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On critical pedagogy (retrospection and projection against problems and experiences in Polish pedagogy)

Introduction¹

I would like to offer some methodological and meta-narrative reflections concerning strategies when it comes to the treatment of the so-called critical or “radical” pedagogy, not only as an object of research, but also a perspective on Polish pedagogical understandings of our existence in the social and academic world, as well as in the public sphere and the educational domain. I undertake this review through the prism of changes from the last twenty five years, its current status, and from the angle of the direction of changes desirable for the future. I am guided by my experience in dealing with this thread of thought, or type of reflection since the beginning of the 1980s, as well as my recent attempt at grasping the comprehensive reception of critical pedagogy in the version related to my translations of Henry A. Giroux’s works, as well as works he co-authored, which were published in Poland, and my own analyses thereof². I am pleased to be able to underline that the attempt at a balanced overview of the reception of critical pedagogy in the book, grouped by way of the foreword, the afterword and the annex, as the main protagonists of the reception, i.e. Professors Zbigniew Kwiecieński, Tomasz Szkudlarek, Zbyszko Melosik, and Bogusław Śliwerski. All their voices are, without any doubt, worthy of being taken into account as the ones providing testimony to what the phenomenon of critical or radical pedagogy has become in Poland. I also wish to point out that the book contains an extensive chapter authored by myself entitled: *O stanie recepcji amerykańskiej pedagogiki radykalnej w Polsce. Próba świadectwa osobistego i refleksji o „doświadczeniu pokoleniowym”* [On the status of the reception of American radical pedagogy in Poland. An attempt at a personal testimony and reflection on “generational experience”], to which I wish to kindly refer you for details, development and documentation of the theses that I can only signal here.

¹ This essay is based on the text of my plenary speech marking the opening of the conference “Critical pedagogy today. Questions about theory and practice”, Gdansk, 28 May 2012, at the Institute of Pedagogy, University of Gdansk. Here, the core of the speech remains unchanged.

² H.A. Giroux, L. Witkowski, *Edukacja i sfera publiczna. Idee i doświadczenia pedagogiki radykalnej* [Education and the public sphere. Ideas and experiences of radical pedagogy], Oficyna Wydawnicza “Impuls”, Kraków, 2010.

I shall divide my paper into three main parts. First, I shall make several reservations and some almost anecdotal remarks, wishing to refer to the symptomatic circumstances grounding the issues of the critical pedagogy itself regarding real references to the attitudes and histories of its foundations. The above will be followed by a retrospective concerning all the things that happened to us when, being a generation of still young PhDs belonging to the seminar circle of Zbigniew Kwieciński at the IRWiR, PAN (Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences) in Torun, we began to realise and understand the consequences, for us, of the existence of someone like Giroux and the phenomena of current critical pedagogy. In a triangle of environments with their leaders: T. Szkudlarek/Gdańsk, Z. Melosik/Poznań and Z. Kwieciński/Toruń, and with my humble participation, impulses were generated in subsequent years, about which Zygmunt Bauman himself wrote directly as being important ones for himself, and for the history of the pedagogical sciences, noticing manifestations of the “Poznan/Torun/Gdansk school” in them³. These were manifestations of a critical attitude in pedagogy, stemming from our re-evaluation of, simultaneously, Marxism, post-modernism, the Frankfurt school and French post-structuralism.

Finally, in the third part, the key question must be asked: what does it mean today to practice critical pedagogy in Poland, and why can, or even must it mean something different than it does in the USA? Finally, we shall not avoid the question of what should the best possible criticism in pedagogy be based on, if it can be designed or, be postulated with some concrete elements? American critical pedagogy showed us that it had gone through a whole range of inspirations, which for us still remained to be a task to be undertaken. We did not have to back us an awareness of the achievements of our local tradition and its criticality, or how it fit the evolution of critical pedagogy in the West. Let us, for that matter, consider that Polish pedagogy, reaching as far back as the interwar period, contains many accents sensitizing us to the significance of the phenomena of resistance in educational (child-rearing) interactions, while the transfer in the critical analysis to the resistance paradigm – following the strategy of the identification of the mechanisms of reproduction of various aspects of inequality by education – is generally considered as belonging to the late stage of the evolution of attitudes in Western pedagogy associated with the 1970s.

Reservations, motivations and programme-related orientation of criticism

I have to state that I am conscious of the fact that I am not unbiased here, being a participant of a certain process which began, and which, I think has not been finished yet, and neither am I certain that it intensively will last, although it still seems important and necessary to me. Critical meta-pedagogical reflection seems all the more indispensable here as I am convinced of the growing intellectual crisis in

³ *Postmodernity and its discontents*, New York University Press, New York, 1997.

our academic environment, which could be discussed for a long time; let it suffice that I have written about it quite extensively, as can easily be checked. Additionally, what is a considerable additional difficulty for me in undertaking the perspective of a distanced overview is the fact that I am not so much attracted by analysing critical pedagogy as by practicing it, and here in my narration I have to change my attitude a little. Generally, this critical pedagogy requires that its important sources of critical traditions be indicated, and, subsequently, it is indispensable to follow their traces from a research perspective, as I have done with Bakhtin, Bourdieu and, partially, with Lacan following Giroux and McLaren, as well as with Erikson and Kohlberg following Habermas. In turn, what needs to be indicated from the point of view of functionality, is new areas, tasks, and the specificity of critical pedagogy's attitude, fitting in particular its ability to identify previously invisible phenomena such as symbolic violence, or, broader, manifestations of a hidden programme and the ritualisation of appearances, and to point out the ability to problematize strategies which, elsewhere, are considered obvious or sufficiently better than others. This includes, for instance – despite various advantages of (neo)liberalism over the baggage of experiences which is being overcome, and is related to all varieties of totalitarianism, including the one generating *homo sovieticus* attitudes – that one needs to identify phenomena that need to be criticised in the increasingly post-totalitarian world, which however is simultaneously entangled in the contradictions and traps of neoliberalism and globalisation, in ways that are not easily identified or untangled from their knots and inertia, nor from the camouflage that is alluring for the naive.

To build critical discourse in relation to the world is very difficult. It starts to have symptoms of resistance of being overthrown, and it includes the mechanism of hiding itself behind procedurality on the one hand, where democracy itself becomes a hostage of procedures, and globality on the other, where differences start to lose their importance and value. And all this is happening with the consent of individuals who are increasingly less reflective, and who increasingly abandon their citizen-subjectivity; or their ability to take responsibility for their own fate and social life in the longer perspective of engaging in the processes of democracy building and developing a culture other than the one temporarily promoted in the media. It is not accidental that Giroux sensitizes us to the “new authoritarianism of neoliberalism”, criticized as far as being included in the categories of terror. And, this last word must also be seen critically, since – as Tomasz Szukdlarek insightfully observed – “neoliberalism is poorly invasive”, and even seductive. It uses soft means, providing an ultimately illusionary sense of comfort and absence of addiction. One needs to be able to recognize the means this new way of impact uses us, in order to find the ways in which its hidden influences can be countered. Along with the strategy of political correctness, it is worth differentiating the pressure of the culture of organisation and interaction dominated by the model of procedurality: the order guaranteed no longer by hierarchy or decision-making as the starting point, but by procedures, which are replacing responsibility, the ability to care, and ethical sensitivity. Therefore, we are witnessing the emergence of a world dominated by the violence of political correctness (ostentatious courtesy falsifies

hidden meanness), entanglements addicted to perverse and perfidious socialisation, and the care for the domination of conventionality in the Habermasian sense, in the form of procedures and procedurality of actions. All this has become a new space for the ritualisation of appearances, as manifested in what I heard from a city authority: "competitions are for those who are to win them". Also in education: efforts are increasingly focused on the generation of the world of paper compliances dreamt-of by every bureaucrat, instead of real concerns for authentic life-giving qualities, so that the latter is measurable, chopped into modules, and definable by declarative competence-related benefits after just a short sequence of impulses.

It is more and more often that we become victims of mechanisms, which are not only concealed, but which also deceitfully use stolen identities, hijacked tradition, and language affirming the right (while in fact usurping claims) to being above criticism as a naturalized object, or one continuing luminous ethos. Social interactions and organisations as a space of hidden, transparent, silent claims – are a perspective which needs to be included in pedagogical analyses, although this takes place slowly; here, Habermas should long have been the primer – but he is not. What is more, it turns out that an act of usurpation in the convention of Orwell's newspeak reverses meanings, and, to be more precise, places labels on situations and new constructs, or even neoplasms resembling neo-constructs that deny associations linked with these labels.

As a part of my own approach to criticality, there is a growing significance of pedagogical alertness, still disregarded in Poland, although already present in its tradition during the interwar period to the two-edgedness of educational measures as well as the bipolar complexity of basic phenomena, which, when reduced to unambiguity, typically become single-sided reductions, losing the necessity to see processes and practices from the other side. We must be able to cope with the necessity to take into account criticality in the form of paradoxical power to protect one from exaggeration, overgrowth or extremes on the one hand, and the absence, deficit and inadequacy on the other. Criticism can no longer be simply related to the postulate of change, since it must be able to also target the changes themselves, their strategies and ways of introduction, and further demand the noticing of their manifestations, which are harmful, diseased, sometimes mad and blind or naïve, or fit the characteristics typical for the so-called Orwellian world involving the description of the world exactly in the spirit of newspeak, denying its sense and enforcing its perspective that imposes blindness and participates in upholding of world that does not deserve it. In its cognitive attitude, criticism includes reflectiveness, which also recognizes the perverseness of effects and burdening intentions, where reflex – as a return reflection of consequences in the form of a distorted echo – tends to be unidentified in the absence of tools for adequate cognition, i.e. for understanding the transformation of the initial attitude. Criticism must be able to feed on impulses also from the sphere of the phenomena, which it can urge us to rebel against by alarming us rather than by only diagnosing and reporting concerns. What is particularly important for the construction or identification of criticism, is the question of what such criticism is motivated by and in which direction (not necessarily by

a project, or less still, utopia) it moves, for what benefit it wants to act, at what price, and with what degree of allowance for giving a voice to the difference within disputes concerning its constitution.

In the Polish reality, it is particularly important and difficult to fit criticism into discourses dealing with the presence of religion in schools, attitudes related to the body and disability, as well as ways of countering the effects of programmes of reform, which cannot be stopped, hampered or reversed. As I have shown elsewhere, we have at least four possible pedagogical strategies hidden behind the differing attitudes to tradition, different visions of freedom and liberation of human spirituality, differing needs for change, and, finally, different ideals of place, which, jointly, call for entirely new visions of possibility for dialogue, for engaging with culture, and for communication mechanisms and their rationality. An entirely different scale of criticism takes on a voice when we are able to notice the need for “transverse rationality” (the importance of which for pedagogy was discovered and is implemented by Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka); or, when – recalling Habermas-Kohlberg’s developmental triad, or its anticipation as found in Sergei Hessen in the form of the well-known sequence: anomie-heteronomy-autonomy – we can critically analyse the double-edgedness of procedurality (of the conventional level in Habermas’s terminology), which was probably most spectacularly presented by Leszek Kołakowski in his analysis of the code-based regulation of occupational liability in the essay, constituting a model for such critical alertness, entitled *Etyka bez kodeksu* [*Ethics without a Code*] from the famous volume *Kultura i fetysze* [*Culture and Fetishes*].

It seems to me that what is most important for pedagogy is the constant infringement of its ideas on socialisation (in view of its stereotyping and reductions of its complexity to local requirements), as well as the highlighting of the violence present in its impact, the results of which range from “voluntary submissiveness” to the allegedly useful and desirable “inviolability” of authority, and the affirmation of seduction or fascination. Critical pedagogy teaches us to understand that dangers and realistically dangerous phenomena are not based mainly on aggression, ostentation or eager offensiveness. Such phenomena can be poorly invasive, and even seductive, and they draw the power of their impact from their apparent lack of interest in addiction. We also know that it is indispensable to trace phenomenon of reverse effectiveness (an effect contrary to the intended one, not despite, but owing to efforts that are directed towards its opposite), or even the perverseness and perfidy of erasing all traces so that peak symptoms of domination and victimisation become reflectively unattainable to individuals who are subjected to them; let alone the generation of gestures of resistance, which is difficult, if not entirely impossible in the entanglement within a “victim syndrome”, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the narcissistic focus on the satisfaction of the needs and follies of the consumer on the commodities market: one of the attitudes being the reverse of the pilgrim’s involvement in culture, as described so well by Bauman, sensitizing us *inter alia*, as we are aware of the demands of tourists or vagabonds for whom educational offers or developmental efforts have no value in themselves. I have already on a separate occasion revealed, following Bauman, the diagnosis of the

“end of the culture of learning” as an additional challenge to education, obstructed by the fiction of the slogan “society of knowledge”⁴.

On the trap of labelling in science: the example of criticism

In my opinion, it is only possible to talk and write sensibly about critical pedagogy when one simultaneously practices and cultivates it, applies it in his/her own attitude for the benefit of the entire pedagogy and not uses it as just another drawer from which, very conveniently, professors or trainees can take papers with a view to promotion, or tolerated texts about some exotic construct, when, at the same time, one is vigilant in relation to traps and dangers. I am against the development of a ghetto from the circle dealing with the critical pedagogy being ALREADY a thought tradition in Western pedagogy – with its own canon, variants, world-class personalities and evolution. It is not about seeing a uniform phenomenon here, still less one deserving an uncritical attitude and single-sided affirmations. Like few other labels, the very formula of “criticality” covers a meta-narrative task, and references to its own claims. It was not for nothing that Marek Siemek sensitised us to the dual, non-reducible tension in the history of philosophy between the extremes of critique and the extremes of the system, where it is easy to encounter an uncritically treated system, or a critique devoid of systemic support as justification for its claims.

The label affirming “criticism” does not give one a patent for infallibility, and cannot relieve one from alertness or responsibility, although we often put traps for ourselves here, and voice usurping aspirations, or at least tempting promises. For instance, the “tasty” soup advertised on TV cannot be tasty just by the power of the word on the pack, and, similarly, the psychology referred to as “humanistic” does not have arguments on the superiority, or, still less, the singularity of the standard of its representation as being such only on the basis of its name, while simultaneously being naive, shallow or discarded outside the boundaries of the complexity of phenomena, requiring as much as the knowledge of psychoanalysis in its version far from reductionist orthodoxy.

There is a huge number of such examples with usurpations or the misfortune with labels and their promises. There is a symptomatic example connected with the so-called socialist pedagogy, which unfortunately was applauded by the majority of the great personalities of our pedagogical tradition after WWII. Wherever pedagogy is right and up-to-date, it has nothing to do with socialism, since it has value outside this label and its reference, which in many respects is deficient. Therefore, we are not the hostages of a label when we recognise some of its elements as being positive. In turn, wherever the pedagogical tradition has become covered over with various endeavours, it is false, and even a label of socialism not only fails to help here, but, what is more, it hinders the effort of differentiating positives from

⁴ L. Witkowski, *Ku integralności edukacji i humanistyki II* [Towards the Integrity of Education and Humanities II], Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń.

misunderstandings. Similarly, Marxism, referred to as a “progressive” philosophy, was unable to hide its lack of progressiveness in its many divergent incarnations, just like the Church, proud of the term *katholikos*, meaning *universal*, is not as such simply by the power of the word – and faces the challenge of ecumenism. Let me remind you that Luther’s criticism on the eve of Reformation did not postulate the establishment of some new Church, as it was fighting for the Church of the time to not only nominally remain faithful to its Christian mission, but also not to cause an association of the word “Pope” with the term “anti-Christ”. Hence, we know that labels often hide huge claims, and even usurpations masking interests connected with attempts at ruling in a given constellation of powers. In the history of philosophy, a critical label was initially mainly associated with the Kantian tradition, and subsequently with the critical theory originating from Frankfurt am Mein in a dispute with Karl Popper’s “critical rationalism”; therefore, criticism has many names, and it would be good to care for it, and reflect on it.

Similarly, although critical pedagogy has its own natural branches and references to the tradition of Marxism, it would do it a lot of harm to fit its entirety solely into this tradition. At the same time, it would be an absolute misunderstanding to consider one’s aversion to, say, Engels or Lenin, as an alibi for the indiscriminate condemnation of Antonio Gramsci’s attitude, or the reading of this tradition in, for example, the Frankfortian version, not to mention a return to the ethical reflection of the “young Marx”.

A discussion on critical pedagogy must be critical itself – in a broader way than in relation to a closed whole. I would not like us here to multiply errors, or undertake a habitual attitude to other labels, including alternative pedagogy, post-modernist pedagogy, or emancipatory pedagogy. Critical pedagogy wants to be pedagogy *tout court*, as such, and not a marginal or exotic variety proud of its exclusiveness, magnanimously recognising the right of the equal functioning of other pedagogical currents whilst unaware of their deficits, or even their harmfulness to democracy, citizenship and the quality of the subjective functioning of the human being in the world of culture. It is, in particular, an opportunity to reflect on the condition of the entire Polish pedagogy, as well as its parts, such as general pedagogy, social pedagogy, or comparative pedagogy, as well as on the development of tasks for each of them, and on the identification of their shallow and backward areas – especially when they are entirely unnoticed as a part of a typical complacent attitude.

I want to close this part of my reflections with a provocative thesis. If pedagogy is serious – it is critical. Of course, the above only begins the dramatic task we are facing – because it is not easy to measure the necessary amount of criticism, just like there is no single direction here, or a closed list of topics to be undertaken – despite various starting models and despite the simultaneous suggestion that there is not a single valid version of critical pedagogy or its single direction. For the purposes of greater precision, let me also add (although I am conscious of an additional complication I am introducing already at the beginning) a certain reservation concerning the signalled traps and terminological disputes, which do not have to be treated as trivial. I must reveal that, myself, I definitely prefer the term *radical*

pedagogy – firstly, because it is easier to be afraid of the term, since radicalism has poor connotations, although its etymology is connected with roots, with reaching to the roots of phenomena as a precondition for the “uprooting” on the one hand, and the taking care of roots, for instance in a culture as symbolic memory, on the other. Naturally, this gives birth to intellectual and ethical alertness as the first condition for in-depth criticism. Secondly, one needs to thoroughly consider what and how should be radicalised (it was some time ago that I postulated the semantic radicalisation of pedagogy). Thirdly, in connection with the above, radical pedagogy is a term which requires a more theoretical foundation than a critical one, because everyone wants to be critical, while not giving much thought to how to be critical in relation to... the critique itself. The willingness or the determination to be radical calls for a much more strategically serious justification, insightfulness and alertness. What is more, I only have to refer to my own already discussed thesis on the need of “semantic radicalisation” of various categories in pedagogical discourse whenever it is marked by academic ambitions, be it only to deepen the association of various categories, as ones including different traps or even semantic differentiation, where a meaningful use of a term calls for the breaking off with colloquial associations with it. For me, the key example here is the indication of the tension between the function of socialisation as a whirl of the cultural reduction of a given space, and education as a way of pulling oneself out from this whirl in a mode that steps beyond both local and tentative expectations and dominations.

A contribution to a description of critical pedagogy in Poland

If I am not mistaken, the first trace of critical pedagogy in Poland dates back to the beginning of the 1980s, when, on a tide of Solidary awakening, I wrote a letter to Giroux, asking him for a book symptomatically and promisingly entitled *Theory and resistance in education*, a trace of which I had found somewhere in literature. The book quickly became our starting source of intellectual opening, encouraging us to follow footsteps which have not yet been discovered here so far. It was not accidental that parts of the book were translated and published, as a part of a series developed by the Nicolaus Copernicus University, in the subsequent volumes of *Nieobecne dyskursy [Absent Discourses]* edited by Z. Kwieciński. That was the key book for further development of our methodological awareness, and it made us conscious of the fact that somewhere out there, there was a different pedagogy – one, which had long ago (the 1980s) assimilated critically the Frankfurtian tradition, and one which was correcting its own criticism in relation to the realities of capitalism by going from the paradigm of reproduction to the paradigm of resistance, which, to boot, was affirmed critically rather than sentimentally.

It turned out not only that somewhere out there, is there a DIFFERENT pedagogy in relation to the one dominating here, but also that pedagogy can, is, and even should be DIFFERENT. The entire pedagogy should be different. It turned out that its inspirations can, and even have to be, different – more deeply integrated

with the state of philosophy, sociology, and even literary science and psychoanalysis. It was the main lesson for me – one which formed the basis for the direction of my further research and my readings – also of our own tradition. I had learnt that a contact with Marxism does not have to copy the domination of creeds of even our leading coryphaeuses, but can provide one with tools of criticism. The different practice of pedagogy by T. Szkudlarek and by me, considering all the differences between us, probably resulted from such a discovery: my own being a consequence of reading, and the excellent Gdansk pedagogue's, also a result of his stay at Giroux's place in the USA, when we were still "young and beautiful" in the 1980s.

Together with my new readings, I also discovered for myself a trace of Bakhtin's Russian semiotics in the American critical pedagogy, which gave fruit in the form of a book (which won me professorship)⁵, and the recognition of the significance of Jacques Lacan's French psychoanalysis for pedagogy, which resulted from as many as three doctoral dissertations I had supervised, which focused on psychoanalysis in pedagogy and philosophy. I have also discovered for myself that Pierre Bourdieu was a great humanist, excellently rooted in the history of philosophy (see *Pascalian Meditations*), and not "just" a sociologist who is interesting only to sociologists themselves, and to scholars doing narrow research. It turned out that they all were providing pedagogy with a new, critical and semantically radicalised language, which we did not even dream of in the past, and which all of a sudden began to be considered as obvious, as something necessary and already adopted by pedagogy in the world.

It soon turned out how much the vision of emancipation was rooted in the Latino-American example of Paolo Freire, whom, however, we tend to associate with some other vision of pedagogy labelled as emancipatory pedagogy. We discovered that one needs to be able to ask oneself a serious, difficult and critical question: what psychology does pedagogy need and why? And why is the one routinely lectured by academic psychology often too weak? And why has it also to be psychoanalysis in Lacan's version? American pedagogues showed twenty years ago that Lacan was necessary in pedagogy, while we still rarely understand that it can be, as much as possible and worthy of observation, with a view to changing the ways of observing and understanding. The unveiling of the significance of the category of absence as one not necessarily related to deficit, while fitting the order of desire on the one hand, and at the same time the appreciation of the ability to recognise absence as a basis for action on the other, is just one of the traces, which require in-depth studying and inclusion into pedagogical thinking.

But, at the same time, I want to stress that it would be a mistake to associate the beginning of critical pedagogy in Poland with our discovery of Giroux, and the critical sociology of education with Apple. So, as not to begin as late as the 1980s, it is worth going back a bit. Let us quote Myslakowski's symptomatic sentence from 1967 as a *motto* for some of our current dilemmas concerning the normative ministerial

⁵ L. Witkowski, *Uniwersalizm pogranicza* [Universalism of the Borderland], Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 1991, sec. ed.

usurpations present in the visions and solutions included in the programme of higher education reform. It requires sensitisation to the necessity of seeing the duality of the scope of education under the pain of a suicidal attitude in relation to culture.

“Possibly, we shall not build a motorcycle with the help of the truths from, for instance, the *Book of Job*, but neither will we become more mature to life by the knowledge of mechanics and the ability to weld”⁶.

Mysłakowski’s modest book of almost magazine column writings entitled, *Zatracone ścieżki, zagubione ślady* [*Vanished Paths, Lost Places*] (1967), contains a large dose of dramaturgy, and simultaneously sensitises us to the fact that critical pedagogy must be... dramatic, that it must not be blind to drama, or even tragedy, and, all the more, the ritualisation of appearances. I also wish to add that what is surprising when one reads Mysłakowski is how much he affirms the presence of the dimension of resistance in educational relations, while we were reading that the paradigm of resistance emerged only after three critical uncoverings of the paradigm of reproduction in the sphere of education. The title of the collection of essays is also meaningful from the point of view of critical pedagogy: vanished paths, lost traces; here, I want to refer to the 1980s idea of the promotion of “absent discourses” in Polish pedagogy. Critical pedagogy was one of them. Isn’t it so that we are to blame for the fact that it still is an absent discourse – and at what price?

Therefore, one needs to ask critically whether we can approach our own tradition in such a way as to unveil in it “accents”, which somewhere else were given a voice, perhaps even later, but managed to do so much more prominently? Are we picking it up critically? And “critically” is tantamount here not only to the opposite of non-criticality, but also of superficiality, of an absence of strong inspirations, of an inability to unveil traces it is worth to follow, which oblige one, which not only become tools of revealing, but as much as an alarmist call for the activation of a change of attitudes. Criticism must be included in the formula of involvement in significant social issues recognised as historical breakthroughs, as was excellently sensed by the generation of Polish pedagogues born in the 1880s, who subsequently were dedicated to developing pedagogical reflection, guided by their desire to support the development of the sector of education in the Polish state, which was regaining its independence in 1918, after years of nonexistence.

Let us also note by the way, that in terms of its sensitisation and openness to psychoanalysis, pre-war pedagogy in Poland, dealing initially and mainly with Adler and inferiority complex-related problems (also in teachers as an obstacle in educational activity), was more critical and advanced in the taking over of impulses from the then-new humanities than our current pedagogy. In the meantime, it experienced a regression of competence and a decline of discursive styles, only painfully regained in the subsequent monographic studies (such as doctorates on Lacan for pedagogy). What I have discovered here was the significance of the Frankfurt school, while independent reading of Habermas revealed the im-

⁶ Z. Mysłakowski, *Zatracone ścieżki, zagubione ślady* [*Vanished Paths, Lost Places*], Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa, 1967.

portance of the trace of Erikson's theory on the life cycle and Kohlberg's triad as a foundation of the vision of developmental processes, which still fail to be entirely used in pedagogy. In this current, in contrast to Giroux and McLaren, I followed Habermas's theory of communicative action and its references. All this allows one to see the limitations of various traces dominating our common associations, such as those connected with the affirmation of humanistic psychology or hermeneutics treated in opposition to critical thinking. However, it is enough to notice that in the light of Habermas's approach, it is clear that developmentally and educationally important emancipation cannot be reduced to the hermeneutic perspective, and requires supplementations taking into account its scopes included in other types of action than those oriented at agreement. It is enough to associate types of rationality and cognitive interests. The poor reception of critical pedagogy in Poland has a lot to do with the poor reception of the critical tradition in the scope of the Frankfurtian tradition, which fails to provide censorship as an alibi after more than 25 years of attempts at showing off the tradition and its translations.

After the first conversations with professor Kwieciński, who at that time was invited to take the chair of the dean of a newly established faculty at UAM, we discussed the formula of taking over the experience from the Miami University in Florida, so that the new unit could be called the Faculty of Education (and possibly also Cultural) Studies. I am surprised that it is still an entirely single case of calling a faculty in isolation from the discipline, the name of which is not especially known or recognized elsewhere. We cannot even use the critical experience of others.

An important benefit resulting from the discovery of critical pedagogy was a study visit that Prof. Tomasz Szkudlarek took (as a still young assistant professor) to the USA, his excellent preparation, works, including those published in America, and Giroux and McLaren's joint earlier visit to Poland (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Educational Research Institute in Warsaw and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan). All this opened up the road to the formation-related turn in Poland, bringing along new generational impulses. Therefore, the generational leap, which simultaneously generated and promoted the generational leaders – personas active in the critical current, including: T. Szkudlarek, Z. Melosik, B. Śliwerski, R. Kwaśnica and my own humble self – has possibly never been repeated. It is still unclear whether it is only a biographical episode which concerns us, or something which will significantly change the worsening intellectual environmental climate of the academic pedagogy in Poland into one preventing deeper concern with the postulate of critical care for education.

Two or three anecdotes as a testimony

In my opinion, it is worth turning attention to Giroux's choice of the cover for our joint book *Edukacja i sfera publiczna* [Education and the Public Sphere] with a motif of Alfred Jarry's King Ubu, utterly fantastically fitting the topic of education and

the public sphere, made by Stasys Eidgrigevicius – a graphic designer of Lithuanian origin who lives in Poland and enjoys international recognition. The figure of the masked, smiling sorehead who laid various claims (to power, to superiority, to seriousness, to kindness), was to symbolise difficulties in the unmasking of the hidden dimensions of communication in the space of education. One of my most acclaimed lectures was the one during which, while presenting the *King Ubu* cover of the book I wrote with Giroux to my students, I explained why it so greatly illustrates the pathology of the public space and education. Similar masks are worn by some students and lecturers dominated by pretending, feigned involvement and kindness, rather than open aggression. Their smiles and lofty attitudes and costumes mask emptiness, and can be a symptom of a persistent ritualisation of appearances and the bareness of participation in the process, but only in a distant sense convergent with the care for the development and deepening of symbolic capital. Let us remark on the sidelines that there are three manners in which masks are worn and the resulting three strategies of unmasking. One needs to act differently when (a) the mask is hidden and its wearer claims that there is no mask, (b) the mask is treated as inherent, making its change or taking off unnegotiable, (c) the mask is shamelessly worn as such with ostentatious related usurpations (e.g. you cannot do anything to me, because I have the power).

Let me also mention, in a slightly anecdotic tone, Giroux's reluctance to accept my proposal of including in the book some texts he wrote jointly with McLaren, although in the 1990s they published joint books promoting, among other things, the idea of a border and borderland for pedagogy, as well as the significance of the politicality of cultural studies. Giroux believed that they were suddenly two separate worlds, since McLaren became more revolutionary in the sense of the Marxist classics, popular in particular in Latin America in the leftish spirit, with the identification with Lenin and "Che" Guevara. After lecturing in Miami and Penn State University (taking its name from Pennsylvania), Giroux now lectures at the McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada, while McLaren, after lecturing at UCLA, immigrated to Auckland, New Zealand (remaining professor at both universities). At the same time, in Mexico, he opened McLaren's Institute of Critical Pedagogy with its flagship call "Teach for a better world". Giroux dominated his texts with critical analyses of the condition of capitalism and mechanisms dominating in the USA, introducing in recent years some dramatic terminology, such as university in chains, America on the edge, and terror of neoliberalism. Together with twelve other intellectuals, he has recently been nominated for a Pulitzer Award in Canada. While Giroux travels less these days, McLaren conquers the world in places reporting the need for leftish political and civic involvement. He activated and publicized institutional anti-capitalist actions as a part of an ideological offence in the spirit of the radical Latino-American left. When I asked him for a preface to the Polish edition of *Schooling as ritual performance*, McLaren sent in a text in which the key thesis was that it was the CIA who had effected Karol Wojtyła's election to become Pope JP II. Although the author entitled me to retouch his writing, I re-

frained from this right. The text was published as it was in a volume dedicated to me⁷. This can be combined with the fact that on the opening page of his website McLaren placed the image of Lenin, and many of his texts follow the spirit of “Che” Guevara, owing to which, together with his openly revolutionary rhetoric, the American radical is known especially in Latino-American countries.

I am discussing this slightly anecdotic information for one rather important reason and a very serious one at that. It turns out that there is not a single model when it comes to a political attitude in critical pedagogy, which is tantamount to its immense potential requiring some intellectual wrestling with the neoliberalist world-view, and to face the end of the pipe dream of state socialism after the drama of national socialism. Marxism can also be double-edged in its critical attitude: as much facilitating, as it is disturbing. And the already mentioned double-edgedness of labels, not excluding critical pedagogy, is an important thesis for me here. I generally believe that labels (even those marking disciplines) are too reductive, too strongly imposing the stereotype of associations, too closing, too relieving one from the sense of obligation to reach out, because our little label is different, because it is not about the very pedagogy or its interest. Maybe it is an all the more indispensable and current direction of fitting into the requirements of the ‘market’. I remember McLaren’s informative remark that it is not enough to be “right in the head”, but one also needs to be reliable in relation to one’s interlocutor: short hair and a tie can destroy all chances for successful communication with college students in the USA before one even opens one’s mouth. In our contexts, it is worth stressing that the interest of pedagogy, or pedagogical environments, is not everywhere tantamount to the interest of education and pedagogical culture. We have environments which represent the academic anti-world looking after its own interests (systems, averageness, stability). It is not accidental that it is so difficult to fight for the interests of education when what dominates is the interests of teachers represented for example by the teachers’ trade union.

The majority of our faculties are faculties of pedagogy – if not hidden among historians at the Faculty of History, as is the case in Wrocław, then among sociologists and philosophers, as at the Faculty of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University. To boot, our names, wherever the term *pedagogy* is featured, hide or lose the fact that professional pedagogical training studies are not at all conducted there. This is a fact even Minister Kudrycka is not aware of, who recently tried to convince us that the poor condition of Polish schools results from the poor preparation of teachers at pedagogical faculties in universities. And, we all know how narrowly school pedagogues are associated with pedagogical bodies or our teachers’ councils, which are also fictitiously labelled as pedagogical.

⁷ Cf. *Ku integralności edukacji i humanistyki. Księga jubileuszowa dla Lecha Witkowskiego* [Towards Education and Humanities. A Jubilee Book for Lech Witkowski], eds. Z. Kwieciński, M. Jaworska-Witkowska, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2009.

The problem of looking for an alternative or changing the mainstream?

The perspective for the treatment of critical or radical pedagogy must be clarified, since it is not so much about it being “only” an alternative, or it being named and treated in this way, but as a certain deviation from the standard or a rebellious margin. The excellent publishing house *Oficyna Wydawnicza “Impuls”* advertises the book authored by Giroux and myself *Edukacja i sfera publiczna* [Education and the Public Sphere] as a representative of alternative pedagogy, and I am not sure whether it is not doing harm to itself in this way, placing us in some ghetto or pigeonholing us, while what it is all about is the reconstruction of the mainstream education, which is deficient and a delusion. Neither an alternative pedagogy nor, much less, critical pedagogy, can be tantamount to just one more label in the work division, which is comfortable to us, or the making of clubs. Critical pedagogy is a paradigm for the whole of pedagogy, reversing the relationship with what already Kotarbiński called the “foozling of disciplines” as a part of the apparent divisions of specialisations. When radical pedagogues reach for *gender studies*, it is not because they want to cultivate a plot – rather, they want to ask what their essence is for the entirety of pedagogy if it does not want to remain backward in this scope. This is because it is not the question of yet another type of pedagogy referred to as ‘gender’ in this case, but the pedagogy of gender as an object of reflection that subsequently leads to important prompts to various pedagogical disciplines, and, to be more precise, to the entirety of pedagogy. When references to postmodernism emerge in critical pedagogy, and there are many references to Bauman in Giroux’s latest books, it is not aimed at the creation of just one more pigeonhole. It has never been the question of the development of a specific vision, for example postmodern pedagogy, but an indication as to what pedagogy, temporarily referred to the condition which the already mentioned Zygmunt Bauman has for some time been calling liquid modernity instead of postmodernity, must be able to find the courage to do.

In Polish pedagogy, we are past the period when various eminent scholars announced that they practiced “socialist” pedagogy (Suchodolski, Mysłakowski or Muszyński), thus entangling themselves in many ways within this label, from which, as we realise, nothing has remained. Wherever such pedagogy was wise and valuable, by no means did it need to be squeezed into the label of “socialism”, and whenever it was pressed into such a label, it did not always have to be dogmatic or stupid. The socialist label was simply totally irrelevant or senseless.

I believe that it is, or even MUST BE the same with terms such as alternative pedagogy, emancipatory pedagogy, critical pedagogy, etc... With just one clarification: criticism is a METATHEORETIC postulate: one entangled in the duality with the care for a systemic approach related to the question concerning the justification of critical strategy. It appeals to the level of organisation of the power of discourse, and to an indispensable distance from it. Critique may be uncritical to itself. We are not talking about such criticism. Critique does not have to be only

unmasking – in none of the three senses which I indicated earlier in relation to the types of the status of the mask. What is more desirable is an alarmist pedagogy, where the alarm is tantamount to a fundamental threat, with the ability of a prior diagnosis. An exposing critique rips off the mask. A critique, which is alarmist, warns that it is impossible to take off the mask as it defends its claims. However, the worst evil does not appear solely in a mask, but also wears an ostentatiously cynical face manifesting that no one can do anything to him, anyway. Demands that reduce universities to the market do not require unmasking as harmful, since they openly announce that it all boils down to the reduction of the university to training, to employees' expectations, rather than to cultural heights, or to the spiritual development of people. Such a critique does not have to, and even cannot be, "systemic", as it invalidates the concern for the critique of the system itself (assumptions, intentions, hopes, sensitivities).

A critique of education can be sentimental and wrong in its claims of the purity of its intentions and their nobleness; this actually being a form of naivety. How can we avoid naive critique sentimentalising, say, resistance or ideologically manifesting its blind superiority? It is an important question for critical pedagogy. One of the directions that can be followed to answer this, which finds its way into our consciousness with great difficulty, as I show when reconstructing the history of pedagogy against the conditions of the social sciences (including sociology as in Simmel, Elias or Bauman) is that it must be aware of the requirements of the paradigm of duality sensitizing us to, inter alia, the already mentioned threat that there can be a kitsch critique of kitsch or, on the other hand, an unreasonable praise of reason. A critique of school requires critical alertness itself, as criticism is not immune to the requirements of alertness concerning the position it takes to speak and see the world or just its educational part. Democracy has already liberated itself from absolutism and calculation-based automatism founded on the rightness of the majority, while the bothersome celebration of difference has become a mark of a culture's democratic co-being as coexistence, at least whenever we are dealing with the maturity of the public sphere or political responsibility instead of the announcement that the winner takes it all, and the opposition is, in exchange, vested with a "bandit's law" with no holds barred.

It is also worth remembering that critique is not to be tantamount solely to some alternative or alternativeness in relation to an equally, somehow, valid pedagogy devoid of criticism. When Bogusław Śliwerski was discovering anti-pedagogy for us, and when it was jointly presented in a volume devoted to critical pedagogy together with the then-young Tomasz Szkudlarek (which, until now, has been reissued at least a dozen or so times), we however already knew that we should seek something totally different: it is not sufficient to declare: *I will not discipline you, and I do not want to exercise authority*, for subordination to disappear. The meeting point of critical pedagogy and anti-pedagogy turned out to be extremely illusory, although both of them are about criticism. Radical pedagogues were searching for critical psychology. Phil Wexler wrote his texts about "critical psychology", while at the same time, we were sometimes told that anti-pedagogy does not require any

psychology since it does not need any psychology of... impact or influence, as it does not want to have any impact or establish a relation of domination – as if the suspension of the intention to exercise authority automatically abolished the relation of power. Unfortunately, it turned out that apart from “absent discourses”, the first associations concerning critical pedagogy were, to its harm, directly linked with anti-pedagogy. I am sorry that we cannot discuss this issue in-depth, and more seriously due to the absence of Bogusław Śliwerski. It would be fair to note here that the 18 “contemporary theories and currents of education” importantly and laudably discussed by Bogusław Śliwerski⁸ include refined differentiations between the divisions of non-authoritarian or anti-authoritarian pedagogy, such as Fromm’s radical humanism, and Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy, while the critical science of education is associated with Habermas, Giroux is absent, and Freire is classified into an approach with which I would not necessarily agree. This is a matter for another occasion. However, these issues are of key significance for our pedagogical culture.

It was since the 1980s that I preferred the Italian version of critical pedagogy in the form of Riccardo Massa’s *clinica della formazione*, where the ‘clinical’ approach was a clarification of his understanding of criticism influenced by his direct opening to Michel Foucault’s trace with his power-knowledge and to the “Frankfurt school”, while at that time we were already independently reading Habermas, when the guys from Greifswald, GDR, told us that they were rid of Habermas long ago. However, let us note that our failure to undertake a deeper analyses as to what a “clinical discourse” brings to pedagogy (as a model and as a backup of specific knowledge) is additional testimony of our environment’s inability to profit from our own tradition, as both Stefan Wołoszyn and Wincenty Okoń long postulated the establishment of a closer relationship between pedagogy and the medicine-related approach, in particular as it concerns studies in pathology. A fuller contact with the clinical approach would also make it easier to inform pedagogy of psychoanalytic currents, so far deafened in pedagogy by its limitations in the discourse of academic psychology.

The problem of an approach to critique in the context of comparative pedagogy

It is worth dealing with the question whether there is a place for critical pedagogy in the descriptions and typologies of pedagogical standpoints we encounter in our literature. In my opinion, there is no such place – not only because critical pedagogy has been excluded to join the class of “absent discourses”. Also, various typologies are developed, classifying Freire and Habermas on the one hand to a separate category, and contrasting the apparently existing emancipatory pedagogy and pedagogy of liberation, or postmodernist pedagogy on the other. I consider

⁸ Cf. *Współczesne teorie i nurty wychowania* [Contemporary theories and currents of education], Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 1998.

all these attempts as unjustified and theoretically uninteresting. We know from Habermas of an interpretative trap consisting in the existence of an “emancipatory interest” he distinguished on the one hand, and on the other we have residues of emancipation owing to each of the other cognitive interests. These residues are present in every type of rationality. Also the “instrumental” rationality (one which objectifies and is based on the mechanism of ruling and subordination) obviously has its residues of emancipation (from the limitations of natural nature), just as contextual rationality has its residues of emancipation from social limitations in the area of a failure to arrive at an agreement.

Just like the words *freedom* or *development* belong not only to the liberal discourse, the words *tradition*, *authority* and *canon* do not belong solely to the conservative discourse. There is a liberal affirmation of tradition, as well as a conservative vision of freedom. We need a vocabulary of critical pedagogy, with its own specificity of categories, such as: empowerment or the attitude of a “transformative intellectual”, or the task of canon deconstruction, and, on the other hand, the specific meaning of traditional categories in pedagogy, be it authority, as I demonstrated in volume 1 on the challenges of authority in *Impuls*.

What is of key importance is the question of what normative project is related to the same term. Critical pedagogy does not have to discard authority or canon to the bin: as for the latter, Giroux talks about the need of its deconstruction, and as for the former, about the emancipatory authority related to the attitude of a transformative intellectual; he postulates borderland or hybrid identity, and turns attention to the category of the voice, which reaches further into the practice of education and society than the very affirmation of subjectivity. This is because it allows one to ask concrete questions and use a strict criterion in the scope of who has the right to speak, who is allowed to speak, whose voice can be heard, and whose voice can be listened to.

Criticism of pedagogy in Polish conditions

Let us at last take my third intended block of issues. If there is not a single critical pedagogy (and pedagogy as such, if it exists, must be critical), how can we understand it in the Polish context – the current one to boot? In America, owing to the titles of Giroux’s latest books, we have an indication of the ‘terror of liberalism’, a fight for the recovery of the University tied with the chains of a military complex, or a mass culture pathology exemplified even by Mickey Mouse, with its soft imprinting of attitudes via an apparently innocent convention of play.

On our end, it is insufficient to associate criticism with the unmasking function – what is indispensable is the discourse Z. Kwieciński calls alarmist, or the effort to reveal pedagogical inspirations from discreet discourse. The fight for the university must be related to both the reclaiming of higher education’s cultural function against the recurring peak pathologies demanding only the kind of education which will be useful for the labour market. This collective madness returns every so often – it

was ridiculed already by Hegel during his university days – he accused a part of the professorial of succumbing to such madness. Hence the thesis – pedagogy, if it at all exists, is critical also in the sense of its identification of the collective madness we are all prone to succumb for comfort, due to the domination of stupidity.

We do not often participate in public debate, which Giroux considers to be a significant aspect and indispensable function of a critical intellectual. On our end, individual interviews in newspapers or weeklies have become exceptions and extraordinary events (just like the recent excellent interview with Tomasz Szkudlarek or an interview with Aleksander Nalaskowski – made in a different convention and from the point of view of an axiological perspective). I am not particularly good at giving interviews, and I do not really like it myself, despite my several attempts at *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily and its local supplement, and my previous attempts as a critical columnist in three subsequent newspaper issues. However, what is worse, we do not read each other's books, we do not reproduce the most precious traces from the history of pedagogical thought, starting with Trentowski's *Chowanna*, which we left without much sense, and is of benefit only to the historians of education. *Chowanna* is a treasure-trove of pedagogical ideas, including, naturally, erroneous ones, but it is worth reading more than many contemporary works authored by disciplinary coryphaeuses, including textbooks: some of them premature or even ill-timed, missed as failing to comply with the heritage of the tradition.

We are in danger of an intellectual catastrophe in our environment if Polish pedagogy fails to really become pedagogy, i.e. a critical discourse, which simultaneously displays mature self-criticism. At the same time, we must treat this criticism as a task rather than something given, as something rolling and developing, moving, rather than something prone to final codifications. Critique is always local, both historically and in terms of space, being a hostage of its time and its limitations, which can be seen only from a distance. One of the tasks, which, when recognised consciously and then undertaken, would change the condition of the discipline, is the task of a critical reference to the achievements of pedagogy from the times of the Polish People's Republic, in its most colloquially affirmed variants, not excluding the works of Bogdan Suchodolski. I am trying to take my first steps in this direction in my latest book⁹.

The indication of the directions of care for civil empowerment must go hand in hand with our care for the cultural function, against eradication from the symbolic heritage, which does not have to be understood conservatively, but as the soil of historicity that develops us, as Heidegger had put it in his flagship book, *Being and Time*.

We often cannot read the critical tradition, or use it in our writing. In one of the recent general pedagogy textbooks, there are only many references to Bourdieu – and only references. Having the power of affirmation, we allegedly have the right to automatically feel like “depositories” of our disciplines. Then I prefer to read

⁹ Cf. L. Witkowski, *Przełom dwoistości w pedagogice polskiej między historią i teorią* [The breakthrough of duality in Polish pedagogy between history and theory], Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2012.

Bourdieu, as his works are basically indispensable for the more serious treatment of general pedagogy, with references to such categories as the ritualisation of appearances, the economics of fraud, symbolic profit, the attitude of complicit adversaries (*adversaires complices*), epistemological pairs, etc. We need critical notions to be able to comprehend, i.e. to critically grasp. Such an understanding becomes categorically more offensive, both politically and culturally; as Adorno¹⁰ warned, the practice of philosophy and science can also be barbarian if the insight into the state of things does not result in postulates for change, but preserves the *status quo* or blocks the very approach to change.

Instead of an ending: On the naturalisation of the world as a source of threats

On the sidelines, these must have been as much as the threats described by Norbert Elias¹¹ which the Frankfurtians in the persons of Adorno and Horkheimer had in mind when they warned in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*¹² that the attitude of quarter-intellectuals and semi-intellectuals is more dangerous to culture than the attitudes of the illiterate, since the latter do not aspire to faking behaviours of, say, intellectual elites, while the former strive to “eliminate” differences and equalize standards at the price of their downward movement. The category of elimination recurs many times in Elias’s work, and it is worth to associate here its links with the elimination of differences at the price of degradation in the ways in which models are manifested in the mode of ritualisation regarding their appearances. It seems that we are not sufficiently aware of the threats to our culture brought about by the admission of degraded forms that promote an illusion to the “educated” layers through the mass-production of the fictitious quality of education, in particular at the nominally higher level. As a part of this digression, which I find important, let me stress that it would be worthwhile to identify and reveal the same (or corresponding) phenomena in the sphere of the mechanisms that compose participation in life and enable expressions within academic environments through participation of persons who have never made a sufficient effort to meet the requirements of top standards, but who, nevertheless, do not find it an obstacle to prevent status-related discriminations by those who are ambitious, including the exercising of academic authority and apparently being the “depositories” of tradition of particular disciplines, having dominated them with their position of institutional hegemony.

One of the tasks we still are not able to problematize in the practice of differential cultural relations is the very translation of difference into value and potential. Toleration is very often associated with a disregard, on the one hand, and a claim

¹⁰ Cf. T.W. Adorno, *Minima moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life*, transl. by E. F. N. Jephcott, Verso 2005.

¹¹ Cf. N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, Wiley-Blackwell 1994.

¹² M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press 2002.

for inviolability on the other. We are witnessing various manifestations of ghetto and ghettoisation, which kill the possibility of interaction and treatment of difference as a treasure, with the help of which one can enliven relations, and keep on enlivening them. Let us note that Mirosława Dziemianowicz rightfully and excellently showed that single-sex education (separation of the sexes) *de facto* destroys the value of the sexes for each other in their function as generating an important experience (also cultural one) and occasions for the acquisition of competence in an area of ability, which require the need to fight for each other, rather than to be separated from such the interactional space. And such education – in an Orwellian way – destroys the value of difference by keeping it rigidly inside ghettos, activating processes of socialised stereotyping not only in the area of the sexes, professions, and attitudes in the public sphere, but also the recruitment when taking a voice. On the side of interest in the phenomenon of interdisciplinarity, one can see how much specialisations, which are closed off from the inside, lose as they become entangled in illusory qualities designed to spoil whole disciplines for years, if not generations. We have evidence to show that pedagogy is just in this situation if we compare its interwar potential with the trends dominating in times of the Polish People's Republic. In my opinion, the only possible remedy is to engage impulses in the mode of a multiplied and transversal criticism.

Summing up: critical pedagogy in its various manifestations shows the minimum use of radicalised discourses and efforts, both academic and civil. It is time to use them more intensely. It is this challenge that needs to be faced – otherwise, complacency and comfortableness in our disciplinary ghettos will occur. We will not even notice the moment when the dream of an unmasking function will no longer be achievable, not because someone will make it difficult to reach it, but because we ourselves, due to our blindness, dumbness and deafness, or – to use one word: stupidity – will be unable to meet the task of awakening, followed by rubbing our eyes and undertaking the daily activities thinking about the future. We will be left with a bleating about our fate – the one we prepared with our own hands. It is possibly already almost done, with little chance for reversal. And, it is always possible to make a soup in such a way that it is inedible, although it comes from a package announcing that it is “Tasty”. Only now can we wish everyone *bon appetite!*

There is one key thesis resulting from the above exposé: there is no longer any alibi for the absence of impulses that are critical to pedagogy in self-education, didactics, and research in Poland – not necessarily the impulses originating from intentional critical pedagogy itself in our daily academic functioning. Critical impulses emerge in various types of discourse, as presented by Zbigniew Kwieciński; their action was illustrated using cultural contexts by Monika Jaworska-Witkowska in their recent extraordinary book written jointly¹³. In particular, their book is about the various discursive practices and the various forms of pedagogical intentionality, which bring about effects that need to be uncovered to reveal critical inspira-

¹³ Z. Kwieciński, M. Jaworska-Witkowska, *Nurty pedagogii: naukowe, dyskretne, odlotowe* [Currents in pedagogy: scientific, discreet, awesome ones], Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2011.

tions for pedagogy from literature and other areas of culture, and from various disciplines in the integrally understood humanities. We have a multitude of undervalued (and, consequently, unused in pedagogy) new cultural and humanistic traces, which have managed to get through, also owing to examples from Poland, to areas adjacent to pedagogy, leaving no alibi to close our discourse in a canon or convention known to our older colleagues, or their younger victims who are doomed, but also dooming themselves by their poor familiarity with a broad literature to the overlimited context of works written to get good grades. Researchers in the social sciences can function closed in by their algorithms, schemes, parameters, and statistics. Pedagogues must not repeat such an attitude if they are to be able to function more profoundly and deeply, since it is the humanistic awareness and alertness that are of key importance here, in contrast to the intentions themselves, and the rigidity of procedures.

In contrast to Suchodolski's thesis dating to the end of the 1980s, maintaining that pedagogy no longer has anything to refer to nor to support it, there are many traces on which we may further develop the strength and critical insightfulness of pedagogical discourse, i.e., using traces boldly referring to accents loudly labelled as postmodernist, although these are most often misunderstood in a way which is harmful to the task of the renewal of modernity. There is no one canonical surname, circle, or a single valid interpretation. One must be able to compose the critical potential by stringing, comparable to a string of beads, of ideas like thought pearls, giving oneself a possibility to start "the glass bead game", as written by the excellent 1946 Nobel Prize winner, Hermann Hesse, in his book under the same title.

We will then discover the category of Peter Sloterdijk's "enlightened cynicism", the Orwellisation of speech, the terror of mediocrity contaminated with the syndrome of mass appeal, etc. I think it is beyond any doubt that the cynicism of those participating in public life and representatives of its official institutions, not excluding educational and political institutions, as well as the Orwellisation of speech, are significant challenges for democracy from the point of view of the care for civil society. This area is particularly important not only for social pedagogy in Poland, which calls for an attitude fitting the critical tradition. When applying a critical attitude, one needs to know what one is against, and what the value of an alternative is, and also – whether the critique itself is able to bear criticism, and what criticism it is unable to withstand. Pondering on what can be the subject matter of criticism is indirectly a manner of analysing where communication barriers and authority pressures are found, or excluded from reflection, or protected against degeneration. Additionally, not only behaviours that are extremely offensive, ostentatious or aggressive are dangerous and critique-worthy, but also ones which are masked, courteous, giving one the sense of an affirmation of subjectivity, naturalising certain states as illusively unchangeable, and even invisible in their transparency.

What remains to be asked is a basic question of whether our cognitive and ethical approach is sufficiently radical in the sense of the reaching to the roots of phenomena; whether we are sufficiently alert to various interpretations of sense and values, and, all the more, ready for the effort of a source-based confrontation

with whatever reaches us if only in a package of authoritative reductions. Changes appear to the characteristics of potential objects, calling for an alertness and attentiveness, radicalizing our potential of fighting for ourselves. Domestication and naturalisation (the claim of an unreflective obviousness of the arrangement of the social world) is the main source of threats. The object requiring criticism has not so much camouflaged itself, or cased itself in inaccessible external ramparts, as built-in the rampart that is within ourselves by naturalising itself under our very eyes with the help of the absence of alternatives, political correctness, inertia of proceduralism, courtesy, the ability to overuse democratic mechanisms and practices such as elections, and an absence of an authentic academic community of people who talk to each other and enter into debates concerning important research attempts and publications. Most of us have closed ourselves off into our ghettos, and diligently collect points and publications to be promoted to one or another degree.

It is not difficult to criticise totalitarianism or authoritarianism. What is difficult is to see the camouflaged attempts at soft hidden violence, and in particular those camouflages that act at the level of socialisation, requiring dissocialising; an alertness necessary to pull individuals and social groups from this vortex of cultural reduction. I have yet to see a pedagogical textbook discussing socialisation, also the desirable socialisation, in the categories of perversion and the perfidy of even commendable impacts. This is indispensable, since socialisation sanctions whatever IS done, at the same time pretending that these are personal models, and, besides, such socialisation covers up its tracks, because one no longer knows what such socialisation has deprived them of, while introducing them to a world of pretended obviousness, which does not hide its arbitrary demands elsewhere. It is indispensable to see the function of education, despite its continuous entanglement in socialisation, as one posing the task of desocialisation, breaking set structures that release one from thinking, and from giving a voice to difference which is as a life-giving impulse. An important aspect of the criticality of pedagogy, as an entire discourse and practice, is to finally recognise everywhere the DOUBLE-EDGEDNESS of the means we must use, the DUALITY of the situation of action, sentencing us to tensions and non-reducible dilemmas, continually threatening us with the one-sidedness of choices. This is tantamount to fitting our actions into the perspective of bipolarity, from which none of our pedagogical efforts, as I am showing in my latest book¹⁴, are free.

I shall conclude, although not just to be courteous, but out of my own desire, that the University of Gdansk and its pedagogical environment is by all means the most appropriate place for a debate on the condition and tasks of critical pedagogy in Poland. Owing to the early contact with Giroux's analyses, it became, largely owing to Tomasz Szukdlarek's development and his creative impact, the leading Polish centre radiating with its new optics of research and pedagogical narration

¹⁴ Cf. L. Witkowski, *Przełom dwoistości w pedagogice polskiej, między historią i teorią* [The breakthrough of duality in Polish pedagogy between history and theory], Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2012.

in the area of critical analyses and new threads in research and theories, covering for example the critique of neoliberalism (Joanna Rutkowiak), the openness to *gender studies* (Lucyna Kopciwicz), and the introduction of the tradition of critical sociology, e.g. that of Bourdieu and Foucault to pedagogical analyses (Astrid Męczkowska). Young researchers are also growing. It was *inter alia* owing to the pedagogical environment of Gdańsk after the impulses of critical theory that Poland experienced – although with reluctance and on a limited scale – a generational breakthrough, and it is also in the Gdansk centre that we are witnessing the development of a new school of pedagogical research, the presence of which can be excellently highlighted on the occasion of the organisation of next year's Pedagogical Assembly, which will again be hosted by Gdansk. We might also follow the temptation to honour Giroux himself one way or another, to mark the significance of the research evolution around critical strategy in pedagogy which has been taking place during the last 25 years. The scale of the impact of Henry Giroux's works on changes, not only in Gdansk pedagogy and its didactic strategy, but its research directions and individual achievements, including the scientific development of a new generation of researchers (headed by Tomasz Szkudlarek), cannot be disregarded and deserves broader recognition. It feels good that the new dynamic pedagogical journal entitled *Ars Educandi*, owing to its young, dynamic and creative editing team, facilitates reflection on the thread of thought, and over time will perhaps provide a significant reflection on the subsequent generation of young pedagogues, and their research sensitivities coupled with civic and cultural involvement, which is so close to the radical understanding of the mission of education in the modern world. This is what we should wish for.

Summary

On critical pedagogy (retrospection and projection at the background of problems and experiences in Polish pedagogy)

The article discusses the status of radical and critical theory of education in Poland. The author presents the educational theorists' generational experience that included both the initial contact with radical and critical pedagogy, as well as following attempts to find strategies explaining the reality of the transformation period. The text is therefore an attempt to answer the question about the ways of practicing critical pedagogy in Poland, but also about the foundations of criticism and criticality in general.

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