Na progu

Zenon Bańkowski and Maksymilian Del Mar

I have known Kaarlo Tuori for many years. We have met at each other's homes and at various congresses throughout the world. We have discussed science and many other matters in the way only Poles and Finns can. I remember with pleasure Loppi, the potatos and the Poetry. We have become firm friends.

We are both from places, Finland and Poland, that have been on the fringes, at the intersections of various currents, political, scientific and religious and aesthetic. It is appropriate then that I (together with my colleague Maksymilian Del Mar, who is also Polish) offer this small piece which tries to understand these places and the slippery boundaries that surround them.

We live in a pluralist world. We can imagine this as worlds of different systems that, each having their own logic and identities, intersect with and against each other. These systems can be theoretical, comprising of social, political and religious philosophy. They can also be practical, as in different modes of religious, political and social life. When we live in such a world, where all these systems cross over us in our daily life, it is necessary to study the boundaries and transitions between them and to see how they intersect with each other and with us. We can do this theoretically by looking at the differences and similarities between belief systems and also practically by considering the boundaries between the forms of our political, social and religious life and the impact that has on polities. What is important then are the transition points. There has been much theoretical literature that talks about the way pluralism, in respect of different identities and normative systems, is managed and how these systems, at points where they touch, influence each other and what it might be like to live in such zones, on the edge.

An evocative image here is that of *grenzestellen* (border posts). This image needs to be studied metaphorically and in reality. And here we consider the contribution of another of these pluralisms, the aesthetic. The plastic arts might tell us much about what it is like to live in such transitional zones, on the edge, *na progu* (doorstep) and on the outside peering in and *vice versa*. Architecture, too, is a powerful metaphor here, but it is also real in its design of transitional spaces in buildings that sweep you from one place of activity to another. Border posts are also real; they manage the transition between systems. Typically there will be a sort of 'no man's land' between the frontier of country X and Y which will be neither one

nor the other. We want to look at the actual frontier posts in different locations and see what that tells us about living *na progu*. We take these 'bridges' and visual representations of such a life, both metaphorically and literally. Our argument will be through metaphor and parable, to see where, if anywhere, these bridges can take us.

This recalls Kafka's conundrum in 'Von den Gleichnissen':

> Many people complain that the words of wise men are always only parables but cannot be used in daily life, and this after all is all we have. When the wise man says: 'Go over', he does not mean that we should go over to the other side, which we could do if it were worth it. He means some mythical Beyond, something that we do not know and that he cannot describe in any more detail and that cannot help us here. All these parables really say is that what cannot be grasped cannot be grasped and we knew that anyway. The things that concern us in our daily lives are different.
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> One man said: 'What's stopping you? If you were to follow the parables you would become parables yourselves and thus be freed from the troubles of daily life.'
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> The second said: 'I bet that that's a parable too.'
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> The first said: 'You won!'
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> The second said: 'But unfortunately only in the parable.'
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> The first said: 'No, in reality: you lost in the parable.'[1]

If we take the parable literally, we must name some real crossing place where we can cross to take possession of the parabolic meaning, the 'Mythical Beyond'. But our daily life is 'all we have'. You win the bet, but not in the parable, for by following the parable you remain in the everyday reality, the one life we have. But if you take the parable figuratively, then you also get nowhere for the parable asks to be taken literally, it is real. You lose in the parable because you have failed to enter its domain. All the parables say is that 'what cannot be grasped cannot be grasped and we knew that anyway.' Nothing has happened, for we can only be told what we already know.

Recall, too, the reality of Bukowina. Here, in the period leading up to the First World War and thus still under the auspices of the Austrian Empire, was a place where Armenians, Germans, Gypsies, Jews, Hungarians, Romanians, Russians, Ruthenians and Slovaks lived side by side on the verge of the collapse of the Austrian imperial state. What was it like to live in this place, as a citizen of

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[1] Franz Kafka: 'Von den Gleichnissen'. In M. Brod (ed): *Beschreibung eines Kampfes, Novellen, Skizzen, Aphorismen aus dem Nachlass.* Schocken Books, New York 1946, 96.

Bukowina, as a member of an audaciously diverse community, in this hot bed of belief systems, in this cauldron of pluralisms? There was one citizen of Bukowina, Eugen Ehrlich, who, in his struggles to understand the nature of law, could not have been more appropriately located, simultaneously finding himself in a theoretical no man's land between jurisprudence and science and social science. His conclusion as to where we should find law was simple enough: 'the centre of gravity of legal development lies not in legislation, nor in juristic science, nor in judicial decision, but in society itself' – law is the living law, the law of daily life. But, much like the words of the wise men, if law is everywhere, it is also nowhere: we cannot see it, for we are in it, and cannot move beyond it.[2]

How do we enter the non-spaces, the non-places, the wild grass, and realise we are in it? How do we become willing participants in the undecidable, the transitional, and see it for what it is? How do we arrive and keep standing on the doorstep, surrendering ourselves to what has come and to whatever may be? Cognition, as many a wise one has it, is the art of making distinctions, often becoming fine and complex enough to form mazes through which we navigate ourselves in daily life: these are the sign posts, the border posts, the frontier posts of everyday life, theoretical, material and aesthetic. But cognition itself can play, and it does so, according to Kant, Schiller and others, when it is purposeless. But is it only purposeless creatures that can inhabit no man's land? How can we imagine the transitional, the real space of the parable, the in-between and the ever-moving? How can we see the bridge while we are on it? How can we see ourselves through the eyes of our shadow? Perhaps we can only speak of that which is not ours, thereby displaying who we are. And so, we who are *'Na Progu',* salute a fellow traveller in these ambiguous and unsettling places. We wish him a fruitful and fulfilling journey!

[2] The conclusion first appeared in Eugen Ehrlich: *Grundlegung der Soziologie des Rechts.* Duncker and Humblot, Leipzig 1913.