

The Standardization of Writing. Asphyxia of Philosophical Thought in Academia Today

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This article addresses the problem of the place of philosophy in higher education today through the analysis of a single issue: the standardization of academic writing and its effects on the practice of philosophy and teaching. From the formal analysis of the academic “paper”, as the unique pattern of production and evaluation of current research, this article evaluates its impact on the relationship between thinking, writing and education. It concludes that standardization of writing in the globally homologated university, leads to a stifling of thought not only in philosophy but in all areas of knowledge. At the same time gives us the key to diagnose and locate, in each of these areas, what are the spaces of the non-negotiable from which we must rethink our relationship with education and thinking inside and outside the university.

Keywords: Writing; Standardization; Academic Production; Higher Education; Philosophy

Introduction: The Uncertain Place of Philosophy, Once Again

The question about the place of philosophy in secondary and tertiary education has once again arisen today, urgently and worryingly. It is evident that the transformation of educational institutions, the slashing of public budgets and the way in which both cultural and knowledge markets are developing are elements of a powerful unidirectional current: the marginalisation of philosophy in educational programmes, academic structures and rankings of academic excellence. Although the question about the place of philosophy may be pertinent and pressing today it is not a new one. First, today’s situation is no more than the culmination of a long series of episodes in a decades-old assault on areas of knowledge that are less profitable for universities. Second, however, the relationship between philosophy and academia has never been clear, and neither has it ever enjoyed a single desirable or stable formula. Plato invented the Academy but it is a moot point whether philosophy is an academic matter or that it might be so in a secure and stable fashion for everyone in any political or social context. Hence, philosophy is once again on shaky ground. The history of this uncertainty is, in fact, the history of philosophy.

Is there anything in the present-day situation of philosophy that is particularly alarming? Something that requires us to reflect more thoroughly than on other occasions about the philosophy-university fit? Indeed, there is something that, quite apart from all the uncertainty, is now highly threatening for philosophical thought and, with it, all forms of free thought: the regimentation of writing that is occurring within the framework of a process of university homologation on the global scale. The changes undergone by universities all around the world, among which the “Bologna Process” is just one chapter in the European setting, should be understood as a form of standardisation (Jordana & Gràcia, 2013 forthcoming) that includes the formalization of academic institutions, their teaching activity and their research production as well as gauging their relative

merits in keeping with international standards. One key element in this process of regimentation, which is rarely mentioned or analyzed, is that which affects writing itself: the diversity of genres and voices, of ranges and types that come together in the sphere of knowledge and that shape it, have been reduced to one thing, the “paper”, as a unit of measure and vehicle of communication for research in all areas of knowledge. Some of these spheres are less susceptible to the violence of the paper while in others, perhaps, it is simply less noticed because it is just a matter of a change of format in the ways in which people are used to writing. In the case of philosophy, the standardization of writing imposed by the new forms of communicating and publishing knowledge is a veritable dagger in the heart.

More than trying to respond yet again to the question about the place of philosophy in present-day academic institutions, I propose, therefore, to inquire into a much more specific question which I believe will give the true measure of the difficulty we face: is it possible to write philosophy in the university today? If we were only expecting a yes or no answer to this question it would have remained at the rhetorical level as the answer is obvious and part of the reason that led us to ask it. Given present conditions of the standardization and predictability of academic writing, the answer is “no”. But what about this “no”? How does it situate one *vis-à-vis* the university and *vis-à-vis* the demands of thinking? What are its consequences? In particular, why is it so important to raise this question?

In contrast with other highly specialized areas of knowledge, it has always been possible to relate with philosophy from different places, and with different proposals and degrees of intensity. Philosophy can be studied in its history, read in its texts, visited and revisited in its existential or cosmological questions, debated in its ethical and political consequences, used as a resource in elaborating models of thought applicable to other spheres, and so on. Philosophy can be known, grasped, enjoyed, instrumentalized, conveyed, sold, synthesized, popularized, et cetera. This is why there are so many reasons for coming to a faculty of philosophy and why so many different kinds of stu-

dents come to it. And this is why neither the university nor other educational institutions have ever been the exclusive habitat of philosophy.

However, there comes a point at which one knows whether, among all the possible uses of philosophy, something is “going on”: this is the point of writing. In philosophy, writing is not a means for communicating ideas or knowledge but is the raw material with which problems and concepts are elaborated. Philosophy is a form of thinking that is embodied in writing and the voice of philosophy is one that is reborn in writing. This does not mean that philosophy is only a literary genre or that it is limited to its written works: writing is veracious if it is linked with a way of life, rooted in a singular experience and concerned with the quest for shared reason. In this interconnection problems are opened up, always new without needing to be ground-breaking, while the concepts that appear are useful without needing to be applicable. Philosophical writing *weaves*, in both senses of the word: it crosshatches and hatches. However, this is precisely why it cannot be formalized, and why it does not admit standards or protocols for assessment or communication.

What are the conditions for the possibility of this writing? It is difficult to say, because there is no such thing as laboratory philosophy, but there is one condition that the practice of philosophy has embraced from the start: teaching. Philosophy was born teaching and there is hardly any philosopher who has not taught—somehow, and in some or other kind of relationship—philosophy. For philosophy, the quote from George Bernard Shaw, typically heard in artistic circles, which affirms that “He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches”, does not apply. The greatest philosophers have made teaching part of their philosophy, whether in institutional or convivial milieus, from the teacher-pupil relationship through to a group of friends who open up spaces for thought.

What is the relationship between teaching and writing as the two elements in which philosophical thinking unfolds? Can writing be taught? What does this teaching consist of? And in what spaces might it develop? Tackling these questions, which appear to be abstract and timeless, entails situating oneself right in the middle of the challenges posed by the transformation which the university and knowledge institutions in general are now undergoing. The threat of asphyxia which, through the standardization of writing, hovers over philosophy does not only affect this discipline. Also jeopardized is the possibility of making free, experimental thinking the basis of knowledge. It seems that the present drift of the university, not only in Spain but on the global scale, is not only towards accepting the situation but also to see the process of strangulation through to the very end. Philosophy can reappear in an open field and acquire the instruments it needs to reinvent itself, as on previous occasions, *out of place*. Yet can the university, as the headquarters of higher education and research, really take on the consequences of this stifling of thought?

Writing Is Transforming Oneself

There are ideas, discoveries, inventions and knowledge that happen in a laboratory, in a computer, in an operating theatre or an excavation and they are conveyed in writing to the pertinent community of experts and, finally, through different publications of wider circulation, to society as a whole. Philosophy does not work like that. As I said, it “happens” writing. What

happens here is not communication and, moreover, everything happens at once, without levels or mediation. In philosophy there are no degrees of writing but different ways of approaching it: a book of Nietzsche is a book of Nietzsche but the readings of a Nietzsche scholar, a philosopher turning to Nietzsche as an interlocutor, a devotee of philosophy in general, or an adolescent seeking urgent answers to his or her painful solitude will be different. The best philosophy is that which, without reserve, offers its writing to every possible approximation, without confusing them but also without hierarchy.

What is this that “happens” writing? First and foremost, in philosophy writing is transforming oneself. To use Foucault’s well-known formulation, one writes to become someone other than who one is or, more specifically, “One tries to modify one’s way of being through the act of writing” (Foucault, 1994). This transformation affects one’s own thought in the movement of its being written. “[...] the book transforms me and transforms what I think” (Foucault, 2000). But how does this come about? This process of modification of oneself takes place through the practice of a specific kind of writing, which is quite distinct, although it may overlap with other kinds such as poetry or composing music. What philosophy does is to propose new variations for already-existing problems and to create indispensable concepts for them (Deleuze & Guattari, 1993). The exercise of creating concepts is, then, abstraction incarnate. It is not alien to the body of the philosopher who braves it, or from his or her life situation yet, at the same time, it goes beyond the body by means of appealing to shared reason, to an intelligibility that demands to be attended to. This has three important consequences for what I am analyzing.

First, for philosophy, there is no such thing as neutrality of the place of enunciation; the person who thinks, the person who writes is involved and directly concerned with what he or she needs to think. There is a vital need that guides writing and that dictates its breathing (James, 1912, p. 37).

This implies, in second place, that philosophy, as discourse, is necessarily connected with a way of life. Philosophy is a manner of speaking that appeals to a way of life, oneself, and one’s relations with other people. This connection has been elaborated in many ways over history, from the classical idea of the exemplary nature of the philosophical life through to the modern call of philosophy to existential creativity and the political transformation of the world. Be that as it may, philosophy is theory only in a residual way. Theory is what remains of philosophy when it becomes detached and neutralized as a necessary inquiry into living (its value, its sense, its languages, et cetera).

Third and finally, the value of this process of transformation embarked upon by philosophy is not to be found in the result it might have for oneself but in its power of interpellation. It is sometimes asserted that philosophy is the changing formulation of eternal problems. They are not eternal. They are problems that keep demanding answers from us. This why, more than being immortal, they stay alive or return to life, transforming themselves thanks to each piece of writing capable of giving them new life.

Hence, writing philosophy is not only transforming oneself but it is also opening up a meeting place, a place of interpellation. Summaries of the history of philosophy present us with the great philosophers in accordance with what they have said, in accordance with what they have stated. It would be interesting to produce one day a history that tells us what they have

listened to. There is no philosophy without listening, without reception, without contagion, without insemination. This does not only refer to the question of some scholastic influences on others but also how what remains to be thought about is received in every case. Listening to what is not thought: it is only here that the desire to keep thinking is unbound, the wish to write again about what has been written, the need to take things up once more, or begin anew.

Writing as an experience of transformation and as a place of interpellation is, necessarily, creative, experimental, bodily, stylistic and unexampled writing. “The question of philosophy is the singular point where concept and creation are related to each other” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1993: p. 17). What would become of philosophical writing if we were not able to recognize, in its tone and rhythm, in its way of approaching the truth, the pen of its author? But the pen of the author, as Nietzsche so very well puts it, is not the signature of an owner but the movement of a body dancing. The steps of a dance are learned and practiced but, in the end, each body has its own way of performing them, its own way of infusing them, as I have said, with life. Even the most austere of philosophical pens, even the most impersonal and anonymous of writings, has its own tone and style if it really has adopted as its own the problem it is tackling, together with the need to develop its concepts and be transformed with them. Philosophical styles have changed, not only in step with authors but also according to times, fashions, political and institutional situations, academic traditions, and the means of publication and diffusion of writings. In each epoch, furthermore, writings have coexisted in tension and open conflict, not only because of the content of their propositions, but also their way of enunciating them.

The real problem that has cropped up today is that of the apparent neutralization of this conflict about the standard “scientific research paper”. The idea of standard is not concerned with one way, among others, of writing but rather it presents the paradigm of validity and legitimate place of enunciation for all content that seeks to be academically relevant. We shall see the effects of this standard on philosophical writing as I have described it above.

1) *Dissociation of form and content.* Although we may have gotten into the bad habit of studying authors by isolating the “doctrinal” content from the main account of the text, in philosophical writing form and content call upon one another and are inseparable. Their dissociation is precisely what turns philosophy into theoretical discourse and annuls its embodied, experimental nature.

2) *Silencing of the voice.* This formal standard results in the gagging of philosophy’s distinctive voice, the expunging of its body in an already formatted text. Who is speaking in a “paper”? The expert. To whom does he speak? To his counterparts, other supposed experts in the same field. The expert is the figure who is allied with the standardized language of academia and, accordingly, the only recognizable and rateable type of “academic” in the university today.

3) *Annulment of experience.* The expert does not make of writing a place of experience precisely because the only person who can venture into the experience of his or her own transformation is the one who is willing to lose what he or she already knows. The expert has deserted experience and its uncertainties for research and its results. That is what he or she writes about. In philosophy, this expertise means abandoning every real philosophical problem in favor of two different kinds of

stock “topics”¹, either the lines of research prioritized by commissions set up to evaluate projects according to preordained criteria of academic relevance and usually dictated from other areas of knowledge, or by turning authors of reference into objects of inquiry rather than treating them as interlocutors of thought. Traditional academia once boasted a certain figure of the scholar who devoted his or her entire life to in-depth research into one author and wrote monographic studies that assisted and accompanied the work of his or her peers. Nowadays, this model, generalized, trivialized and imposed, is presented as the only one to adopt. The expert on an author, a period or school of thought is now not only the most usual figure one finds in European faculties of philosophy but also the only authorized prototype. Hence, not only is the voice of the academic in question muffled but the author is also silenced along with it as the object of specialized study to which the expert devotes his or her career. The experience of thinking is neutralised in this double silencing.

4) *Demarcation of an inside and outside of writing.* The paper functions as the unit of production, rating and evaluating what is deemed to be research activity. In addition, however, it works as a frontier. As a standard, it disbars from the arena of what is countable, visible, rateable and evaluable any writing that does not conform to its protocols and goals. In abiding by the division between communication for the community of experts and divulgation to the rest of society all writing in the academic world has been harmed by this division. Scientists have embraced the maxim “publish or perish”. In the domain of letters, one might vary the terms of the alternative, “Do you write or publish?” It would be the joke that portrays the dramatic situation of so many “academics”, not only philosophers, who must choose between writing to publish within the established guidelines and writing what they really need to think. In the case of philosophy, this demarcation has a twofold effect, the consequences of which we have not yet sufficiently assessed. On the one hand, the philosophy that goes into the legitimized field of standardized writing is a philosophy made ridiculous in having to present itself as scientific research while, on the other hand, other philosophical writings are subsumed either to literature (the philosopher as writer) or journalism. The natural overlap between philosophy and literature, between the philosophical word and the poetic word, has no place in the bastion of the present-day university and is dispatched directly to an enforced extramural exile. And the relationship with the public word is abandoned to the forces of the communications and entertainment markets.

5) *Subordination of writing to English.* The issue of the inside and the outside of academic writing also has a determinant linguistic aspect. The certification of standardized university activities as meeting international standards of scientific production implies, of course, that this production is increasingly being communicated in English, not only because of criteria of utility but, directly, as part of its added value. When language is a mere vehicle for the transmission of findings, the language in which they are communicated may have some relative importance. However, does this apply to philosophical writing and its creative, personal and experimental singularity? Of course not. The relationship between philosophy—in its western and especially European tradition—and languages is one of continual

¹In Spanish, the word “tópico” can mean both “subject” or “cliché” and “hackneyed expressions” [translator].

displacement given the mobile and relocated nature of its readers and interlocutors. Depending on the period and the most intense foci of philosophical creation, some or other European language has predominated, always in communication with the rest. There have been classical languages, *linguae francae* and languages with more philosophical prestige than others, as well as hegemonic and proscribed languages, but what has never existed is a neutral language. If engaging in philosophy means creating concepts and this, as I said, “happens” writing, part of the raw material of philosophy is the language in which it is written. Writing philosophy always entails a linguistic decision, a commitment to pitching the language, whether one’s own or by adoption, in another way. Now, this decision has been manacled, coerced and subordinated to the calculation of a yield that is directly valued in terms of academic career and possibilities for job finding and institutional visibility.

In philosophy, then, the consequences of the standardization of academic writing geared to the paper are not only formal (how a scientific article is to be written) or related with institutional monopoly (where one publishes and what value is given to it) but they also directly affect the practice of philosophy and the conditions of its teaching. Faced with the situation I have just described, the question that then arises for any university philosophy teacher is evident: is teaching philosophy in the university about producing so-called experts, and training students to write papers in which they can show their research proficiency? Or is it something else? First, it means renouncing philosophy that simulates doing philosophy. Second, as we shall see, it means embarking on a hard task, going against the flow and working in “clandestinity”.

Philosophizing in Teaching

Thinking is learning how to think. This is something that philosophy has proclaimed and practiced from the very beginning. This is why it is an activity that cannot be separated from teaching and learning. If thinking is learning how to think, it essentially means two things: that normally we don’t think, and that there is no already known way of thinking. The former situates philosophy in a relationship of conflict with established opinions and learning, while the second places it in a position of tension with respect to itself, since it does not admit stabilisation, accumulation and predictability in its ways of thinking. Thinking is learning how to think because thinking is thinking again. But then, how is it possible to teach? What could be the intrinsically educational sense of a practice of thinking that comes about in the displacement of established knowledge and of its own conquests? What philosophy as educational practice proposes is that educating is not about acquiring skills, conveying knowledge or organizing thought into schools. It consists, fundamentally, of a displacement, a change of place that renews the desire to think, and commitment to truth. “It is something to be able to raise our heads but for a moment and see the stream in which we are sunk so deep. We cannot gain even this transitory moment of awakening by our own strength; we must be lifted up—and who are they that will uplift us?” (Nietzsche, 2000: p. 71). The real educators are the ones that make us raise our heads. Raising one’s head is, at the same time, starting to look and ceasing to obey; discovering the world, opening up its problems as something of concern to us and entering into them free of all servitude, whatever brand it may be. The teacher, in philosophy, neither trains nor instructs but

liberates, freeing us from what prevents us from thinking. The true teacher is, in the last instance, the teacher who frees us from the teacher. Now become a friend, he or she “delivers us to the happiness of our solitude”, as Deleuze put forward in his *Abécédaire*, when he talks about teaching. This is not a paradox. The relationship between friendship and solitude is the condition to start thinking, to “learn again to see the world” (Merleau & Ponty, 1955: p. 63), rewriting it. Nietzsche says in the quote above that we cannot raise our heads with our own strength. Flying in the face of every idea of natural inspiration or the revealed word, philosophy wholly situates us in the terrain of human interdependence: if we think, it is because we are given something to think about by means of another person, teacher, friend, mediator. As Heidegger recognized in the German root of the verb to think, in every thought there is gratefulness (think/thank). Making one think is not indicating how or what to think, just as teaching writing is not putting into practice standards or methodologies of writing. Making one think, teaching one to write means indicating that there remains something to think about, and there remains something to write about, still. Teaching philosophy means leaving clear spaces with one’s gesture and one’s word. Teaching philosophy is an invitation.

Educating, therefore means initiating the other in this displacement, moving the other, shaking up or seducing or dragging the other out from what he or she is, or believes he or she is, out from what the other knows, or believes he or she knows. This is why philosophy’s relationship with education is at once violent and fecund. It is violent because it attacks the very roots of what is constituted. It questions what we are and what we know, what we value and what we purport. It is fecund because it opens up new relations and new ways of seeing and speaking, where once it was only possible to perpetuate what already existed. In brief, it offers new approximations to what makes us live. Philosophy’s question about education has never been the pedagogical question about how to teach philosophy but the question about how to educate the human being, the citizen or humanity. It is therefore a question that affects, challenges and reformulates the representation that, in every epoch and in every context, organizes the space of knowledge and political space.

Is today’s university willing to be the place in which it is possible to formulate such questions and take responsibility for their consequences? It would seem, quite clearly, that it is not. At the same time as it is making its productive, working and curricular structures more flexible so as to adapt better to the demands of the market, the university as an institution is armour-plating itself against questions and has ceased to ask questions. Faced with this situation, some writers and teachers have denounced the “cultural desertion” of today’s sectorial-university (Oncina, 2008; Llovet, 2011) or entrepreneurial-university (Jordana & Gràcia, 2013), which has become a collection of professional schools and centers of technological innovation. Invoking the humanist ideal of the university as society’s cultural headquarters and motor, they perceive the presently occurring changes as betrayal and a dismantling of the pro-culture project. Nevertheless, with the university’s subjugation to business interests today we should not be taken in by nostalgic images of lost freedoms: the pro-culture university was a tool of the western bourgeoisie which had, in culture, one of its chief prerogatives and sources of social “empowerment”. When the university began to open up socially, this enterprise

was lost. Nowadays, culture, in this sense, does not exist and is of no use to anybody. Why would the university want to defend it unless it is to become a mausoleum?

The problem lies elsewhere. Beyond all humanist melancholy, beyond the whole gamut of defensive and conservationist positions, what is at stake is a battle of thought: how might we ensure that the real questions, the ones that matter to us, that move us to write, to acquire knowledge and to transform the society in which we live do not expire under the weight of profitable but toothless knowledge? From whence might it be possible to construct the alliance between philosophical inquiry and knowledge? Inside or outside the university?

Inside or Outside the University?

This is the question that is raised every time the educational institutions and centers of knowledge shield themselves against questions and succumb to the pressures of producing predictable knowledge. Although they might remain active, even increasing productivity and their economic and institutional relevance, the upshot is that it is impossible to think within their bounds since there is nothing to think about. The drain begins, a veritable brain drain of people who are not willing to stand by and observe the demise within them of the desire from which all thought springs.

Inside or outside the university, where can one start thinking once more? This question goes hand in hand with the history of the university, as an institution, since its inception. Heretics and scientists escaped from the medieval theological university. From the still-theological modern university escaped the great philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Descartes and Spinoza to the French “Republic of Letters”. After the consolidation of the German university, which was built on the foundations of the Enlightenment and idealism, fostering all German philosophy, from Kant to Schelling and Hegel, other philosophers including Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Marx also had to take flight. We are now in a similar situation. After the opening up of western universities from the 1960s to the 1980s, admitting epistemologically and socially diverse voices, problems and practices, we have been witnessing its progressive closing down for some years now. Subjected to purportedly innovative reasoning, we are in fact faced with a new kind of scholasticism: an appearance of knowledge that is based only on itself, making this self-referencing the basis and legitimizing source of its power. Hence, the university today is not only the cause of ruptures and expulsions, but also of increasing indifference in society. Once again, there appears the need to leave, to grow in the wilderness—“let the philosophers run wild” (Nietzsche, 2000: p. 116). As a clear symptom of this, we are now seeing the spread of a great many self-training associations (Garcés, 2009), projects of political, social and cultural experimentation, writing groups, independent publications, networks, forums and gatherings that, in all their fragility, are committed to undertaking the task of learning how to think. Is the university emptying? It is, in part. The most creative and exposed forms of knowledge, the processes of producing the freest and at once most compromising kinds of knowledge, the procedures of engaging in horizontal and collaborative work, and so on, are moving out of academia. Even writing books no longer brings formal academic recognition but has become an “extemporaneous” activity. Does this mean that we must undertake a radical commitment to this out-of-university, affirm-

ing it while denying any possibility of life in the university? The answer I offer in this article is a paradoxical yes and no. Yes, one must make a radical commitment to the out-of-university while yet not denying all the possibilities of life within the university. How can these two apparently contradictory positions be reconciled?

The answer is provided by philosophy itself, in its historical origins. If Socrates is a sort of father and midwife of western philosophy, then who are the children of Socrates? Many, probably all of us, are still that. Immediately following him in Athens there were basically two: Plato and Diogenes. Plato, the one who baptizes philosophy and invents the Academy; Diogenes, the one who abhors the conventions of knowledge and their relations with power, who lives naked and sleeps in a jar, a “Socrates gone mad”, as Plato famously says. The Academy and the jar; the man of prestige and the stray dog; the organisation of all knowledge in its unity and its destruction root and branch; education and de-education; reformist political aspiration and subversion: this is the binary body with which philosophy took its first steps. What has been presented throughout history as two options, as the alternation between two conceptions of the word and knowledge, is in fact a necessary polarity. Plato without Diogenes would be a dead end. Diogenes without Plato would have fallen into oblivion. Academy and jar have mutual need of one another without any possibility of making a synthesis of them, of overcoming them or finding any middle ground. On the one hand, knowledge needs to consolidate, to organise and foster contact between different spheres of erudition. On the other hand, questions of knowledge perish when they are no longer exposed to their own limits and to the real problems that nourish them: the problem of life, the reason of being, and ways of inhabiting our existence.

Philosophy is faced with the challenge of keeping this irresolvable tension alive. However, it is this difficulty (and not its supposed foundational or systematizing nature) that situates it at the base or root of knowledge. The academic side, when attempting to be self-sufficient, dies of self-absorption. The wild side, when putting an end to all and any dialogue with the extant social institutions and forms of knowledge, is dissipated in personal postures and particular micro-worlds that easily break off communication. Then again, this “wilderness” outside of educational institutions is no longer a true outside but one that is densely articulated, dominated by market forces and their corresponding dynamics of power, which make it very difficult for unprotected thinking and creation to survive.

Against “these divisions [that] simply attest institutionally to the renunciation of the whole truth” (Adorno, 1984: p. 156) and without losing sight of the fact that “all forms of thought are solidary” (Merleau & Ponty, 1955: p. 99) and need to meet each other, the task of philosophy is to keep this tension alive because it is only in philosophy that the desire for knowledge and commitment to the truth can be renewed. Philosophy loses its ability to keep the tension alive every time it becomes just another academic discipline. In the case of the modern university, this occurs when philosophy becomes one of the “human and social sciences”. Its disconcerting virtue turns into productive impotence. Its cliché-resistant nature and resistance to being confined to authorize topics becomes meta-discourse or “transversal competence”, in the words of the new methodological terminology. Its writing, in servile genuflection, becomes tame theoretical discourse that refers to other theoretical discourse.

This is a time of growing detachment between academic and wild. In this disconnection, philosophy as such does not need to be defended or saved from the besiegement to which it is submitted as a discipline of the human and social sciences. As a discipline of the human and social sciences it was stillborn. It needs to be free from this “pigeonholing” in order to be able to do its job, to link up once more established knowledge with its outside world, what is thought with what is not yet thought, knowledge with not-yet-knowledge.

Conclusion: University without Surrender

I began this article by wondering whether it is possible to teach and write philosophy in the university today and ventured the response that we already knew the answer. If we comply with the present-day conditions of standardization of institutions and writing, it is not possible. After the above analysis of the writing which is deemed to be appropriate for the only kind of document that is now regarded as legitimate in academic *curricula vitae*, namely the research paper published in the right scientific publications, this response has not only been confirmed but appears as an even more serious matter. Yet the arguments of the previous section oblige one to add something to the predictable answer: *it can't be done but, for the moment, it must be done*. Let us see, to conclude, what this statement means and what it entails.

We have seen, first, that writing philosophy means opening up spaces of transformation and interpellation in which a singular way of living points the way to shared reason, appeals to shared intelligibility. I have argued, second, that the possibility of such writing is related with an education that can enable us to “raise our heads”, which is to say, to start looking and to cease to obey. Now, one can add that this writing is that which, from its commitment to the truth, connects knowledge with non-knowledge. It is writing that toils at the limits of what is known, of what is thought, of what is established; at the limits of what can be enunciated and recognized. Philosophical writing elaborates the limits of language itself. Hence it does not admit the inside/outside blackmail but rather restores this connection over and over again, thus attacking the sterilizing myth that imposes a “*cordon sanitaire*” (Merleau-Ponty, 1955) between disciplines, between legitimacies, between ways of speaking, between murmuring and silence, between what is thought and what is not thought. “If philosophy is paradoxical by nature, this is not because it sides with the least plausible opinions or because it maintains contradictory opinions but because it uses sentences of a standard language to express something that does not belong to the order of opinion or even of the proposition.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1999: p. 82) Its disturbing character is precisely that of subverting standard language to make it say what was not accommodated in it. “Words are wellsprings that must be dug up in the telling” (Heidegger, 1960: p. 127).

In opposing standardization of writing, it is essential, then, to keep writing philosophy, to philosophize by teaching, to teach how to write. Philosophy is not, then, a humanistic bequest about to die of starvation and in danger of extinction but the most powerful weapon by means of which the university, which is indeed in danger of asphyxiation, can resist becoming, as many thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum or Bill Readings among many others have pointed out, a great global enterprise of mass production of ultra-specialized professionals and of redundant and sterile fields of knowledge.

In 1998, Jacques Derrida gave a lecture at Stanford University (California) titled “The University without Condition”, in which he presented the thesis that the university *should* be the place of dual unconditionality: the unconditionality of a boundless commitment to the truth and the unconditionality of an absolutely heterogeneous dissidence before any kind of power. The university *should* be, then, the place of “*unconditional* freedom to question and to assert” (Derrida, 2002), governed by “the right to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the *truth*”. Unconditional freedom, unconditional discussion, unconditional resistance and unconditional dissidence *should* be the manifestations of a “profession of faith” in the truth, which the university would embody. The principle that would govern its justice: thought. This is why Derrida conceives of the university as the privileged place of what is philosophical, and its future as the promise of “the *new* Humanities”. As I have noted, all the discussion about the university “without condition” conjugates, in Derrida’s text, into the conditional. For Derrida, the university “without condition” situates us in the time of a “perhaps”, on the horizon of a commitment to what is “*de jure*” and in relation with “an event that, without necessarily coming about tomorrow, would remain perhaps—and I underscore *perhaps*—to come...”

In response to Derrida’s stance, I have put forward a proposal of unconditionality: instead of a should, a “must”; instead of a perhaps, a “for the moment”; instead of a profession of faith in absolute terms with regard to the university to come, taking a specific stand in the presently existing university. What comprises the unconditionality of this position? Opening up spaces for the non-negotiable. In particular, in terms of what concerns us here, teaching the writing of philosophy in the university is a non-negotiable commitment. Something that is non-negotiable is something that has value in itself, that does not answer to any kind of calculus imposed from outside. In this case, teaching people to write philosophy in the university, in the sense described above, is a commitment that declares that it has broken with all the rating scales that justify and assess academic activity. It is only justified on the basis of its own necessariness.

This indispensability is embodied in specific people, every one of them individuals who come to the university moved by their wish to learn. Obviously, the desire to learn is an impure desire: it is bound to the necessity of finding a profession and earning a living. Why not? The self-sufficiency of the sage is an ideal, either aristocratic or religious. However, for the rest of humanity, knowledge and work, learning and money are perforce intermingled. Without denying this impurity but enlisting within it, the university is the place in which two things in the order of the incalculable and the order of the non-negotiable can still happen: being taken seriously, namely for oneself, one’s desire to learn; and learning that with this knowledge it is still “not enough”. By this I mean that all knowing implies non-knowing and all knowledge appeals to a way of life that has personal, social and political consequences that go beyond its specificity. This is the philosophical task that is not negotiable in the present-day university.

Speaking of a *university without surrender* is not, therefore, a call to redouble our efforts to defend the university but to make the commitment not to capitulate *to it*, not to surrender *in it*. “[...T]his is precisely where culture begins—namely, in understanding how to treat the quick as something vital...” (Niet-

zsche, 2009: p. 66) The university is, perhaps, more dead than alive, but we, each one of us who teaches and studies in it are alive, and this is how we must treat each other, as something vital, something alive. At the heart of this I have placed taking a stand, a “for the moment”. It is possible that the asphyxia of thought in the university will come to such a pass that taking a stand, such as I am declaring here, ceases to have any sense. One will need to be attentive to this and to know how to make the right decisions at the right time. Hence, not capitulating to the university also implies, as I have noted, not ceasing to nourish what is happening outside of it, what escapes, what does not fit, what can only be done and tested outside the institutional frameworks that we know. It may well be that this testing, these attempts, are what will give us in future the clue as to how we might go beyond the university itself.

The question about the place of philosophy in higher education today, which I have discussed here through analysis of the present standardization of writing and the possibilities of teaching philosophy in the university now brings us to the need for opening up spaces of the non-negotiable inside the university, maintaining them and experimenting with them, as a commitment that concerns everyone who, coming from whatever sphere of knowledge it may be, is resisting the stifling of thought in educational, creative and research practice. To conclude, what specific and provisional implications arise from this way of taking a stand?

1) *Do not accept the inside-outside blackmail.* We have seen how today’s university does not function on the basis of censorship or prohibition but from regimentation and standardization of what is admitted as legitimate. Whatever its form, such blackmail is unacceptable by any standard, either from the submission/flight dichotomy or from the even worse assumption of a double truth (I pretend to conform inside and do what interests me outside). On the basis of what I have argued, it is necessary to work at the university’s limits, which connect, and in doing so tautening the relation, the inside and the outside. This entails experimenting with the specific forms of such a connection, individually and collectively exploring strategies of contamination of both teaching and research languages and practices, as well as of the ways of life that they make possible.

2) *Distinguishing the negotiable from the non-negotiable.* Precisely because this is not a matter of making great petitions based on principle but of taking tactical stands that are situated and effective in reality, one must distinguish in every context what is negotiable and what is not negotiable. In the case of philosophy, we have situated it in the practice of teaching people to write as the moment in which the incalculable takes shape within the study of philosophy. Every sphere of knowledge and every specific institutional and human context will need to identify and examine its own non-negotiable commitments.

3) *Be willing to lose.* Declaring “non-calculable zones” in university activity means being willing to waste time, academic visibility and points in one’s *curriculum vitae*, among many other things. It is difficult at times not to see all of this as losses outweighing gains since an academic career is presented in an unambiguously countable fashion. Gratuitous activity is then understood as frittering away one’s energies, inefficient volunteerism, a waste of time and effort.

4) *Learning to give value to what “doesn’t count”.* If we are to challenge this sentiment I have just mentioned, which explains many processes of defeated conformism, we must learn

how to do justice to what is of value and to share it. The prize of vocation has always existed in the academic world: “I do it for me... and for my students”. This value is not to be renounced, but it is a very fragile one today given the implacability of the forces with which one must engage. It is necessary to combat the vulnerability of each of our decisions and motivations, shoring them up with alliances, complicities and structures (groups, publications, et cetera) that give us back, and enable us to give to each other, the value of what we are doing. This means consolidating a network of counter-values that also acquire the power of challenging the imposed system of assessment.

5) *Don’t lose questions.* One can lose just about everything, except questions. Questions are not these rhetorical interrogations without an answer by means of which people tend to parody sages (who am I? from whence do I come? and so on). “Questions” simply means this thing we have put in movement and on the basis of which we have begun to search, to walk, to desire; this moment in which “we raise our heads” and that, after so much capitulation, we end up forgetting. This is why it is sometimes necessary to go against oneself, against what one has come to be and represent, against what one believes one knows and through which one occupies a place. In order not to lose questions one must keep alive intelligence and the humility of not coinciding totally with one’s own “position” and to vacate it whenever it threatens one’s capacity to think by learning again to think.

6) *Don’t get trapped in the impotent gaze of nostalgia.* All of western modernity, even as it looks to the future also looks back with a sense of loss at what is left behind. In recent decades, loss has not been accompanied by any future and, in recent years, has been turned directly into destruction. From the world of culture in particular, without wishing to, we have let our gaze become trapped in this model of representing change wherein nostalgia, melancholy and resistentalist positions prevail. The destruction of public institutions, the university among them, which we have witnessed over the last century in Europe is the destruction of a direct attack. This is not a state of decadence but a state of war. This war is our present, and there is no value in any laments over any past. Value lies in our ability to spread and gather allied forces that are not willing to surrender or to live in fear of a future that we cannot yet see.

7) *Put body and voice into it.* For all these reasons, it is necessary to become present and credible, not in sweeping proposals but in what we do every day: the classes we teach, and in what we are to our students and in what we write. If blood calls blood, imposture also brings more imposture. Only with the truthful word and gesture of each one of us will we be able to break the circle and thus leave space for others to come and occupy it with their own gestures and their own words, which are unyielding before any attempts at standardization.

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