition. From the perspective of research on epistemic power, such metrics do not measure cognitive quality but conformity to dominant circuits of knowledge production, thereby reinforcing existing epistemic centers (the English language, the Global North). Throughout these processes, however, a decisive role is played by the technique of writing itself. Academic style is not a neutral medium—indeed, no such medium exists—but a material practice that produces a particular type of subject: the “scholarly author,” disciplined, distanced, and aligned with institutional

norms. Writing thus functions simultaneously as a technology of subjectivation and exclusion, eliminating alternative forms of knowledge and expression. Consequently, peer review, format, and evaluation are not ancillary to science but constitute its conditions of possibility and, as such, ought to be subjected to critical reflection.

Let us now relate the foregoing considerations to the specific situation of the present article and give a brief *phenomenological account* of what we are doing here and why. After all, my essay is what it is for a reason. Overall, it is not that the author chooses—from the wide range of means of expressing philosophical experience—“a scholarly paper”, which is a strictly defined written form. Well, when we make existential decisions, all our actions can be considered our own and voluntary, but the concrete range of possibilities imposed on us by the world as privileged and the only “legitimate” one is not our doing. Rather, by “choosing” a specific “project of being” (“to be a scholar”), we endorse certain practices and conventions defined by quite rigid *standards*. We agree because, as we sometimes admit bitterly—paradoxically—“we have no choice”. In the case of science, even if it is philosophy, not fully reconciled with its name, these standards are set by tradition and the current scientific policy pursued by social institutions responsible for the creation and preservation of desirable “scholastic habituses” (Bourdieu, 2000). They arise through writing exercises and the reading of scholarly literature of a specific format. For such practices to be effective, the format of the text need not be defined strictly; however, to satisfy the requirements of various institutions (national and international) that create and maintain the order of academic activities and the relevant capital flow, the editorial offices of journals and scientific publishers specify on their websites the “right” kind of scientific and philosophical experience.³ They do so in accordance with their profile, which is legitimized by the licenses they have been granted.⁴ All of this occurs in the administrative sphere,

³ In so doing, they avoid the overly suspicious phrase “philosophical experience”, readily replacing it with neutral “research”.

⁴ For example, here is what we read on the website of the journal *Analiza i Egzystencja*: “‘Analysis and Existence’ is a quarterly published by the University of Szczecin Press in paper version (the basic version) and electronically (in Open Access system); license CC BY-SA. The Journal is included in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). The Journal has been published since 2005, at the beginning twice a year, and since 2011 as a quarterly. Since 2007 the Journal has been listed in the DOAJ, since 2015

which imposes a way of thinking about the world as an order of “matters” that are possible to document. Owing to the increasing institutionalization and standardization of academic life that pervade the tiniest and, as it were, the most liberal (human) cogs in the global machinery of social administration of knowledge, the style of scientific literature increasingly resembles the office style of drafting and circulating documents. In this way, one arrives at a highly standardized, ordered, measurable, and countable set of “types of writing” that can be further subjected to administrative treatments through cataloging, parametrization, citation metrics, rankings, and, ultimately, archiving. These and other elements are known as bibliometrics. This is the normal course of things in a “bureaucratic society” (Weber, 1978, chapters 3 and 11), often appearing completely “natural” and functional despite our real feeling and ethical suspicion that we are subjected to violence and its derivatives. Well, “that’s the way it is”, “that’s the way things are”, or “there’s no other way”. No more, no less. So, why claim that writing in general and scholarly texts in particular have something to do with violence, a topic on which Derrida writes so extensively, without offering a clear explanation of this state of affairs? He asks, “What links writing to violence?” (Derrida, 1997, p. 101).

It may be, however, that Writing is not everything—that on the “margins of philosophy” and science, where the book meets the world, Writing loses its authority, and something that does not lend itself to the practice of textualization begins—something truly anarchic, out of which grows philosophical experience, whose diversity calls for many different “means of expression”, not only writing. However, in the world we live in, the only means of expression that is admissible in the communication practice of science is writing—indeed, not just any kind of writing but a text like this.

Writing, Humanism, and Spectacle

While, from the vantage point of the “anarchy” of extratextual life, which—in “romantic” terms—appears to be the domain of freedom (from violence), any

in the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH PLUS), and since 2016 in the SCOPUS” (<https://wnus.usz.edu.pl/aie/en/>). There is no question of the philosophical significance of the texts published, but the credibility and value of the journal is measured and certified by purely *bureaucratic* criteria.

kind of order (especially an administrative one) can be accused of unwarranted (is there any other?) use of violence. That said, we should approach such claims with caution. Using the term “violence” frivolously and extending its semantic scope unreasonably make its meaning less precise. When everything becomes violence, then in practice nothing is violence anymore, even acts of direct physical aggression. So again: Why would philosophical arguments in the form of scholarly papers have anything to do with violence? Is it simply because, in this way, as a rule, some aspects of the natural philosophical element are barred from manifesting themselves, while this element could otherwise manifest itself were other methods openly allowed? Even if this were the case, is it not absurd anyway to accuse written philosophy of resorting to violence, considering how much real violence has been disclosed and eliminated precisely thanks to socially and politically involved academic and philosophical literature? So what does Derrida write about?

Let us say this loud and clear: the widespread presence of writing in European culture must be judged, almost without exception, as beneficial and protective against violence. Instead of using elaborate arguments, let us pose a few rhetorical questions. Have we not fought illiteracy for centuries to defend ourselves against the violence of ignorance and stupidity? Do we not write down whatever is worth saving to defend ourselves against the violence of oblivion? Do we not build public schools, universities, libraries and archives to defend ourselves against social exclusion and inequality? Do we not lay down laws protecting individuals against stronger ones to combat injustice? Do we not establish high standards and regulations protecting the equality of individuals to guard against all kinds of corruption, nepotism, and mobbing? Was democracy—as a system where all are equal before the law—not invented to guard against despotism? Are human rights not there to protect people from violence? Would technological progress, which is driven by scientific research and has unquestionably benefited humankind in such spheres as medicine or education, be at all possible without the pervasive presence of writing? And all of this, after all, has been informed by some kind of philosophy—that kingly principle of rationality discovered by the Greeks and equated with European identity (as Husserl still saw it (Husserl, 1970), being perhaps unaware of the cultural particularism of his theses)—with its thoroughly *humanist* vision of humanity, dominating it for centuries, as well as “human rights” and the public institutions protecting them.

These clues can sufficiently demonstrate the problematic nature of the link between writing and violence, especially in the context of philosophy. This problem is all the more apparent if we see that, historically speaking, the culture of writing is the other side of *humanism*, which, as we have said, is more of a defense against violence than its cause. Again, instead of resorting to elaborate argumentation, let rhetoric speak, this time in the form of literature, where one of the most beautiful self-attestations is the statement made by Settembrini in his dispute with Naphta. It was no accident that the dispute began with an invocation of Virgil, who epitomized the golden age of Latin literature, which produced such humanist institutions as the canon, the classics, and literature.

[...] it was a matter of not of drawing symbols but of literature as a human impulse, of its spirit, which was Spirit itself, the miraculous conjunction of analysis and form. This it was that awakened the understanding of all things human, that operated to weaken and dissolve silly prejudices and convictions, that brought about the civilizing, elevating, and betterment of the human race. While it developed extreme ethical sensitiveness and refinement, far from being fanatical, it preached honest doubt, fairness, tolerance. The purifying, healing influence of literature, the dissipating of passions by knowledge and the written word, literature as the path to understanding, forgiveness and love, the redeeming might of the word, the literary spirit as the noblest manifestation of the spirit of man, the writer as perfected type, as saint [...].

(Mann, 1961, pp. 524–525)

A man who writes philosophical articles, as the protagonist of *The Magic Mountain* might go on to say, not only shuns violence, but also straightforwardly pursues the European vision of the humanist—that human being sanctified by writing. The vision, as can be easily seen, offers a wide range of measures protecting people against the violence of nature and other people. Let us dwell on this thread for a while, as it has already been studied extensively. Western civilization is a culture largely informed by literary practices, as it was created by people for whom so-called “humanist man” was and still is the guiding vision and ideal of themselves. Humanism defines man as a being who becomes what it is mainly through literary practices—through the use of writing in its *canonical* form of world literary masterpieces, not only as a tool for recording and conveying information, but also as a specific practice of self-formation—graphoanthropogenesis. By all historical

accounts, the first designation of humanist man, who was born, developed and dominated European culture, is *homo literatus*. Western man is now what he is through writing, in writing, and for writing, because (or perhaps, *for that reason*—it is unclear what causes what), ontologically speaking, he is a writing and reading device. Since ancient times, European man has defined himself through metaphors, used not only as revealing stylistic devices, but also as designations for essential insights related to writing, such as Plato's and Aristotle's "wax tablet", *tabula rasa*, mentioned by Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, or the British empiricists, or the more recent term, *Wunderblock*, used by Freud. "Man" so understood is a common reference point for all, even the most revolutionary philosophies of man that arose in Europe. Humanism grew out of *graphocentrism* and cannot exist without it. This is why we *feel* that an attack on writing is an assault on what seems to be the most innocent, benevolent, and noble in European culture. We need only to recall the image of "burning books" to realize how devilish it all is. Let us put it bluntly: Naphta cannot be right!

The link between literary practices and humanism is confirmed by modernity by way of negation. Is it not today that we are experiencing a kind of crisis of humanist ideals concomitantly with a crisis of literacy? And is something new not evolving out of this, as illustrated, for example, by the image of young people bent over their mobile phones and lost on the internet—a picture that does not, to put it mildly, inspire optimism? Granted, such images illustrate the weight of the problem, but *our* diagnosis of the present "state of the world" does not allow the era of writing to be blamed for this crisis. On the contrary, we hold that European civilization is thoroughly a civilization of writing, which is now reaching the point of its fulfillment, despite the fact that, paradoxically, the so-called post-literary or post-writing era is said to have arrived (McLuhan, 1962; Dukaj, 2019). Writing, as we shall see later, is wayward and has an exceptionally ambivalent, two-headed nature that manifests itself through many paradoxes. The complete domination of writing, and therefore its violence, does not have to be manifested in the open domination of libraries and archives. Writing has many names and possibilities for consolidating its own hegemony. One of them is the beginning of the post-literary era. The fact that the development of new technologies has led some to speak of functional illiteracy, visual culture, the death of the book, and the post-literary era does not mean that Writing has stopped being an organizer of all kinds of beings. In their total subjection to

the Writing principle, new technologies are creating substitutes for something else. For the first time in history, writing, as a system for generating signs, is capable on its own of creating phenomenal sensory, emotional, and aesthetic experiences of what used to be reserved for extratextual reality, that is, the world in its real dimension. Owing to new information technologies, writing is now building a virtual reality that has reached a degree of realism equal to or even exceeding that of reality (hyperreality). In so doing, Super-Writing produces its own Other (a virtual world), which simulates pre-literary experiences and practices, only for Writing, as it seems, to invisibly consolidate its dictatorship even further. In the modern “society of the spectacle” (Debord), writing and power acquire an entirely new dimension.

And again, a counter-argument can be proposed. We can ask whether accusing a certain technological invention of being violent—a certain form of preserving mental content so that it can be communicated to others—is an abuse, since we have just said that writing, as a method of perpetuating and disseminating a humanistic ideal, serves precisely as a defense against violence? Can we accuse a knife of being sharp? Leaving aside the violence of educational, political, social, economic, scientific, and technological systems (which we all have felt at some point), we can provide countless examples of this defensive and praiseworthy function of writing. Let me ask once more: can *belles lettres* or philosophy be accused of violence? Humanism as violence? Writing has written many beautiful chapters in human history. Undeniably, the ongoing bureaucratization of reality, its incessant, frenzied, and obsessive textual representation through terabytes of data, enveloping our reality in the ever-thicker fabric of text, generating colossal clouds of text (comprised of innumerable layers of information), regulations, laws, decrees, instructions, licenses, applications, reports, etc., does not mean that we should play down the role of law, literature, and philosophy, and the humanistic ideal of educating through writing. Rather, *bad* and *good* writing should be distinguished.⁵

If we maintain a balance and accept this twofold appraisal of writing in relation to violence, the question still remains why writing should be

⁵ The most serious problem with new Melanie McMahon’s book about writing lies in its complete neglect of this beneficent dimension of writing, as it reduces writing exclusively to an instrument of violence, terror, and colonization. Throughout the entire book, the association of literature with beauty appears only once, if at all (2023: 107).

in any way related to violence and why it should be accused of that—as Derrida has done in so many ways, whether as an aggressor or a defender. Let us step back and amplify the question we have already asked about the *violence of Writing* mentioned in the title: What does writing have in common with violence, and why?

The Violence of Writing and Metaphysics of Presence

To answer this last question, let us turn to the excerpts from Derrida's work quoted at the beginning, which are disturbing and nevertheless make us reflect on the phenomenon of writing and its relationship to violence more deeply than just at the level of some superficial findings of historical and cultural studies. He has more than once been accused of succumbing to the mania of pure textualism (Foucault, 1979, pp. 26–27)—note his famous assertion, “There is no outside-text” (*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*) (Derrida, 1997, p. 158). It unambiguously links writing to violence, from which, after all, he clearly distances himself. Does he also make a distinction between good and bad writing? What is this violence that Derrida mentions in the fragments quoted above, produced at the level of the originary in the absolute sense, accessible to first philosophy in the form of premonition, for example? Derrida notes that “metaphysics has constituted an exemplary system of defense against the threat of writing.” But this metaphysics, since the time of its creation as *ta meta ta physika* (Andronicus of Rhodes), is defined as a place within writing. Therefore, how can metaphysical writing defend itself against the violence of writing as such? And, what is good writing here? Or, to risk an absurdity, which violence is good and which is bad?

Derrida distinguishes different ontological levels of writing, which implies—so we may surmise—a distinction between different levels of violence. The question, however, is what changes in violence when it is situated on the highest floors of the philosophical edifice. There are several options that Derrida does not consider:

- 1) Does it thereby begin to lose its character as violence as such?
- 2) Does it become—like *différance*—a more ubiquitous violence, but also a more cunning, hidden, elusive, and unpunishable one? Or
- 3) does it merely lose its physical character in order to persist as “ideal” violence? Yet, does ideal violence not become even more “demonic” than

empirical violence? Given Derrida's arguments concerning traditional metaphysical categories, one can be certain that all these distinctions would sound to his ears like metaphysical distinctions and, for that very reason, would all be questionable. Or perhaps,

- 4) there exists a good violence—as has been said—that, for example, is responsible for introducing *justice* into the world and for administering punishment for bad violence? Is this the divine violence referred to in the text by Walter Benjamin discussed by Derrida (1996, pp. 236–252; Derrida, 1992; Kowalska, 2018)?

The history of Western culture shows why writing, especially alphabetic writing, initially popularized as a useful tool for notation—now becoming more and more effectively interiorized through education and the production of a scholastic habitus suffused with grammatical-idealistic melancholy—is radically changing our mindset so that we open up to it and to the “world” as a space for signs that call for infinite interpretation. This subject has been researched widely (McLuhan, 1962; Havelock, 1963; Goody, 1986; Ong, 2002; McMahon, 2023). In the culture of writing, using a special kind of graphopedagogy, everyone is trained *to be, speak, and think* in line with the ontology of writing. Only the person who is, speaks, and thinks according to the dictates of writing, can be regarded as a human being—an educated human being, understood as *homo literatus*. Besides, “there is only one education” (*es gibt nur eine Bildung*) (Mann, 1952, p. 655; translation mine): having authority and/or being subordinated to Writing turns out to be a criterion of humanity. We certainly sense in this pervasive violence that subordinates every fibre of our being to a certain technique, which is blown up to monstrous proportions. This is, one might say, the triumph of Being as a technical device, an apparatus mentioned by Heidegger (1977, pp. 3–33) and Flusser (2000, pp. 21–32).

But is this hypothesis not too one-sided again and too far-fetched? Does it not just apply to the historical moment in which the West finds itself now, which has submitted to alphabetic writing, producing two utterly different consequences? On the one hand, by popularizing and strengthening the violent potential of the ontology of writing, European culture produced science and technology which, as a consequence, led to the creation of various instruments of violence that have enshrouded planet Earth—political, economic, social, or technological ones (McMahon, 2023). On the other hand, based on this very ontological phonetic script, the West has produced

the most wonderful and, as it were, the most innocent literary and philosophical artefacts, embodying the human dream of peace and a world without violence.⁶ The alphabetization of writing has provided humanity with immense possibilities for expressing its experience. On no account can this state of affairs be viewed negatively. And this is precisely what education and its associated ideal of humanist man are about: to assimilate these practices and their works. The consequences of a prolonged and obsessive abuse of a certain technique grounded in an ontology of some kind, which enables and opens something while preventing and closing it, are radically different. In so doing, writing eludes an unequivocal and negative assessment.

The fact that—as is well-known—Derrida distinguishes two categories of writing does not lessen the violence. On the one hand, there is Arche-Writing, which, as *différance*, constitutes the signifying character of all signs. It is the source of all differences that are articulated in language. This writing precedes every language, including the spoken word. On the other hand, there is writing in the ordinary sense of the term, as a certain tool of notation, which was invented long after humans learned to speak (especially alphabetic writing). Since this second type of writing is structurally unthinkable without the first, it is not possible to situate violence in only one form of writing—for example, that associated with *ta meta ta physika*—without thereby accusing Writing in the first sense. According to Derrida, there is no language without violence. Yet, in accordance with the distinction between primary and secondary writing, should we not also distinguish two kinds of violence: the originary violence of language and the secondary violence of a certain type of writing (e.g., “alphabetic”)? However, does this distinction between two kinds of writing in the context of violence make any sense at all, given that writing without violence is impossible? Or is it nevertheless possible? If so, the question then becomes the following: does the absence or reduction of violence in some form of writing result from that writing being closer to, or farther from, the originary violence of arche-writing? Would deconstruction, as a mode of writing close to arche-writing itself, be such a way of writing? Deconstruction as justice without violence (Kowalska, 2018)? Or should arche-writing not serve as the criterion for

⁶ This is mentioned extensively and embodied by Settembrini in Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*. Failing to recognize the positive aspects of the dissemination of writing is the greatest shortcoming of McMahon’s book (2023).

increasing or decreasing the violence of writing at all? If that is the case, then what else should serve as this criterion? If one were to claim that it is precisely belles-lettres, as the foundation of humanism, that could be indicated as such an instance—one that is somehow capable of freeing itself from the exercise of violence—does it do so because it suspends its reference to the world, because it reduces or brackets all transcendent references to reality?

Is this really the case? If we recall that European philosophy, especially its innermost philosophical element—metaphysics, but also, to some extent, metaphysically-oriented literature—is described as “metaphysics of presence”, whose first attributes are, as its opponents would have it, violence and war (Levinas, 1979, p. 21), then in what sense can we still speak of good writing? We are left with literature. Is it not the first and in fact the only reflection on writing as such that has lasted for centuries, leading to the creation of forms of writing that transform the violence virtually present in writing into beauty, virtue, and peace? Note that they achieve that, paying the price of reducing reality and defining themselves as a game of pretence, fictitiousness, and literariness. By relinquishing its claim and desire for presence, literature enters into a non-aggression pact with writing, so that it can “say anything” (Derrida, 1992, pp. 37–38) but allows itself a degree of figurativeness. And was literature so understood not held up in the second half of the twentieth century as an example worthy of emulation by philosophy in order to mitigate its violent attitude to reality and turn the true world into a fable (Nietzsche, 1911, p. 24)? They used to say: let philosophy become literature (Rorty, 2016), let it abandon its claims to the Truth so that we can avoid its violence.

Are such appeals acceptable? One can counter that by saying that they themselves use violence against philosophy under the banner of fighting violence. In other words, they do not see that, unlike in literature, the link between philosophy and writing is arbitrary. Literature is writing, and as *literature* it cannot be anything else. Meanwhile, the historical and cultural fact that philosophy has surrendered to writing does not mean that it is conceivable (like literature) solely as a writing practice. It is likely that philosophy (precisely as a literary practice and therefore as a “book”), in which philosophers-scribes tenaciously transcribe their metaphysics of presence, once *became* a philosophy full of violence, yet violence was not its immanent and essential state. Here, we encounter yet another paradox of writing. The phonetization of writing occurs in parallel with

the transformation of philosophy into metaphysics, which in the first place (coincidence?) signifies a chosen place in the order of Aristotle's writings—into metaphysics of presence, being metaphysics as writing. Drawing inspiration from the violent ontology of alphabetic writing, it proclaims, urges, wishes, calls, and dreams of abandoning writing and its violence; it evokes in itself, as Derrida says, a safeguard against the violence of writing, in the name of the living and peaceful presence of voice. Hence, as Derrida would have it, its phonologocentrism, which by means of writing, in writing and for writing, in defense against this violence and running counter to it, surrenders itself to the voice, or vocative mark and the “living word”, giving rise to another kind of violence: the violence of proximity, immediacy, presence, fullness, totality, unity, and community. Violence, which reverses the order and becomes the vengeful violence of the word toward writing. However, we boldly claim that it is still the same violence (of writing), only inverted and enriched, which has its origins in the ontology of writing, the same violence, only that it does not remember itself; it is blurred and transformed into resentment. If those philosophers are right who, like Levinas, have recognised the violent consequences of a philosophy under the sign of the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism, does overcoming this metaphysics and leading philosophy toward non-violent thinking necessarily mean a transformation of philosophy into literature and grammatology, which, as a philosophy written in alphabetical script, must after all perpetuate the violent writing patterns—unless it becomes literature? Or, perhaps, there is another way. Perhaps philosophy can abandon its discourse and go beyond alphabetic writing to become, like mathematics, a purely formalistic discourse and, hopefully, conceivable as non-alphabetic script? Being like mathematics—is it a viable alternative for philosophy? A strange alternative it is, since mathematics, as a highly writing-based creation and a tool used in positive sciences, offers a fully deterministic view of the universe, devoid of any form of free human existence.

Derrida noted that a strict distinction between pure phonetic and non-phonetic script is arbitrary,⁷ as phonetic script contains many characters that are impossible to verbalize—therefore, seeking non-phonetic script for violence-shy philosophy to use makes no sense. Let us simply stick to writing as is—so, graphologocentrism then. Are there any other options

⁷ McMahon (2023) argues otherwise.

here? In one of his early texts, Derrida confronts the thoroughly Greek and Christian phonologocentrism of the metaphysics of presence, which he believes is most uniquely exemplified by German phenomenology, with the Jewish discourse of Levinas. The latter, he contends, must fall under the charges of logical inconsistency and hermeneutic blindness, which are informed by the logocentric, violence- and presence-oriented metaphysics of Heidegger—but also under the weight of its own phonocentrism and somber silence. The Jewish script of Levinas turns out to be full of violence. A Greco-German is a Jew and a Jew is a Greco-German, the Same is the Other and the Other is the Same (Derrida, 1978, p. 153). Between them is the history of the West as the history of dialectics—struggle, contention, and reciprocal violence. Is this the definitive *factum*, beyond which one cannot go?

Derrida notes that if we abandon the question about the elements of the alternative, we need to look at the difference between them. Instead of searching for writing that would suit philosophy in the form of some Book, we should simply “experience” (this term comes from old metaphysics) Writing as such, which Derrida views as the primary source and principle of unity and difference, i.e., *différance*, word, thought, and being. Metaphysically, Writing as *différance* is a totally violence-based power. The above-mentioned violent ontology of writing, referred to in *Of Grammatology*, is only a product of pure Writing as pure violence. For each discourse is violence, for a few reasons. As we have said, writing relies on the principle of diaeresis, constantly differentiating and contrasting. It is articulation and arbitrariness. It is separation and postponement; externalization. It follows from the said essay and some other writings of Derrida that Writing is synonymous with the economy of violence and war. The violence of Writing follows from its being a trace, which wields authority within the logic of wanting to preserve and the violence dictated by presence. In fact, desire for writing is the reverse side of the desire for presence, as presence wants to delay death. To leave a mark on becoming, as Nietzsche would say, means simply being. Writing has always had one goal: to make one immortal, preserve, protect, make present—something that is no more or is not yet (Domański, 2002). The trace, as Derrida himself admits, operates within a logic of death, disappearance, and mourning (Kopka, 2024).

Conclusion: Other Than Writing?

Can we keep on asking questions if every question here is entangled in the creation and amplification of the violence of writing? If not, what remains but the apocalypse and eschatology that Derrida speaks of, and the deconstruction that heralds them?

We should, perhaps, think about philosophy going beyond discourse and Writing, something that would do justice to a practice other than writing. If not write, then what? In choosing Writing as a principle governing the triunity of being, speech, and thought, Derrida brings the old metaphor of the world seen as a book, writing, or a letter to philosophical heights. Interestingly, although this metaphor was known to the Greeks, who imparted to it a metaphysical dimension, it was Jews who invested it with the appropriate scale and import. Although all the other great monotheistic religions revere their holy books as the living word of God, only Judaism reveres the Book to a degree unknown anywhere else (Jabès, 1990). By merging Greek philosophical tradition with Jewish-Christian thought, the metaphor of the world as a book became the dominant European pattern of thinking, speaking and being (Blumenberg, 1981). An absolute metaphor (Blumenberg, 1960, p. 9), we might say, extending its dominion throughout Western culture. The Derridean catchphrase “end of the book and the beginning of writing” challenges the metaphysics of presence, which gives priority to phonetic writing (thus the book), keeping a distance from it yet affirming the Jewish tradition. Admittedly, within the metaphysical framework the Jew is a Greco-German and a Greco-German is a Jew, but Derrida’s decision to highlight the metaphor of writing makes him a staunch ally of the Jewish tradition in the Marrano style (Bielik-Robson, 2022). But if we challenge the sense of the metaphysics of presence and the associated primacy of voice as a metaphysical “book” and the very metaphor of writing, what is left for us in philosophy? If we remain at the level of metaphor—which could be used to depict the most fundamental vision of the philosophical element—do we not endorse a space of conflict (going much further than other conflicts) of metaphors or a media conflict, which are in fact political conflicts? But does the latter not boil down to a conflict of interest? So, again: ideology, violence, and war? Further, does any conflict of metaphors not presuppose the victory of writing—before the battle even begins? For what metaphor would be as robust as the metaphor of writing to compete

with it? Perhaps, only a metaphor of the world as theater could be a match. But has theater not been regarded for centuries as a—mostly secondary—form of writing (McMahon, 2023, pp. 108–115)? If, as Ingarden says, theatre is merely the liminal situation of drama (Ingarden, 1970, pp. 219, 10), then theater could even be chosen as a characteristic symptom of the omnipotence and violence of writing. Well, even if we agree that theater is not the same as drama, considering it a metaphor and extending its *logic* to the whole of reality understood as the spectacle of the world (Sobota, 2022), still makes it a product of Writing—a special “scene of writing”, perhaps the most spectacular that has ever happened. Owing to the tools it has, the system of Writing makes its opposition the best part of itself.

Before we “loosen up” (Derrida) and give in to the unbounded dominion of Writing, we may accept our role as scribes, writers, readers, before we abandon our bodies and pore over the book, let us dwell, for the last time, on the metaphor itself, which we may have taken to be a tool of writing. For what is a metaphor, understood here as the “last word” of philosophy, as its liminal notion, something ultimate, as an arche-principle that would govern the entire system: Writing and non-Writing?

Obviously, people who use writing will, in the first instance, think of metaphor as a stylistic device. There are many indications that such a metaphor is secondary to the originally metaphorical structure of language as such (Derrida, 1982, pp. 207–270). Language or, as Derrida would have it, Writing, would be thoroughly metaphorical from the very beginning. But we are not interested in a dead metaphor, but a “living” one (Ricoeur, 1975), which will free us from our attachment to the immediate environment, revealing similarities between things that can be totally removed from and alien to each other. It asks a question and tells us to endure it—in so doing, it is responsible for our new cognition and ways of being. It is heterological. Therefore, philosophy, wishing to maintain its status in the current of questionability, which happens to be its element, must never give up the creation and use of metaphors. As it happens, they need not be verbalized—language is a broader concept than speech. Originary, living language is even closer to gesturing or dancing than to speech, even if living. A living metaphor, in this sense, would be *profanation*—that is, the reuse and consumption of the sacred as something that is re-read (from *ri-leggere*) and separated (Agamben, 2007, p. 75). In order to transcend the power of Writing and, even for a moment, break free from its tyranny, we

would need something like *performative* profanation of abstract Writing as that which constitutes the principle of continuous separation, differentiation, and deferment. We dream of turning the sacred ritual of writing, as dividing and separating, into a joyous performance of profanation. Surely, we'd need some new phenomenological reduction here, which transcends the constraints of both grammatical-idealistic philosophy and literature. The aim is to suspend the reference to transcendence and remove the onus of being by profaning the weight (Lat. *gramma*) of Writing (Gk. *gramma*). Only metaphor conceived as carrying, therefore, as defying the force of gravity, can render this movement on stage (which is no longer a "writing stage") and migrate into the "Nietzschean" festivity of performative questioning in the form of, say, body movement, gesture, color, shape, aroma, not to mention narcotic experience. In choosing, for example, dancing as a philosophical (as question-oriented) movement of thinking, speaking, and being, we do not want to persist in conflict, even if metaphorical or medium-oriented (or especially political) and surrender to the violence of Writing and ideological battle, but, disarmed, we invite Writing to perform Dance, which is not war but fun: farce-mystery (J. Grotowski). This is genuine anarchy, hospitality, wild empiricism, which Derrida the Marrano wrote about outside the economy of war, the violence of Writing, the quadrature of the book, the dictatorship of *logos*, outside the archive, but still on the scene of a revisited academy (Sobota, 2025), which is a symbolic place near which the dangers of absolute trust in writing as a privileged means of philosophical communication became apparent (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274B–278B).

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