Why should we cultivate “the difference” in everyday practices of the university?

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Abstract
The paper explores the phenomenon of the local-worldly university. Why should we cultivate “the Difference” in everyday practices of the university? The author refers to the Derridean “différance,” to the idea of wonder (το θαυμα) and the Herderian concept of Heimat. By putting these terms in the university’s specific context, the author asks questions about an autonomous space for thinking and experiencing. The university cannot be homeless, unanchored or uncommitted. The more intensively the universalising procedures of the control of universities are implemented, the more we are convinced that the world does not need any global institutions of higher education and research. This is because a human being is more localised than we would be willing to admit. What is important is difference, the untranslatability of knowledge and languages, the contextual grounding of thinking and action, as well as the experience of the fragility of what is “locally human,” which makes us observe closely a local human being, attached to a place, wandering about with the notion of home, and thus dispelling his or her doubts here and now, even when they tend to recur eternally.

Abstract
The university is first and foremost an idea that connects people in the name of truth and its cognition, but it is also about the time-old cultural practices that denote a special kind of commitment due to their persistence. Regardless of how different universities are, the very idea of university remains the same: the universitas magistrorum et scholarum (community of teachers and scholars) provides a general framework for the whole of those who teach and those who learn (Rashdall, 2010, p. 7). The twin notions of universality and community share an approach which thoughtfully creates respective realms of universitas magistrorum, universitas scholarum, and universitas scientarum. The idea of universality as translated into the grand concept of community and realised respectively in the Parisian and Bologna models of the university is what underlies the European university education with its communal focus. Even though the history of the university seems to cover also the history of some other schools resembling universities to some extent (such as the Platonic Academy, the Academy of Gondishapur in ancient Iran, the Al-Azhar Academy in Cairo, Egypt and the Nalanda school in Bihar, India), thus pointing to the multi-faceted nature and wide occurrence of the centres of research and education, it is the traditional Latin shape of the university that has contributed most to the formation of the European identity.

A contemporary university nurtures the memory of different ways of legitimating knowledge: its background is provided by a familiar narrative of freedom that Jean-François Lyotard identified in the French Enlightenment story of liberating all Mankind, as well as the narrative of German idealism considering the speculative spirit to be the subject of knowledge which was behind the foundation of the Humboldt University of Berlin in 1810 (Lyotard, 1984, pp. 31–37). Drawing on this heritage, a contemporary university continues to pose the question of what the proper relationship between university teaching/learning and state authority is: either full autonomy and freedom of inquiry, yet sustained by state donation (Wilhelm von Humboldt’s project) (Humboldt, 1989) or a close control of the state (Napoleon’s scheme) (Rüegg, 2004, pp. 11–15).

The university as a multi-layered communal experience embraces both contemporary tensions and modern diseases that determine the course of discussion and make it schematic. It is therefore difficult, while debating the
problems of the university, to evade the questions concerning the presence or absence of hands-on approach and financial reductionism, which readily inscribes the university in the narrative of market economy (Kościelniak & Makowski, 2011, p. 9). Similarly, it is virtually impossible to leave out the notion of social challenges, the question of the relationship of an institution of higher education to its environment or of the plausibility of the division into research and didactic centres (Kościelniak & Makowski, 2011, pp. 10–13). It is difficult to resist the temptation to trace the connections between the global need for qualified workers in the labour market and global education programmes (Carnoy, 1999, pp. 14–17), which is what forces the university to “readjust” to contemporary reality but also reinforces its role in constituting the global order.

Government policies, social transformations, global changes, a system based on the idea of competition, unification of the practices of living and the community of civilisation is what provides the framework for the debate on the university and at the same time suggests the lexicon to describe the current shape of the institution. We mourn the commercialisation of universities, the changes introduced into education to make it adapt to market needs, and the omnipresence of the principle of utility. We distinctly feel the effects of what Jacques Derrida called “tele techno media” power, one which in the field of university education translates into simplification and homogenisation, application of the criterion of profitability to the field of research, popularity of marketing mentality, ratings and viewing figures, as well as the violence inflicted on language (1994, p. 63). Past concepts are being increasingly marginalised and consigned to oblivion, while other ideas are becoming dominant, ones whose only purpose is to establish the equivalence between the utilitarian world and the trivial and instrumental instruments of its description. By quantifying the value of the university, we have already agreed to quantify the value of the world. Yet the university cannot be reduced to a mere practice of organisation.

“The University without condition” (L’Université sans condition)—Jacques Derrida’s key concept—is to be based on a large number of authorities: state, economic, media, ideological, religious, etc. (2001, p. 16). According to the deconstruction philosophy, the university is supposed to be a place where everything is subject to the right to think critically, to “the right to do it affirmatively and performatively, that is, by producing events (for example, by writing) and by giving rise to singular œuvres (which up to now has not been the purview of either the classical or the modern Humanities)” (Derrida, 2002, p. 204). While creating or writing we produce individual works. The spirit of deconstruction is not destructive to the old idea of the university, it demands recognition of the university in social and institutional life anew, responsible renewal of entrenched divisions, anachronistic terms, organisational schemes (Derrida, 2004, p. 102). Derridian différence enables highlighting radical questions and doubts without giving up the spirit of hospitality, and in this sense it allows us to discuss the question of the place of the university as a practice of the open life. The university is home for differences.

The domain of the university is time. Its activity consists in constant deconstructing and reconstructing, demolishing and building anew, placing on the margin and introducing an unfamiliar element into the old and lasting. Without shedding altogether the modern metaphor of progress, but also without succumbing to the overly arrogant contemporary narrative of innovation, the university still persists, watching over the most essential. To put it a bit bombastically, the task of the university is to reinstate and renew the world. Its primary obligation is not to eschew but to bravely confront what constantly recurs as a result of the universal human experience of the clash of the finite and infinite. Regardless of the changing circumstances of daily living and of the changing expectations about scientific and scholarly pursuits, the university remains a place whose duty is to protect the sort of thinking that seems inapplicable here and now but is in fact indispensable as partaking in the practice of posing essential questions. The university remains a real university, and not just a higher school of professional training or an ever-expanding network of exchange of teachers and students, inasmuch as we can refer to it with the words of Thomas Merton describing the dazzling lectures on English literature he attended at Columbia University after he left Cambridge: “It was the only place where I ever heard anything really sensible said about any of the things that were really fundamental—life, death, time, love, sorrow, fear, wisdom, suffering, eternity” (1999, p. 197). The university does not matter much if it does not confront us with the word made of “fire,” rocking the foundations of
our knowledge and existence. It is the place that is only meaningful if it protects a strong word written "in blood," one that is worth fighting for, as Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote (2006, pp. 27–28).

2 | THE CULTIVATION OF WONDER

The university, by protecting a strong and disquieting word, aims to protect wonder. In Greek τὸ θαύμα is not just a wonder, a wonderful thing or picture, but also wonder in the sense of astonishment or amazement. Hence the verb θαυμάζω (thaumazó)/θαυμάζειν (thaumazéin) means to wonder, to be astonished, and to admire, but also to appreciate and worship. The meaning of the word is worth remembering as the university cannot distance itself from the power of wonder: it should not fail to provoke fear or bewilderment, to upset people’s good moods and their entrenched habits of reasoning, obviously on condition that the negative response is not an end in itself, but a means to an end of posing essential questions on the way to better knowledge and enhanced experience. For Plato the origin of philosophy is located precisely in wonder, as this is a frame of mind indicative of the philosophical disposition—"For this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy" (1921, 155d). Aristotle recalls the notion of the necessary connection between the origin of philosophical thinking and wonder—"It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophise; wondering in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about the greater matters too, e.g., about the changes of the moon and of the sun, about the stars and about the origin of the universe. Now he who wonders and is perplexed feels that he is ignorant (thus the myth-lover is in a sense a philosopher, as myths are composed of wonders); therefore if it was to escape ignorance that men studied philosophy, it is obvious that they pursued science for the sake of knowledge, and not for any practical utility" (1933, Book 1, 982b). He points both to the presence of various degrees of wonder and the absence of practical utility, which liberates philosophical thinking and directs it towards rational contemplation, one that postulates reason as the foundation of all being. Aristotle also signals another connection that cannot be regarded with indifference by the staff of contemporary university, especially if they strive to place the human studies on the pedestal. As we learn from the ancient philosopher’s considerations, whoever loves myth is in a sense a philosopher because myth satisfies wonder, which is a pure desire for knowledge. Even though the orders of muthos and logos are separate and diverse, they both partake in wonder, bringing forth an interesting connection in the realm of the humanities. Their mutual gravitation may indeed be invigorating for the practices of the university.

What is however most significant is that wonder, due to its close connection with the university, is an ever-present stimulus and inexhaustible source that is a fountainhead of philosophy, capable of constant renewal, to follow Karl Jaspers’ explication. Wonder is thus not a mere point in time marking the beginning that soon fades away but an eternal source of knowledge. University cannot fail to anchor its thought and idea of community in this very origin. What is thauma? It is a shock accompanying the act of recognising things for the very first time. The old becomes new because it is seen distinctly and accurately for the first time. Wonder upsets the order of things, especially if they are quotidian meanings and events. It introduces a break in the routine of perception, and questions previous experience and habits of legitimisation. Finally, it leads one to ask questions about the very nature of the universe. It prompts a recognition of something as radically new. Yet, in its openness and receptivity to the new, it does not foreclose the old (Kulas, 2006).

The cultivation of wonder in the spiritual dimension, as well as in everyday practices of the university, seems to be necessary on account of its basic meaning: wonder is what prompts one to pose philosophical questions, whether it be out of disbelief, confusion or unease, and what leads one to realise one’s ignorance. The Socratic ignorance becomes a first step towards gaining insight into the essence of things, and the university’s task is to kindle interest in this sort of thinking while carefully handling the connections between thinking, understanding and being. It is difficult, however, to imagine the connections without referring to Martin Heidegger’s philosophy and his notion of wonder, which is more than just a mere beginning: it is perceived as what pervades philosophy
and constitutes it every time anew. The Heideggerian wonder is also related to the Greek πάθος [pathos] and as such necessitates a reference to the question of suffering and pain. In order to correspond to the becoming of being, wonder simply must be regarded in attunement with “the Being of being” (Heidegger, 1958, § 48).

The space of the university, arising from wonder and striving to maintain the latter’s power, needs also some room for doubt. We may be curious about the relationship between wonder and doubt. The starting point for scholarly considerations is mundane experience and the image of reality it yields—initially taken for granted, it becomes increasingly less obvious. We can thus ask whether wonder always entails doubt. These are two powerful figures in the philosophical discourse, whose coupling is a driving force not only of the development of knowledge, but also of wisdom. Therefore, wonder and doubt are supposed not only to further philosophical reflection but also to pursue and accumulate wisdom. Constant wondering—which means listening attentively, looking differently, being ready to relinquish a previous explanation, and remaining rootless—is thus both a humble attempt at gaining some insight into reality and an exercise in wisdom.

What is alarming, amazing, and unheard-of, what breaks the routine of our thinking and our good mood stemming from familiar knowledge, arises in the space that is distinct, separate and liberated. It is university that needs to create such space. Alternative thoughts do not occur in the unified space sustained by similar programs, similar metaphors, and similar practices. On the other hand, the spirit of liberation, which is dominant within the university, is sustained by alternative thinking.

3 | THE UNIVERSITY: GLOBAL OR NOT?

The establishment of the global criteria of quantification of knowledge, the constant repetition of identical metaphors used to describe the university (such as innovativeness, internationalisation or quality of education), the legitimisation of the systematic solutions for the practice of academic living, the presence of universally valid and rigorous procedures of assessment—these are the gestures that pave the way for the domination of the principles of unity and identity. The latter make us feel confident and secure—we know what to expect, what to question, and what to rectify in accordance with the notion of standardised mental activity. Yet we also feel imprisoned in the scheme which forces us to restrain and censor our thoughts and actions so that they respect the rules of academic correctness. We are thus forced to reconcile the needs of our imagination and personal freedom with the policy of universal standardisation. We are aware that the policy does not amount to good and wise living, as wisdom is what eludes scientific norms. The university nowadays no longer addresses the question of wisdom and wise people; it is rather interested in scientists and scholars conceived as experts, specialists, researchers, or coordinators of scholarly pursuits. Its current aspirations can be best summarised by Leo Tolstoy’s ironic comment stating that scientists have created a model of science that seeks to answer innumerable sophisticated questions but is unable to address a single issue of what a human being is and how he or she should live (2004, p. 335). By expecting the university to be an institution intent on protecting qualitatively homogenised knowledge and bridging the gaps between equally homogeneous scientific fields, we aid in reinforcing the power of the same.

The university based on identical, universally valid criteria of assessment is only able to yield an expected product in terms of scholarly knowledge and academic practices. It is a product which is easily measured, universally recognisable, and overly repetitive: it is ever “the same.” It is placed on ranking lists and thus legitimised by the legislators of science who see to it that the correct procedures in accordance with the rules are strictly observed. The paradox of such an institution is that it is no longer necessary to travel between universities as we feel at home everywhere. We do not encounter difference: never do we come across a tribe of strangers. We move about in the familial space that has previously silenced the alien ethnos and subscribed to the space of the predictable and homogeneous. And even though we are differently positioned on the career ladder and may have different experiences with regard to innovativeness and ability to access financial means, we are located in the same mechanism of the production of knowledge, forced into the same procedures, squeezed into the straitjacket of a
single definition of a scholarly pursuit. This machinery of homogenised science is far removed from the Derridean *différance*, which does not govern anything, does not reign over anything and has no power (1982, pp. 1–28). The concept of *différance* "is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general" (Derrida, 1982, p. 11). It introduces a rupture which eludes wholeness, an action of postponing sense—"the action of putting off until later"; and retreat from identicalness—"to be not identical, to be other" (Derrida, 1982, pp. 7–8). What is globally the same has little tolerance for difference. The latter is allowed if only at the price of its subordination. As long as the differences are minor and insignificant to the power of homogenised science, they can exist as local, insubstantial and short-term practices. The situation results in the muting of the imperative to give voice to Difference, one radically conceived and irreducible to a number of insignificantly differing arguments, the same difference that made the Nietzschean Zarathustra "stroll over" the heads of those that are homogeneous, with the declaration that "human beings are not equal" (2006, p. 99). The university becomes impoverished when it is not distinctive and does not nurture radical difference taught by the likes of the teacher of the eternal recurrence (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 177) and revealing the other in the incessant movement of repetition and return.

What is problematic is that we do not know what or who fuels the belief that the world needs the same university, based on the same criteria, everywhere: whether in Latin America, in Asia or in Europe. There is something that makes us suspicious about it, as suspicious as we become of the Nietzschean Zarathustra when he attempts to undermine science. There is something that makes us open the door and slip out "to let in the good air" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 245). It is systematic thinking introducing universal solutions that legitimises the aforementioned belief. The belief is however far from beneficial to a human being, as it is against culture, against difference, against the local and the ability to make oneself at home in a given place. No system mourns the fragility of the university, and neither is any system affected by the fact that we do not attempt to protect what is small and insignificant, immature, uncertain, local, fragile, infinite, rare, unprecedented, unimaginable and so on. The global world will not miss or mourn the lost chance for differentiation, yet a local human being, clearly defined by a point in time and space, aware of his or her local roots and impermanence of the material world, may develop such a longing or desire. And there seems to be a great but still unacknowledged desire for a local university with the capacity for acknowledging difference.

The more intensively the universalising procedures of the control of universities are implemented, the more we are convinced that the world does not need any global institutions of higher education and research. This is because a human being is more localised than we would be willing to admit. What is important is difference, the untranslatability of knowledge and languages, the contextual grounding of thinking and action, as well as the experience of the fragility of what is "locally human," which makes us observe closely a local human being, attached to a place, wandering about with the notion of home, and thus dispelling his or her doubts here and now, even when they tend to recur eternally. A comparative approach should not be reducible to a distanced act of confronting different standards. It should be sustained by the imagination which is both eager to take risks and sensitive to difference, and which cannot be levelled, curtailed, translated, fully comprehended and, finally, tamed.

4 | THE REGIONAL ART OF LIVING

The university should be first and foremost recognised and sustained by the region which yields alternative thinking and action, and does not demand that the conceptual tools and ideas match the canon imposed by the administrative centre. It is the region that makes us sensitive to the place we live in, a place which is not accidental but is so often made non-existent by the usual "rootless" science. Thinking about regions is a "centripetal" move, a "pursuit of the centre," but it is also an art of authentic living in the proximity of "authentic centres"—close to a human being, as Krzysztof Czyżewski wrote (2015, pp. 65–66). It would be, however, a mistake to think that the region is what binds us to a place and does not let us get out, beyond the familiar framework of thinking. The region makes
us acutely aware of alternative ways of being—those of other people living “elsewhere,” far away, outside, beyond our boundaries, and so on. Still, it is highly significant that the region secures the basic responsibility of the university as a site of research and education, as well as a place of various encounters.

By protecting a sense of gravitation of the university to a place, we indicate that the university cannot be the world’s playground, a laboratory experiment, a “trick,” or a universal project that is not translatable into living here and now. Culture is not a project of the modern laboratory. The university is a commitment to the surroundings whose task is to teach how to be committed to what is furthest away. This is a commitment not only to what constitutes home and a local community, but also to newcomers. The university stays close to living, construed not just biologically, but in the Nietzscher and Diltheyan terms. In Nietzsche’s words, life is not a heavy burden and neither is it a story of trivial happiness. From the point of view of the will to power, it is an act of affirmation or liking (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 28). The Nietzscher favourable attitude to life (2006, p. 28) means perceiving from the affirmative perspective the whole of human life, life which is a movement originating in the spirit of lightness and is creative enough to be able to stay open to the realm of the future. Krzysztof Michalski, taking up the philosopher’s theme, elaborates upon it by saying that human life is, on the one hand, composed of familiar elements and assimilated into the well-known structure (“here is a house, here is a mountain, here is a hammer and a triangle"), but, on the other hand, life is something more, something alien and different from one’s expectations and preconceptions (“It differs from what can be called my deep and abysmal difference, impossible to overcome”) (2007, p. 94).

It is thus essential that the university should exist in the felt proximity to the processes of living conceived as what is familiar and abysmal simultaneously, just as it was important for the Diltheyan Geisteswissenschaften [the human sciences] to be intimately close to life (Dilthey, 1987, pp. 186–190). Perhaps the magnitude of the experience of the university stems from its ability to penetrate into what is both home- and abyss-like? Indeed, the humanities that sustain the university protective of thinking have long been supposed to approximate life so as to be able to find the connection between thinking, acting and living. The limits of understanding are the limits of living—what is thus really at stake here is approaching life in the most adequate way, as Wilhelm Dilthey indicates (1970, pp. 70–73). The university is thus committed to living in the hermeneutic sense.

The very fact does not, however, translate into the university’s utility and the demand for its effectiveness so that it is able to solve social problems, at the same time marginalising any considerations that seem to have no instrumental quality. The university approaches life inasmuch as it defends the posture of engagement and responsibility by being able to bridge the gap between individuals and community and to affirm difference that powers imagination.

5 | BEING AT HOME IN A PLACE

The university cannot be homeless, unanchored or uncommitted. While at university we do not perceive the world from the vantage point of science which is found "nowhere," but from within the realm of culture that places scholarship in the cultural, moral and aesthetic framework. Home is something distinctive. That is why an institution of higher education cannot offer a narrative of cognitive and moral neutrality, understood as a tool for avoiding biased content. It was already the Nietzscher human sciences that suspended the belief in neutrality through the reference to the processes of living, as Michalski pointed out: “It is only life and the evaluation with regard to life that can bring to light the validity and, at the same time, the real meaning of an act of cognition” (2007, p. 50). Neutrality is thus restricted on account of life, due to the authorial figure behind. And yet, all things considered, it is also restricted by being-at-home. Distinctiveness, the stamp of the name and place, the emphasis on the perspectivist character of research, looking at things “from within” is the best way to rule out preferential treatment of what is familiar but mediocre, or politically and ideologically correct, be it a judgment or an interpretation. A lack of neutrality, just as the lack of anonymity, is what protects us against the plague of cowardly assessment. By displaying our name, we attach special significance to the idea we have just called into
existence: our thinking turns into action for which we are responsible. We are ready to defend it; moreover, we can be blamed or praised for what we have conceived, recognised, affirmed or rejected. In any case, the lack of anonymity makes the researcher and the university more distinctive. The widespread affirmation of a blind review system shows how much the idea of reliability and impartiality has been divorced from the notion of belonging, commitment and individuality.

In Michalski’s words, a human being is wise if he or she is able to reach not only what is given, already in existence or previously planned, but what is further on and beyond—or “up in the sky” (2007, p. 93). The university, inasmuch as we perceive it from the double local-and-global perspective, needs to take roots in order to retain its distinctiveness and to be able to reach the stars. The process of wrestling with the notion of home is always both departing and home-coming, abandoning and reconstructing. To be at home in the world means first to be at home in the idea of home and region as a spiritual realm, as what the Germans and Silesians call Heimat, using a word difficult to translate into other languages. Heimat is supposed to open the door to the world, not to close it. In this way what is homely is also worldly. Oikology (Sławek & Kunce, 2020), as a study of home, does not refrain from tackling the question of Heimat, which can be traced back to Johann Gottfried Herder’s ideas on social bonds, a sense of belonging, being part of the folk and nation, and, finally, culture which shapes the human being (1962, p. 388). Herder’s thought includes support for expressing oneself in one’s own language, struggle for a recognition of human and communal originality, concern for the development of the spirit and affirmation of culture. As Peter Blickle indicates, taking up Herder’s points, Heimat is best expressed in the notion of belonging and homeland (2002, p. 54). Oikological considerations, which tend to connect home, a human being and a place, are not really attached to the idea of a nation; what is more important is the relation of an individual lot to the earth, as was discussed by José Ortega y Gasset (1992, pp. 25–39). We are now coming back to this wise observation, unwilling to succumb either to the slick mythologies of the herd or to the mythologies of rootless (dis)association. Home is openness, hence Heimat becomes a cosmos. It protects tenderness, abstraction and specificity. It is about home, or oikos, providing a man with location, arming wanderers with the idea of home they travel the world with (even if they claim to be in flows), equipping a man with the simplicity of experience, open and rooted at the same time—such home would be an asset.

The university needs to make itself at home anew by being responsive to the needs of a place. Being at home in the local area is never neutral; it already constitutes a commitment. And it is only the condition of belonging and being at home that opens the door to the world. The imagination of university people is situated at the crossroads of the world and home. Whenever we take a look at the world, we do it from within home. It is also from home that we set out on a journey towards far-away places. The planetary imagination is thus a local imagination. The university in the service of truth cannot fail to serve both the world and home. Each and every gesture of an intellectual entails the notion of service and humility, even if the gesture is not remotely connected with culture or cannot be translated into cultural terms. At the end of the day, we work either to strengthen the world or to destroy it. Scientists and scholars—who are at the same time orderly and mad, playing the roles of discoverers and archivers, sages and disciples, patient experimenters and radical artists, those who worship procedures and expert advice and those who praise freedom and free-floating signifiers—connect discipline and order with what is unpredictable, unexpected, infinite and inconceivable. Yet in this violent confrontation of different elements that elude totalisation, like the simultaneous adherence to the rules and praise of their violation at the university, there is ample room for the loyalty and service to the notion of home and homeland—which is both affirmed and rebelled against, left behind and constantly returned to, lived and reconstructed. In this clash of provocation, enthusiasm of exodus and local service, the university rediscovers its identity as a difficult community of the place.

The university’s autonomy, both as a claim and imperative, or a practical requirement, cannot be suppressed. It was well-known to Józef Maria Bocheński, who pointed out that the essence of autonomy resides in six demands:
(1) that the university is a separate and self-sufficient legal subject; (2) that the organisation and selection of the fields of research and education is the university's own and free choice; (3) that the university is independent in its decisions regarding both the personnel and students; (4) that the university independently elects its authorities; (5) that the university has freedom in making use of its financial means, no institution (such as the state or church) being authorised to dictate how the money is spent; (6) that the discipline of research and education is also the university's own business, as an extension of its autonomy (1993, pp. 67–68).

The autonomy is closely connected with the recognition of the university as "a purely spiritual power," to quote Bocheński's remark (1993, p. 70). Let us stop at this point and stress the phrase, which tends to be deliberately forgotten these days. If the universities were to be deprived of this spiritual power and transformed into efficient and well-organised institutions of expert knowledge, we would have to depart from the time-honoured tradition that had so far declined to reduce their existence to the questions of utility, efficiency and organisation. The spiritual dimension, which is incompatible with the bureaucratic languages used today to describe the field of education and research, makes it virtually impossible to equate the university with any other social institutions. Bocheński was neither the first nor the last person to elaborate on its autonomy, but he was one of the few people who regarded it as a guarantee of good relations between the university and the church or state. Tadeusz Sławek writes that autonomy requires thoughtfulness so as not to turn into "aping" (2011, p. 29). And he adds that human beings are free "for themselves" but at the same time they have to be free from themselves or their "excessive selves" (Sławek, 2011, p. 21). Autonomy does not mean the right to do whatever one pleases and to spend the money available in an uncontrollable way, just as it does not mean absolute intellectual liberty. Quite on the contrary, autonomy is what gives rise to a sense of responsibility for the condition of the institution that exists "on its own" or separately from, but still in connection with, the whole family of universities.

Autonomy also means the necessity to meet cultural requirements. In order to stay together, one has to learn first how to live separately, as the theoreticians of the community well know. That is why, to quote Roberto Esposito, our communal living oscillates between rootedness and rootlessness because it involves both staying in one place and wandering (2010, p. 5). We should constantly bear in mind the combination of the two important elements: locus and communitas. Concern for the university is not about creating a monolith of power, a system based on the cultivation of unity and familiar identity; it is about looking forward both to what is familiar and what is different. An-other university is able to contribute something new to the world due to the distinctiveness and originality of its ideas. The quality of reflection and research is related to their specific, unique and unusual character. The local–global university is distinctive because it celebrates the autonomy of the languages used to create worlds in different fields and the attachment to its own, select genres of academic writing (which is far removed from the common recommendation to apply one universal standard of writing, one taught in the class on "how to write an academic text"). Furthermore, the university shows a preference for the use of one's own concepts and a predilection for specific metaphors, which means the willingness to recognise the diversity of individual academic styles. And once again, the celebration of autonomy needs to be referred to the insatiable drive of creative living which "always transcends its limits by creating ever new forms, none of which can be called final" (Michalski, 2007, p. 241). Behind the alternative ideas and practices, behind the alternative discourses and values that the local community should be ready to fight for, there is a distinct cultural trademark. And it seems that the university should strive to possess its cultural trademark.

7 | A UNIVERSITY IN A STRONG REGION—A REGION IN A STRONG UNIVERSITY

A university at the intersection of the world and home is here understood as an imagined university as such and the future of the university community. It is about potency. It is about generality. However, equally important is the university encountered "here and now," which can be determined through a region, whose ideas can strengthen
a territory, and which resonates with the spiritual tradition. Several tropes can be found below. They deliberately refer to strong regions which are marked by individuality, specificity, often also by autonomous achievements, and nurtured aspirations for independence.

Traces of thinking about the strength of a given region can be found at the University of the Basque Country—Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, located on campuses in Bilbao (Bizkaia), Vitoria-Gasteiz, and San Sebastián (Donostia in Basque). The university’s mission—available in Basque (Euskara), Spanish and English—is aimed at addressing the cultural heritage of the region, whereas the university itself is defined as a guardian of the age-old linguistic heritage, which intends to upgrade the pre-Indo-European Basque language to the highest educational level (see https://www.ehu.eus/en/en-mission). Theoretical research is reinforced by the creation of theoretical knowledge in order to improve people’s lives in the region. The Basque Country is a distinct area, while the Basque University sees itself in openness to the universal, to what requires mastering various European and global educational mechanisms, but, above all, to retaining its individuality, uniqueness, specific pride and responsibility for the place understood as home.

While searching for distinct traces of entwining home and the university in the European space, it is hardly possible to ignore Catalonia. It is a distinct region and this fact in itself challenges the university to skillfully address heritage, a kind of spiritual background, to respond to social problems, and, simultaneously, to preserve the international nature of research, openness or impetus of worldliness. A self-presentation of the University of Barcelona, Universitat de Barcelona, available in Catalan (Català), Spanish and English, is permeated with pride arising from being a highly estimated educational institution in both Catalonia and the whole country, an institution famous for offering comprehensive education and resilience of its European-scale research, with its numerous research programmes aimed at the world and the region (see https://www.ub.edu/web/ub/en/universitat/universitat.html). Moreover, the description of the university clearly refers to its close connection with the history of Barcelona and Catalonia; it also includes a declaration of continuous weaving of traditional values in the university’s goals as an institution dedicated to innovation and teaching excellence. The University of Barcelona is as open and cosmopolitan as its city, however, it is also locally centred, firmly rooted in the area that is open and entangled in meetings in history, in being on the border, at the intersection of the world and distinct home.

To refer to a topos that is extremely clear when thinking about home, about a place as such, about almost mythical space for the development of European academic thought, it is certainly worth mentioning Heidelberg. The Heidelberg University (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg) is described by means of history as its roots go back to the 14th century, of numerous Nobel laureates, but also of a place—Heidelberg, or more broadly Baden-Württemberg. While speaking and thinking about this university, we have no doubt that it is an internationally significant research centre which is presented as a university focussing on highly theoretical and methodological research, but also on the quality of subjects taught within the disciplines. It is a university which sees not only the power of disciplines, but also cooperation between them, as well as thinking beyond the discipline boundaries in order to address complex problems being crucial for shaping the future, and thus to accept social responsibility (see https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research/research-profile). The Heidelberg University sees itself as an important social stakeholder actively shaping the future, promoting responsible knowledge transfer in cooperation with its strong local, regional and international partners. The above constitute an important statement in the university description which makes it possible to understand that Heidelberg is not only a world-famous university, even a model landscape, nice space filled with history, but it is also a strong place, crucial for shaping home, leaning into the future where thinking at the intersection of home and the world will count. The significance of the place is felt everywhere in Heidelberg.

Another trace important for thinking about university through the prism of a terrain is the University of Edinburgh. Defining this university is conducted in reference to the global and the local. The "global" and "local" tabs of the university website lead to a kind of tension revealing the research and teaching power of the university. The aim of the university is cooperation with partners in order to establish the region as an important centre in Europe—attracting investments, driving entrepreneurship and promoting the area. Cooperation of researchers and students with local communities on various interesting projects is extremely important (see https://www.ed.ac.uk/local/projects). Similar questions apply to a connection between the city and the university visible in a
number of simple facilities available to non-university residents of Edinburgh (evening classes, short courses, and even gym membership!—see https://www.ed.ac.uk/local/university-city). Local power is global power, which is emphasised in the university presentation, and this makes this institution a significant contributor to the world through global partnerships, exchanges and engagement (see https://www.ed.ac.uk/global). The University of Edinburgh is one of the world's best universities in terms of intensive research, research power and scientific activity classified as world leading (see https://www.ed.ac.uk/research). “Edinburgh Global” and “Edinburgh Local” provide a framework for thinking which does not ignore the strength of the territory.

University understood as being at the intersection of the world and home must take this strength of the territory into account. We can cherish the hope that the above institutions will inspire some universities located in the present-day Poland, which have the home-world potency as they are strongly rooted in the territory, in the strong region and in universal thinking binding home to the world. It refers in particular to the University of Silesia, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, as well as the University of Warmia and Mazury, the University of Gdańsk, and the University of Wrocław—provided the latter ones would wish to assume a spiritual place in its alienation and regional distinctness.

8 | CONCLUSION

Little can be seen from the privileged centre of power/knowledge, especially in the human sciences. Withdrawing, staying away and apart, at a certain cognitive distance, can have a salutary effect in that it contributes to the making of separate peripheral centres. Being on the periphery, construed in positive, and not condescending, terms, lays a good foundation for thinking at a remove from the blinding light of knowledge pursued by those who wish to constantly affirm their identities in the same schemes. The discovery of the university in its peripheral existence is however no apologia for some mediocre or deficient knowledge that would serve to safeguard the parochial interests of one's native group. The acknowledgment of the university’s peripherality is instead aimed at protecting fragile knowledge by sheltering what is easily lost in the consideration of human beings and community. It means highlighting the periphery in terms of its acute awareness of difference, of detail and margin. It is about constant dismantling of the power of the centre and its systematic interpretation of the world, which makes it possible to uncover the glimmering texture of living and to affirm what comes as a surprise, unexpected and unannounced.

In its commitment to the place, the university retains its gravity because this gravity is placed not in the technique or political temporariness of university, but in a substantial core that stores the home-universum tension. Regardless of the change of costume from medieval to modern or contemporary, the university’s duty is to rethink the relationship of “here and there,” “now and forever,” in the place and in the world. Then home is revealed to us as Europe, home as strong regions, and, finally, home meaning the world of places and a sense of community of those who assume their location as part of rooting in the universum, rethinking the commitment and homelessness of science, and homecoming. Only in this way can university become an adventure for free people who assiduously move forward treading on the ground, carefully listening to the spiritual territory and staring at the stars. It even gains a poetic aspect without attributing an excessive role to common indicators of usability, progress and fight instincts.

The local–global university is a commitment due to its desire to come home or to bring the idea of place back to home.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
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