

# THE PEDAGOGICAL PROVINCE OF BRIDGE BUILDERS

## INSPIRATIONS AND CONTEXTS

**1. Hesse's Castalia.** Hermann Hesse wrote *the Glass Bead Game*, his last novel for which he received the Nobel Prize in the Europe subjugated by barbarian totalitarian regimes whose followers threw it onto the burning pyre in the Opera Square, Berlin. In the times of the twilight of the European civilization he span the tale of Castalia, a certain special pedagogical province whose life was subordinated to education and spiritual development. His work referred to the German tradition of Bildungsroman, best expressed by Goethe in the educational novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Hesse created a contemporary novel which - following the example of masterpieces of the previous centuries – strives to protect man from “the oblivion of being” (Heidegger), to throw an undying light on “the world of everyday life” (Husserl), “to build the knowledge about the soul” (Freud) and to serve as “the base of education” (Hoffmannstahl).

Castalia hides in itself also threats, and they also feature in Hesse's novel. One especially, the breaking of links with the world and embracing exclusively the pleasures of spiritual exercise. Quite aware of that is Josef Knecht, the hero of the novel, whose internal development leads him first to the top of the Castalian hierarchy, and then, still further, to the service of people in everyday life: as a great master leaves Castalia and undertakes the work of a teacher. This choice of pedagogical service to deal, first of all, with the education of a young student, complements significantly our knowledge of the glass-bead game, an educational and artistic programme practiced in the schools of the province – the most important element of which is spiritual upbringing of a new generation that is to grow up not in an ideal land of the spirit but in the real world, with all its earthly, historical and human conditioning. Because only then each “symbol and each combination of symbols lead not to one or other place, not to particular examples, experiments or proofs, but towards the centre, the secret and the innermost profundity of the world, to urknowledge”.

The undertaking titled by us “The Pedagogical Province of Bridge Builders” draws on the utopia described by Hermann Hesse, its living heritage and inspiration.

**2. Neimar and Culture of Dialogue.** Committed to the process of European integration and creation of the civil society we begin to achieve the awareness that our future is, essentially, to be decided by the problem of the meeting with the Other, the prospect of an alarming possibility of failure and never-ending cultural wars. Such a trail of events would bring the failure of our ability to establish an authentic community in the postmodern reality. There is a need for an

innovative school of thought. The support can certainly be found in the philosophy of dialogue which demands continuation and development. There is also a need, perhaps even a bigger one, for the culture of dialogue, forming the ethos of the persons engaged in its creation, and finding its expression in the practical activities in the interpersonal space. This concerns thus new cultural practices and modern tools of bridge building, suitably adjusted to the dialogic reflection. In other words, we ask here for a new way of thinking and coming to its aid craftsmanship, worked out in the modern workshops of the cultural dialogue.

Man's dialogue with the Other means building. It is not given unto us, it does not become on its own. Dialogue is a craft. Practicing it for centuries have been compared to bridge building. In the Balkans they called bridge builders *neimars* and surrounded with respect due to the architects who knew the secrets of nature and were able to conquer the forces of chaos. Later the name went into oblivion and together with it the secret of the craft. Bridge building became a technology. Old tools were mistreated, and reaching for new ones forgotten were the functions once used by the *neimar*.

The question of how to internalize the Other is also the question for the viability of a modern borderland culture. Borderland is understood here not as a territory situated at the outer boundary, e.g. of a state, but as a space of the coexistence of different people in which borders run across communities. Today, it is no longer an area located far away from the centre of the region, known for the continuing, since time immemorial, tribal conflicts, as well as for the wealth of the preserved, in spite of modernity, various, sometimes exotic, cultural traditions. The centre of the modern civilization is already a borderland. Indispensable, in such circumstances becomes the creation of workshops of bridge building, situated in more and more recent and more difficult "passages". As long as it is still not too late, as long as the ethos of dialogue will not be associated again with something unnecessary and as long as new apprentices will not begin to fill the workshops of the new rulers of souls of king Ubu's sign. An alternative for such a course of events is neither a festival-type multiculturalism nor any other form of a superficial short-term meeting of cultures. Before us lies the challenge of creating an active culture of dialogue in the organic process of personal and community development, a process of long duration. For that purpose we shall need the forgotten craft of the *neimar*, read again and beneficial wherever man struggles to transcend oneself.

3. **Ethos of *universitas*.** The university, both as an institution and the constituting it philosophy, experience today a deep crisis. The worked out for almost nine hundred years (and in reality considerably longer, because, after all, first European universities in Bologna est. 1088 and in Paris est. 1150 were a continuation of the Greek idea of academy) ethos *universitas*, constituting the essential foundation of the European civilization is under threat, one talks even about its demise. Anxious humanists, analyzing the reasons behind the phenomenon, write about the "academic enterprise in the era of student consumerism" (David Riesman), about the transformation of universities into training centres for professional experts with the

accompanying degradation of professors from their position of the master to the role of the instructor (Tadeusz Ślawek), about the phenomenon of leveling down of standards propelled by the “dogmatic embracement of instrumentalism”, discrediting the authority of intellectuals, contending the standards of study and culture in the name of the critique of elitism and privilege (Frank Furedi), about the system of education which “rather induces to repetition and pleasing the teacher than understanding and testing yourself” (Michel Crozier).

For the creation of the dialogue of culture, the ethos of *universitas*, its vitality in the democratic and pluralistic society are of fundamental significance. It used to institute the world being a microcosm of the communion between people and environment over the religious, national geographical or administrative borders, in which expressing common values did not stand at odds with tolerance, and pursuit of truth was free from instrumentalization and particularistic self-interest. The threat to or an outright disappearance of this ethos in the multicultural European society must vex. It is not difficult to observe that it is accompanied by the occurrence of a growing fragmentation of reality, its break-up into smaller and smaller parts defending their own separateness and identity. It does not refer, first of all, only to national states. Nowadays, it is chiefly the matter of the growth of cultural differentiation and tensions nascent in this area, including the threat of cultural wars. The culture ceased to play the role of a uniting agent, increasingly depriving itself of a universalistic dimension and more and more often offering itself to serve as a form of protection of the particular identity of one or other community or region. The tension between what is universal and particularistic has always existed in culture. At present, however, clearly felt is the dominance of the particularistic tendency and confrontation with otherness. It is, doubtlessly, one of the consequences of the exhaustion of the ethos of *universitas*.

In such a situation we need something more than just a critical reflection on the condition of university in the modern world. We need new visions in the pedagogical province. An inspiration for them is the university tradition. We also need courage and power of imagination to look forward into the future and to create unusual, stimulating and driving ambition creative units of educational utopias.

## FORMS OF ACTIVITY

Inspirations and contexts connected with Hesse’s *Castalia*: the neimar, culture of dialogue and ethos of *universitas* were decisive in the establishment of forms in which the project of the “Pedagogical Province of Bridge Builders” will be implemented. As they include both broadening of the humanistic reflection and innovative intercultural practices, included have been the following forms of activities: an international symposium gathering outstanding representatives of the humanistic reflection, and a workshop of best intercultural practices.

The realization of the project of “The Pedagogical Province of Bridge Builders” constitutes a new stage in Borderland’s work, offering a chance to deepen and broaden new

aspects of its educational and artistic work in the multicultural communities of different regions of the world. Nevertheless, the form of activities which we refer to in our undertaking were worked out by our team during many years, they have their own continuity and dynamics of continuation, and they also have their international partners and the significant context of the past accomplishments.

## **THE “NEW AGORA” SYMPOSIUM**

### **1. Venue: SEJNY**

After Sarajevo and Wrocław, the next stage of this 'mobile academy' will be held in Sejny. This Polish-Lithuanian small town, situated in the neighbourhood of the juncture of the borders with Lithuania, Belarus and Russia, has very rich traditions of multiculturalism. Their traces left here Jews, Russian Old-Believers, Byelorussians, Gypsies and Germans. From the beginnings of its activities, i.e. from the 1990s, it has been the headquarters of the Borderland Foundation and the Centre “Borderland”. Although it is difficult to imagine today, the rebuilt and used by Borderland buildings, formerly belonging to the local Jewish community, in the past were abode of rich and progressively oriented scientific and pedagogical life – they housed a Hebrew Enlightenment grammar school, yeshiva and a heder. Also the once operating in the walls of the Dominican monastery Polish grammar-school enjoyed a high renown and attracted to Sejny professors and students even from distant parts of the country.

However, it is not the rich traditions of multiculturalisms or educational systems that determined the choice of Sejny as the venue for the 2008 symposium. For the subject matter of the symposium, very essential is the aspect of the existing here junction of Lithuania, Poland and Germany. Sejny is not only the heart of the Polish-Lithuanian borderland, it is also close to the territories of the former Eastern Prussia, Protestant colonization and the influences of the German culture.

And the last important determinant for the choice of the venue: after years of preparation and efforts to acquire funds Borderland launches the construction of the International Dialogue Centre. In the situated near Sejny locality of Krasnogruda, the former estate belonging to Czesław Miłosz's family, in the restored manor and surrounding it great park, we shall witness the slow process of the construction of a small pedagogical province which all year round will train bridge builders.

### **2. THEMES AND SPEAKERS**

#### **New Educational Utopias**

Reflecting on the crisis of university we come to the conclusion that one of the reasons behind it is the stagnation of the educational system itself, unable to keep up with the dynamically changing reality. Perhaps then, we need to separate ourselves momentarily

from the reality to be able to overtake it and free ourselves from imposed on us limitations and regain the power to shape it in the future? Perhaps we should believe in the courage and madness of imagination, so that the resulting thanks to its power visions could draw for us a new map of our endeavours and inspirations? Utopia does not, really, denote only a nonexistent place, but one difficult to acquire. This fact does not just deprive us of our sense of staying on the move, but simply makes it incessant and insatiable. Seeking answers to the question of the values on which we should build the ethos *universitas* for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but also creating the visions of pedagogical provinces we sketch new horizons whose appearance will be able to breed in man longing and striving.

### **Philosophy of Intercultural Education**

Reflecting on the philosophy of the intercultural education, eventually, we offer advice how to manage in the world in which the Other becomes a closer and closer neighbour, one reluctant to assimilate, not separated from us by the wall of a ghetto or border - the breeding place of cultural tensions. Identity ousts community and variety proves stronger than universalism. In such a world we need common landmarks, the bridges to connect islands of the archipelagos. How can one teach it? What new tools in the pedagogical workshop should be elaborated to oppose the destructive powers threatening our world? And to what ideas and values should these tools be adopted? Should we look for our models in the past, or on the contrary, they should be protected against the poisons of the historical past and painful memory?

The following speakers are invited to the event:

**Ejgidijus Aleksandravičius** – historian, chairman of the Lithuanian Committee of Historical Sciences, director of the Centre for of Studies on Lithuanian Diaspora. His field of research includes the national revival processes in Lithuania and the role of educational institutions in the formation of the modern Lithuanian nation, as well as the history of the Lithuanian society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is one of the initiators of the series “Historical studies on the Lithuanian Revival”.

**Grzegorz Godlewski Ph.D.** – cultural anthropologist, lecturer of the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. His fields of interest includes anthropology of literature and anthropology of word, and also - cultural animation as applied cultural anthropology. He is the author of several books, including ‘Cultural animation: Experiences and Future’ [Animacja kultury. Doświadczenie i przyszłość] (2002). Dr Godlewski is also a member of the council of the Borderland Foundation.

**Tadeusz Sławek** – translator and historian of literature, his fields of research are English and American literatures. He is the author of several poetry and essays books, including the 'Essays for Voice and Double-Bass', performed together with a composer and double-bassist Bogdan Mizerski. In 2002 he published the book 'Antigone in the world of corporations. Considerations about a university and the present times'. Professor Sławek is the head of the Chair of Comparative Literature at the University of Silesia in Poland.

**Richard Terdiman** – Historian and critics of literature, Professor of Literature and the History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His fields of research include French literature and culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as the theory of culture and literature, and the globalisation of culture.

**Cezary Wodziński** – philosopher, historian of ideas, translator, and essayist. His fields of interest include philosophy of Shestov and Heidegger; metaphysics, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and philosophy of dialogue. He is the author of several books, including 'Heidegger and the Problem of Evil' (English translation published in 2000). He is a professor at the Institute of Applied Psychology of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Science.

**Krzysztof Czyżewski** – co-organiser and the president of the Borderland Foundation in Poland; practitioner of ideas, animator of culture, poet, and essayist. He is the author of numerous cultural programmes and projects, focused especially on intercultural dialogue. He was active in many Polish and international non-governmental cultural bodies, and currently he is the president of the network of European literary institutions HALMA.

The *New Agora* is not a typical scholarly conference, but a forum for debate and exchange that is open to the public, especially students. There is no formal lectures and strict sessions; the speakers' contributions (speeches and comments) are treated as an introduction into a free, open and informal debate. All the speakers and participants are expected to take an active part in the discussions during all three days.

### 3. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

'New Agora' symposium will take place on November 20-22, 2008, in Sejny, north-east Poland, in the premises of the Borderland Foundation (Borderland Centre) and in the nearby former Calmedoli Monastery at the Wigry lake. About 60 participants are

expected, mainly the leaders of intercultural projects from Poland and abroad, including the organisations from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Great Britain, and Greece, who are partners in our joint project 'Glass Bead Game – Laboratories of Intercultural Practices'. The Borderland Foundation covers the costs of stay of the invited participants.

The symposium will be conducted in English.

## EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE PROJECT

In July-August 2009, the Borderland Foundation will organize in Sejny the first, pilot summer-school for the practitioners and theoreticians of intercultural dialogue. The program of the school, similarly to its staff will be defined, in large measure, during the realization of 'The Pedagogical Province of Bridge Builders' project. The school will constitute an attempt at putting into practice of some of the postulates, endeavours and visions of the New Agora symposium, which in their fuller dimension will be realized in successive stages by the International Dialogue Centre in Krasnogruda. In the nearest two years the Borderland Foundation will implement the first phase of the process of building the IDC, due to support obtained from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland.