

Jolanta Rzeźnicka-Krupa
University of Gdansk

Critical contexts of the creation of knowledge at the border area between radical pedagogy and the contemporary engaged art (or what the analysis of modern art discourse and research into the category of disability may have in common)

In the eyes of society, the artist is perceived as a shaman, a demiurge, a flamboyant figure, a kind of a lunatic, or someone who's forever ill, consumed by a fever of a chronic malady. Of course, that's a socially generated fantasy. And this ubiquitous fantasy is what shields society from the actual contact with art.

Artur Żmijewski, *Trembling Bodies. Conversations with Artists*¹

It [art] is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space.

Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics as Politics*

Introduction

When pondering on the questions posed in the texts included in the book I am presenting – questions concerning the achievements and the condition of the contemporary critical pedagogy in Poland, the manner in which engaged research can be carried out, the methodology of studies based on the critical paradigm and the emerging results – one may propose a potential path leading to the area which seems to be distant to pedagogy, i.e. modern art, and in particular some of its trends or concrete works and actions. I understand the very notion of *art* in two ways²: firstly, as all forms of material creations and symbolic artistic activities (tak-

¹ Introduction. Artur Żmijewski in conversation with Sebastian Cichoński, [in:] Artur Żmijewski, *Trembling Bodies. Conversations with Artists*, transl. S. Gauger, M. Głogoczowski, K. Kościuczuk, A. Lamm, M. Wawrzyńczak, A. Zapałowski, D. Malone, CSW Kronika – Berliner Künstlerprogramm DAAD, Bytom–Berlin 2010.

² It is only a working reference to the space I am focusing on in the analyses included in this article and by no means an attempt at the defining of what art is in general, since I am far from undertaking such a task.

ing very diverse forms of a 'work' of art), i.e. whatever can obtain a working name of a discourse of art, and, secondly, as the discourse about art as a part of which these creations and activities function, being subject to analysis and interpretation (history of art, theory of art, and art criticism).

The analyses presented herein are based on the fundamental thesis of the existence of common areas in critically-oriented pedagogy as well as trends of modern art referred to as critical and politically engaged. These points of contact are inter alia related to the fact that both the field of art and the field of broadly understood education are shaped by social-cultural practices as a part of which symbolic representations and meanings are produced, i.e. certain knowledge on the reality around us is created. Both these fields are also marked by a certain type of – as T. Szkudlarek put it in relation to pedagogy – interference into the world of the social organisation of meanings³, involving a modification of the functioning manners of the understanding and interpreting of social phenomena and events, and the creation of different configurations and ways of understanding of social facts. Both in the area of pedagogy and art one may adopt a critical perspective manifesting itself in focusing on the unmasking of reality, overcoming the dominating discourse and giving a voice to the groups experiencing social oppression and marginalisation (the clearly expressed category of hope in pedagogy and the related project of the possibility to deliver social change)⁴. It is because the critical perspective contains the postulate of engaged action aimed at the transformation of cultural narrations, and, what follows, also a change of the social reality. Pedagogy and art are forms of social activity strongly permeated with politicalness. According to J. Rutkowiak, the politicalness of pedagogy is expressed in its being oversaturated with the thinking of education as a process inevitably rooted in an organized social space functioning in line with principles of a specific order⁵. The relationship between art and politics is convincingly shown by J. Rancière, describing politics not as a fight for power or the exercise of such power, but as a certain manner of the configuration of the social space and a specific sphere of experience, the distribution of the community and that which is outside it. The relationship between aesthetics (art) and politics is indeed contained "in the way in which the practices and forms of visibility of art themselves intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration, in which they distribute spaces and times,

³ T. Szkudlarek, *Radykalna krytyka, pragmatyczna zmiana* [Radical Critique, Pragmatic Change], [in:] *Alternatywy myślenia o/dla edukacji* [Alternatives of Thinking of/for Education], Z. Kwieciński (ed.), Gdańsk 2000, p. 278.

⁴ See H. Giroux, *Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education. A Critical Analysis*, Harvard Educational Review 1983, No. 3(53), as well as texts included in H. Giroux and L. Witkowski's work *Edukacja i sfera publiczna. Idee i doświadczenia pedagogiki radykalnej* [Education and the Public Sphere. Ideas and Experiences of Radical Pedagogy], Impuls, Kraków 2010.

⁵ See J. Rutkowiak, *Z problematyki społecznego zaangażowania pedagogiki: upolitycznienie i polityczność jako jej „pulsujące” kategorie* [From the Problems of the Social Involvement of Pedagogy: Politicisation and Politicalness as its 'Pulsating' Categories], [in:] *Nauki pedagogiczne w Polsce: dokonania, problemy, współczesne zadania, perspektywy* [The Pedagogical Sciences in Poland: Achievements, Problems, Current Tasks, Perspectives], T. Lewowicki, M. Szymański (eds.), Wyd. AP, Kraków 2004.

subjects and objects, the common and the singular"⁶. Art, shaping elements of common experience, composing the space of the presentation of concrete subjects and objects, has a political nature; one may say that politics is, in a way, its essence: as Rancière put it, *it [aesthetics] is politics*. It seems that another trait which the areas have in common is the fact that both pedagogy and art function in the state of existence that balances at the border of presence/absence in the public space (critical pedagogy as one of the threads of the academic discourse, socially-engaged art as a trend in modern art discourses), marked by the classification to socially isolated circles perceived as elite, incomprehensible, alien and fancy, distant from real life or real science. There are some theoretical and interpretative approaches which are common to both these fields – they are most often associated with critical theory (Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, postcolonialism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, cultural studies), whereas on the methodological platform we may find certain common practices related to the visual aspects of the reality and the category of activity (in pedagogy, these include audiovisual research, critical and engaged ethnography, and action research, while in the area of art, apart from the visual aspect of traditional artistic forms such as painting, sculpture, and photography, also forms characteristic for contemporary art including performance, happening, action, events and artistic experiments).

I would like to show the process of the construction of pedagogical knowledge inspired by artistic expression and questions posed as a part of it, the messages and narrations emerging from it or, rather, their possible interpretations (the process of the construction of knowledge at the border between the two areas), on the example of an analysis of cultural meanings related to the category of the *body* and its injuries/deformations/dysfunctions. This is because the body functions as a certain type of basis for the construction of language shaping the way we think about the phenomenon of *disability*, and its 'defectiveness' becomes the source attribute establishing subjects. Under the valid definition of the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF) and the so-called social model of disability adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO)⁷ and accepted in the USA, Canada, Australia and the majority of European countries, disability is perceived as a consequence of an impairment of a body structure or function which can lead to social deprivation in the form of marginalisation and exclusion. As results from the above scientific definition of disability, a disabled person can therefore be described as an individual with a low biological capital, which significantly shapes the *habitus* ingrained in their body. As pointed out by P. Bourdieu, the relationship between the individual and the world is a relationship of a presence in the world

⁶ J. Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* [Malaise dans l'esthétique], transl. S. Corcoran, Polity Press, 2009, p. 25.

⁷ Cf. C. Thomas, *Disability Theory: Key Ideas, Issues and Thinkers*, [in:] *Disability Studies Today*, Barnes, M. Oliver, L. Barton (eds.), Polity Press & Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge-Maiden 2002, pp. 39–43; D. Goodley, *Disability Studies. An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, Sage, Los Angeles-Washington DC 2011, pp. 11–12; T. Shakespeare, *The Social Model of Disability*, [in:] *The Disability Studies Reader*, L.J. Davis (ed.), pp. 197–204.

strongly involving the body of the social actor – the body in which the order, silent commands and hierarchies of social structures are engrained⁸.

The body and identity – sources of relations, contexts of entanglements

In the contemporary humanistic reflection, the body plays an extremely significant role, stepping beyond the function determined by the Cartesian thought, of a biological being belonging to nature, and contrary to the sphere of the rational mind which constitutes an autonomous and thinking subject gifted with free will. The body and the bodily aspects of human existence became an impulse and a field of reflection in the area of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, history, pedagogy, cultural studies, gender studies and many other disciplines, becoming an important and broadly-discussed element of reflection on the condition of the contemporary man and the world. The body, with its various meanings and related practices, is present in literature and art, becoming not only a means of artistic expression, but also a phenomenon bordering on nature and culture, which we are looking at closely, attempting to understand its experience, relations and the positions it takes in the social world. The body, which we are not only wearing as an external robe, but which is an immanent part of ourselves, has currently become (although it has long played the function) an entity which is managed, ordered and organised in a manner consistent with the needs and requirements of the social structures in which we function, as expressed in the discipline of biopolitics, which was fascinatingly described in the categories of knowledge/power by M. Foucault, and which can currently be found in works by such authors as G. Agamben, M. Hardt, A. Negri or – not directly in the same meaning, but touching the related issues – A. Giddens and Z. Bauman⁹.

⁸ P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, transl. Richard Nice, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2000, pp. 128–164. For further discussion of the social construction of the body and the concept of *habitus* see also the same author's *Masculine Domination*, transl. Richard Nice, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002.

⁹ See M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, transl. R. Hurley, Pantheon Books, New York 1978, and *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, transl. A. Sheridan, Vintage Books, New York 1995 (second Vintage Books ed.); G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, transl. D. Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, 1998; M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2000; A. Negri, *Negri on Negri. Antonio Negri in Conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle*, transl. M.B. DeBevoise, Routledge, 2004; A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford University Press, 1991; Z. Bauman, *Ciało i przemoc w obliczu ponowoczesności* [Body and Violence in the Face of Postmodernity], Wyd. UMK, Toruń 1995. The term 'biopolitics' literally means "politics dealing with life" and is a currently intensely developed and used approach covering diverse political actions related to medical research, epidemiology, preventive healthcare, economics, ecological trends, as well as racial issues, the problems of colonialism, biosociality, ethopolitics, and biocapital, as discussed by Thomas Lemke in his book presenting critical analyses of trends and notions of modern biopolitics, *Biopolitics. An Advanced Introduction*, transl. E.F. Trump, NYU Press, New York and London 2011.

We can talk about the body in many dimensions and contexts¹⁰ questioning the specific 'non-troublesomeness' of the bodily aspect of human life present in the naturalistic approaches and boiling it down to the issues of biology, physiology, and medicine. In the area of the philosophical reflection covering the body, as clearly expressed in the works of phenomenologists (in particular representatives of the French phenomenology such as M. Merleau-Ponty, M. Henry, F. Chirpaz, and J.-L. Nancy), it is the body which establishes the essential relation between man and the world, as well as the rooting of an individual in reality, thus constituting the basis for the constitution of the subject and their existence. In the socio-cultural dimension, the body is perceived as a social construct to which various meanings are ascribed¹¹; it becomes possible to understand it as a living *palimpsest*, on which the subsequent texts describing our existence and determined by time and the dominating values, are recorded. In this context, the human body becomes a fabric and a place in which history and culture are recorded. It is therefore possible to talk about a specific *language* of the body, its signs or bodily expression formulated by means of the Derridean metaphor of the *writing* of the body. Another aspect related to the body is the issue of its potentially negative stigmatisation, as expressed in the society's attitude to all manners of abnormalities, deformations and impairments which may be experienced by the body. In her already classical anthropological work devoted to the setting of the social order by means of the creation of categories belonging to the spheres of the sacred and the profane, on the example of an analysis of the functioning of the so-called primitive and modern societies, M. Douglas turned the readers' attention to a certain *taboo* related to human corporeality. Various bodily anomalies exist at the border between the sphere of the sacred, which constitutes an area of power over the attribution of meanings and the generation of rules, and the sphere of the profane, in which phenomena and activities stepping beyond the first area appear – ones which do not fit it, ones which are related to the questioning of the standards shaping the social structure. Anomalies of the body are often associated with a flaw, uncleanness, and social dirt, which does not fit the sphere of the accepted social order and interpretation schemes; reactions to it, closer to the profane, may include disqualification, control, distance, and tabooisation or a shift towards the other extreme – that of sacralisation and inclusion in ritual¹².

In the critical-emancipatory context, the body is a social construct subjected to oppression, in which mechanisms of power and domination, as well as resistance, are engrained. The body as a specific type of objectified socio-cultural construct

¹⁰ I am briefly referring to only a few selected perspectives which are significant for the presented analyses and consistent with the adopted theoretical assumptions.

¹¹ Sociological analyses of body-related issues are discussed by B. S. Turner in his famous work, first published in 1984, *The Body and Society. Explorations in Social Theory* (3rd edn., Sage, Los Angeles – Singapore 2008), in which the author analyses the different manifestations of corporeality present in many interpersonal activities and relationships as well as manners of body management and the establishment of order in the light of various social theories.

¹² See M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge, London and New York 2002, pp. 36–50.

subjected to concrete, typically oppressive practices, which at the same time are able to establish subjects, was reflected on by, inter alia, M. Foucault, and P. Bourdieu. The issues of the oppressive nature of language, culture, and social practices consolidated in the body were also discussed by J. Butler, who questioned the sex-related meanings universally functioning in the society and referring to biological attributes¹³.

The body, disability and culture – an attempt at research exemplification

Reflection on the issues related to the body and corporeality in the context of the phenomenon of disability makes it possible to notice one of the most basic problems which may generate a certain cognitive conflict. On the one hand, one may perceive this relation in the perspective of scientific objectification generating verifiable knowledge, consistent with the observable facts, on biological impairments and shortcomings marking the disabled person as well as their consequences. On the other hand, one may adopt the perspective of a particular cultural engagement giving birth to many issues concerning the meaning of a concrete bodily dysfunction, the way it can be perceived, the related emotions, the meaning of being disabled and having a given impairment, the words used to talk about it, the meaning of these words, the language we use to talk about 'anomalies' of the body or the mind, and the discourse this language fits into¹⁴.

In order to bring closer the meanings which may appear during attempts at the answering of questions of this kind, I shall present the results of the research endeavours aimed at the identification of the areas of the presence of the *impaired/deformed/ill/weak body* (the body in the state of physical and symbolic oppression) and the language (discourses and meanings) marked by a certain potential of softening, diluting and transforming of the strongly opposite and normative categories (such as healthy/ill, normal/abnormal). The research was related to the search for interpretations breaking the heretofore existing narrations and stepping beyond the sphere of beliefs shaping the professional 'scientific' discourse of a disabled body/mind. In the texts which create it, one may clearly discern the presence, although not directly expressed for a long time and developed on the ground of the *episteme* of modernism, of the tradition of exclusion, which gives the phenomenon of disability the role of an anomaly, pushing it into the sphere of pathology and deviation. The tradition seems to be contemporarily deepened and strengthened by the discourse of culture promoting the healthy, strong, fit and beautiful body, which becomes the source of a specific 'aesthetic discrimination' and a promotion of the marginalisation of the disabled¹⁵.

¹³ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York 2007.

¹⁴ I am writing more about it in my text *Niepełnosprawność i pedagogika. Pytanie o podmiot a kwestia tożsamości i zmiany paradygmatycznej dyscypliny* [Disability and Pedagogy. The Question of the Subject and the Issue of Identity and Paradigmatic Discipline Change], *Studia z Teorii Wychowania* 2011, No. 2(3), pp. 267–283.

¹⁵ P. Hughes, *Disability and the Body*, [in:] *Disability Studies Today*, p. 70 and further.

Cognitive perspective and research method

The research was focused on selected works representing the critically oriented and politically engaged modern Polish art (the 1990s) – the trend constituting a specific ‘social critique’ and represented by, inter alia, Grzegorz Kowalski (running the sculpture workshop, the so-called *Kowalnia* in the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw) and people originating from the studio, including Artur Żmijewski, Paweł Althamer and Katarzyna Kozyra, as well as Zbigniew Libera, Joanna Rajkowska, Katarzyna Górna, Andrzej Karaś, and Jacek Markiewicz. As D. Jarecka put it: “[...] what is the essence of their art is not just [...] the undermining of the set social roles, but also addressing the evil”¹⁶. These brief characteristics express in a simple and accurate manner the ideas and postulates present also in the critically-oriented and socially-engaged pedagogy. I. Kowalska points out that the so-called critical art of the period “analysed mechanisms of the incapacitation of the body by the contemporary culture”, making strategies of its disciplining visible. The human body, shown in a variety of ways, in various situations and states, “became the basic area of artistic discussions concerning the human identity”. By showing the border states of physical existence, disease, death, sexuality, “art began to crumble the contemporary taboo areas”¹⁷. In turn, A. Żmijewski, the artist, whose selected works became the research material in the project concerning the phenomenon of disability, determined critical art as “[...] a line of thought and creation of resistance in the form of knowledge”¹⁸.

The essential research problem boiled down to the question of what an ‘impaired/dysfunctional’ body means/can mean, and to the related issue of what meanings constitute/may constitute the basis for the identification of the individual and collective identities of the subjects perceived as disabled. **The main analytical strategy** was discourse analysis understood as an attempt at the identification and deconstruction of the meanings of the text, or, as D. Howarth puts it: “the process of analyzing signifying practices as discursive forms”, in which all types of linguistic and non-linguistic materials can be considered as text¹⁹. Assuming, after M. Foucault²⁰, the understanding of discourse as a historically-determined notion, i.e. one marked by the changeability of the system of meanings shaping subjects through the concrete systems of relations and social practices functioning at a given time, I also based my analyses on the assumptions and methods of the critical discourse analysis

¹⁶ D. Jarecka, *Malowanie zła* [Painting the Evil], an article published in the internet portal of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily, 25 March 2005, www.gazeta.pl, accessed on: 27.07.2011.

¹⁷ I. Kowalczyk, *Problematyka ciała w polskiej sztuce krytycznej lat 90.* [Body-Related Problems in the Polish Critical Art of the 1990s], a website of the Interdisciplinary Group *Gender Studies*, University of Wrocław, www.gender.uni.wroc.pl/index.php?lang (articles, online texts), accessed on: 21.06.2012.

¹⁸ The quotation comes from the conversation between Sebastian Cichocki and Artur Żmijewski, constituting the introduction to A. Żmijewski’s book *Trembling Body. Conversations with Artists* (Seria *Krytyki Politycznej*, vol. II), Galeria Kronika&Korporacja Ha!art, Bytom–Kraków 2006.

¹⁹ D. Howarth, *Discourse*, Open University Press, Buckingham 2000, p. 10.

²⁰ M. Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston, London and Henley 1981.

(CDA). It is defined as a manner of studying discursive aspects of a subject and constitutes one of the main research strategies applied in the area of cultural studies²¹.

The analysed **research material** comprised images – the results of the photographic recording of portraits and situations showing people with visible bodily deformities, i.e. persons who in both the colloquial and scientific perception may be referred to as disabled. Selected photographs (photos of the original works) comprising Artur Żmijewski's cycle *An Eye for an Eye* were taken from the publicly available internet sources and a catalogue accompanying the exhibition organized in the Polish pavilion during the 51st Venice Biennale²², with some of the research materials illustrating press interviews with the artist. The author often undertakes the topic of the image of the body subjected to various forms of oppression, and his characteristic manner of work, a specific method of artistic activity, involves collecting people together and challenging them to perform an emotionally difficult, often controversial task.

The analysis of the research material covered two areas simultaneously: firstly, photographs, treated as text, of people with visible deformities (creations of artistic activities generated in the field of art, 'works of art'), as well as, secondly, texts in the form of statements of both the artist himself and other people, included in interviews, articles, reviews, disputes, etc. (discourse generated in the area of the theory of art and art criticism, related to the social perception of creations of art). This made it possible to identify **different areas of meanings grouping themselves in several categories**, including the visual level of description, the title, emotions, reversal of the situation/change of order, otherness/hybridisation, stepping beyond borders/the violation of borders, and terror of the healthy/terror of the disabled; the borders between the particular groups as well as the networks of meanings within single categories are blurred and intermingle, creating subsequent configurations and structures.

Research results – categories of meanings

At the level of the description of what one can see in the photographs, we may say that they present standing, sitting or lying individuals who are incomplete, as they do not have certain parts of their bodies – an arm or a leg. The crippled, incomplete people pose for the photographs, being supported by healthy individuals with all their limbs, whom the former use as prostheses. They jointly try to create a 'complete' fit body, able to act. From among the people in the photographs, as pointed out by D. Jarecka, referring to Andrzej Wróblewski's cycle of paintings entitled *Rozstrzelania* [*Firing Squad Executions*]: "[...] some are sound and

²¹ See the work *Krytyczna analiza dyskursu. Interdyscyplinarne podejście do komunikacji społecznej* [Critical Discourse Analysis. An Interdisciplinary Approach to Social Communication], A. Duszak and N. Fairclough (eds.), Universitas, Kraków 2008.

²² A. Żmijewski, *If it happened only once, it's as if it never happened. Co stało się raz nie stało się nigdy*, transl. M. Appelt, et al., Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warszawa 2005.

healthy, while others injured, in pieces. We do not know why. This is the way cards were stacked. Are the healthy ones feeling guilty? So what? This will not rescue the crippled ones"²³. Such an interpretation of the situations shown in the photos turns attention to the evil present in the world, in nature – the evil the source of which remains unknown and which is a certain riddle, a secret, to a fate perceived as blind and cruel. The sense of such interpretation can be confirmed in the question which is frequently a part of the experience of the disabled or their loved ones: why me, why has this happened to me?

Another group of meanings is made up by the **title** of the cycle of photographs *An Eye for an Eye*²⁴, around which a certain symbolic order is organised. At the more direct level of interpretation, it can be described in the following way: healthy bodies replace the missing limbs, they are a 'depository of limbs', creating, together with the crippled bodies, a specific hybrid which does not remind one of the typical scheme of the human body. At a higher level of symbolism, these images can be interpreted in the perspective of a metaphor of compensation for damage fuelled by the sense of guilt – it is when the healthy offer their assistance and support to the ones who are crippled not only in the literal sense, but also by the oppressive cultural practices. We may also refer here to the metaphor of a return, a revenge of the disabled, using the healthy in an instrumental and, at the same time, physically and emotionally exhausting manner. But these human hybrids can also be treated in line with the spirit of the Biblical interpretation, which talks not so much about the return or revenge, as about the need to maintain a life balance.

Another group of meanings identified as a part of the analyses is related to **emotions**. Looking at the photographs, we may notice a very strong differentiation of strong emotions including surprise, astonishment, uncertainty, fear, anxiety, embarrassment, shame, distaste, aversion, disgust, curiosity, compassion, pity, sorrow, guilt, and relief. The presented images and the accompanying broad array of emotions strongly focus the viewer's attention on themselves and make it difficult for them to take their eyes off them. They are marked by a peculiar ability to seduce. Artur Żmijewski himself said during one interview that "disability can seduce in the same way as beauty; physical deformity makes one stand out. It is something unusual, amazing, you need to make an effort to understand it"²⁵. The difference between the presented image and everything which is typically shown in the context of the body, the uncovering and the 'shameless' presentation

²³ D. Jarecka, *Malowanie zła...* [Painting the Evil...].

²⁴ The title refers to fragments of the *Book of Exodus* and the *Book of Leviticus* of the *Old Testament*. "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise" (*Book of Exodus* 21,23–25). "Anyone who injures their neighbour is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury". (*Book of Leviticus* 24,19–20). The quotations come from the *New International Version of the Holy Bible: Old and New Testaments* available at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/>, accessed on 19. 10. 2018.

²⁵ The quotation comes from an interview with the artist carried out by K. Bielas and D. Jarecka, and entitled *The Depository of Limbs*, published in the *Duży Format* magazine (a supplement to the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily) on 16 May 2005, p. 3.

of what we, people, try to cover and hide, may lead to a sense that one is being shocked by disability, bombarded with the images of bodies which contrast with the generally accepted aesthetic criteria.

Yet another set of meanings which emerged during my analysis is focused around the **change** of a certain typical order and a **reversal of the situation** that we are normally used to, which results in the deconstruction and reconfiguration of meanings. In the analysed photographs, healthy people were reduced to the role of the suppliers of limbs; they were treated as objects and perceived through their attributes and usefulness; they had to adjust to the situation in which they participated. This is most frequently the experience of the disabled, who are mostly perceived through the perspective of their own impairments and limitations and faced with the necessity to adapt themselves to the rules of the surrounding world. The actions of the healthy and the ones missing their limbs seem to be ambivalent: on the one hand, they can be interpreted as an attempt at an assistance offered by the fit, but on the other, the assistance and support, presented in the form of a literal, physical support of the impaired, non-independent bodies, can also be a certain type of violence in relation to the disabled, an attempt at 'repairing' or 'supplementing' them, making them complete, which strongly fits the social discourse of normativity and the discourse of the normalisation of the life of the disabled. When writing about the cycle *An Eye for an Eye*, I. Kowalczyk stated that it showed a positive vision of the symbiosis between the non-disabled and the disabled, as a part of which the differences between them faded, owing to which the division into the sphere of normality and whatever is excluded from it ceased to be meaningful. The exposed handicap showed in the situation of co-existence with the ones who do not experience it, led the author to an interpretation providing that "only through getting to know the 'Other', he/she can be included in the whole. His/her disability is not [...] negated, it is included into the closed area of social relations"²⁶. But getting to know the Other, resulting in his/her inclusion in a specific whole, a definite order and discourse, can also be understood as a possessive act of violence, a colonisation of the identity which does not fit the accepted rules, the identity of someone perceived as a 'worse Other' (A. Gramsci's notion of *subaltern*). Colonisers can be healthy, 'normal' representatives of society, including the artist himself, whose work can be interpreted in many ways, also becoming a potential space of symbolic violence or an act of artistic provocation. Another source of the appearing ambivalence is the interpretation in the light of which disabled persons may be treated as recipients of assistance, individuals who are weak, harmed by fate, but also a source of oppression for the healthy, which A. Żmijewski called a "rape of the disabled on the healthy"²⁷.

Yet another interpretation of the non-typical nature of the situations under discussion may refer to the already mentioned direct showing of what is normally kept

²⁶ I. Kowalczyk, *Problematyka ciała w polskiej sztuce krytycznej lat 90.* [Body-Related Problems in the Polish Critical Art of the 1990s].

²⁷ *The Depository of Limbs* – an interview with A. Żmijewski carried out by K. Bielas and D. Jarecka, *Duży Format* magazine (a supplement to the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily) of 16 May 2005, p. 3.

in hiding (the deformed body). Its unveiling and making visible may be interpreted as 'the voice of the disabled', the presentation of their life and reality, their version of reality, which does not necessarily have to be consistent with what the healthy would like it to be (different articulations, different discourses, different versions of the truth). The picture of exhausting and imperfect attempts at the creation of one fit body, able to maintain stability or move, would be, as a part of this understanding, a particular struggle in the fight for the meaning, for one's own version, of the truth.

Another group of meanings identified as a part of my analysis has been included in the category **otherness/difference/hybridisation**, and is related to the exposition, present in the photographs, of the bodily difference and narrations concerning people and their stories written into their bodies. The manifestation of the impassable otherness, to which one can hardly remain indifferent, its persistent, or even intrusive presence, fosters a reaction, and calls upon one to respond in the rational and ethical sense. Deformed bodies awaken in us a Levinasian appeal of the Other to which we must respond. We may also treat in the same category a meeting of the healthy and the impaired as an area of the negotiation of differences, of the emergence of the significant differences which establish subjects. The constructs originating from the combination of the non-disabled and the disabled bodies may symbolise the process of the hybridisation of identity, in which – referring to the strategies of the construction of identities as described by H. Bhabha – *mimicry* is tantamount to becoming similar in order to vanish, dissolve, in the alien, other identity, *emulation* means becoming similar in order not to be worse, while *resistance* becomes a reversal of the heretofore existing order or emancipation²⁸.

The one but last of the identified categories of the analysis groups' meanings focused around the question of the **crossing/violation of borders**. The scenes presented in the photographs concern participation in a very intimate, emotionally difficult situation of the uncovering and presenting of literal and symbolic 'wounds', the specific 'touching of the scars' in close contact with others, including the viewers looking at the photographs. The revealing of a disease, the showing of the 'naked' truth – the sphere of the taboo, and the tackling of a very difficult aspect of human existence in the individual and socio-cultural dimension – may breed resistance towards the entire situation, but also resistance to the dominating discourse of the healthy, strong, non-disabled and beautiful body. A physical stepping into a situation which is full of irony, the inescapable grotesqueness and the irrationality of the presented figures, the clash of contrasting emotions, may breed uncertainty, emotional dissonance, and discussion with the standards of political correctness.

The last group of meanings was referred to as the **terror of the healthy/disabled**. They are related to the interpretations as a part of which the disabled can be accepted only if they become similar to the healthy. Therefore, the discourse of normativity becomes a condition for existence in the world, and the adoption of the identity of a 'disabled' person the only possibility to establish a subject. In

²⁸ See T. Szkudlarek, *Wiedza i wolność w pedagogice amerykańskiego postmodernizmu* [Knowledge and Freedom in the Pedagogy of American Postmodernism], Impuls, Kraków 1993, pp. 203–224.

E. Toniak's interpretation, "For a moment, handicapped bodies become normal again, the missing limbs once again returned to them"²⁹. However, attempts at making cripples healthy, at a particular complementation of the impaired body/subject, at the 'closure' of identity in the area of typical, domesticated meanings, is impossible, while the effort focused on the task is doomed to failure, since hybrid-like creations do not resemble normal bodies. Another possible interpretation refers to the 'terror of the disabled', who by their very presence disturb the peace of the healthy, making them confront the things which raise their existential fear, which are pushed away and often denied access to the consciousness of individuals, as well as social life.

Discourse of science, discourse of art – different but close worldviews

When making creations in the cultural text generated in the area of art the subject matter of my research analyses, I adopted an assumption that an artistic project may be a source of knowledge on subjects and society. The foundations of this decision can be sought, on the one hand, in the stepping beyond the borders of disciplines and the search for new spaces of knowledge generation as postulated by the critical pedagogy, while, on the other hand, it can be found in the relationship between pedagogy (the critical, radical, and engaged one) and art, the sources of which can be sought in the area of the very art as well as the discourse on art. I will try to elaborate on this relationship on the basis of several statements of the artist whose works were analysed.

In one of his interviews, Artur Żmijewski said: "There is no division into art and life. Art is life"³⁰. In this sentence, both life and art (just like all education and the discipline referred to as pedagogy) are real practices taking place in a definite time and space, which tell us something about the reality around us and as a part of which certain activities are undertaken, which interfere with reality as we know it, shape it, and introduce certain changes. In another conversation with a journalist, when asked whether he practiced politically-engaged art, Żmijewski answered [that he practiced]: "Art, which is interested in what is going on, takes a voice in the discussion. Silence can be considered as a consent, a confirmation of the status quo. You have to say something so that others know your position"³¹. This statement focuses on the necessity to take a voice, to express one's disapproval of the established order, and disagreement with the tacit consent to the evil and the injustice taking place around. The categories of *voice* and *resistance*, which are present here, are among the most basic notions of the radical pedagogy, which

²⁹ A. Żmijewski, *If it Happened Only Once, It's as if It Never Happened...*, p. 177.

³⁰ J. Ruszczyk, *Językiem elit jest tekst, a mas obraz* [Text is the Language of Elites, While Image – That of the Masses], an interview with A. Żmijewski, www.nesweek.pl (accessed on 21.07.2011).

³¹ A. Kowalska, *Nie jestem emerytem sztuki krytycznej* [I am Not an Old-Age Pensioner of Critical Art], an interview with A. Żmijewski, 17 April 2009, www.gazeta.pl (accessed on 21.07.2011).

postulates the 'policy of giving a voice' to those individuals and groups which are socially marginalised and oppressed, the expression of their identity as well as the emancipation and resistance against socially-sanctioned, oppressive practices.

Yet another quote from the artist: "Art [...] excluded as knowledge [...] preserves the "unfathomable" ability of following intuition, that which is repressed, but which art can retrieve and reinstate to public debate"³² shows attributes of art as spheres of life which are inaccessible or perhaps absent in other discourses, giving art the ability of providing critical reflection on and a demystification of the mechanisms of domination and oppression hidden in the rules of social order. Similar postulates are also formed by the project of politically-engaged radical pedagogy. In another quote taken from an interview, we read that "[...] artists are used by the society. The society asks a question and they provide an answer"³³, and in yet another that "Art itself could stop insisting that the answers it provides are in fact questions"³⁴. In these statements, we can find a specific redefinition of the status of the statements of art, providing it with the ability to not only present reality and comment on it, but also to formulate answers to various social problems and issues. Therefore, what is present in them, just like in critically-oriented pedagogy, the pedagogy of resistance, is the language of possibilities, which gives hope for the making of a change. The noticing of social problems, bringing them to the surface, and political engagement in the solving of the problems, breeds the attitude of an artist, and, similarly, pedagogue/teacher, to whom H. Giroux referred as a critically thinking 'transformative intellectual' who mistrusts *doxa* and creates conditions for the transformation of reality.

When conducting the research presented herein, one may pose a question as to what type of knowledge related to the category of an 'impaired' (disabled) body emerges from the above analysis and what the consequences of the above can be for pedagogy and social change? An answer to the above can be summarized with reference to the notions of diversity, non-clarity and ambivalence, which are expressed in the impossibility to grasp and clearly determine the meanings of the 'impaired body', and in the balancing at the edge of the grasping of the identity of the subject and the relationship with it (an attempt at the grasping of the identity of a 'disabled' subject becomes a ceaseless 'chase after the rabbit', which seems to be so close, but still continues to escape, and we cannot catch it, i.e. name and classify it, and determine its properties). Therefore, they are marked by a variety of subject positions, a diversity of the possible 'closures' of meaning, and openness to various social ontologies of disability, which E. Laclau understands as sets of meanings closed in structures of specific discourses³⁵. What becomes necessary as a result is critical reflection on the nature of the objectivisms performed in the

³² Introduction. Artur Żmijewski in conversation with Sebastian Cichocki, [in:] Artur Żmijewski, *Trembling Bodies. Conversations with Artists*.

³³ J. Ruszczuk, *Językiem elit jest tekst...* [Text is the Language of Elites...].

³⁴ Introduction. Artur Żmijewski in conversation with Sebastian Cichocki, [in:] Artur Żmijewski, *Trembling Bodies...*

³⁵ E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London – New York 2005, pp. 67–68.

area of the traditional discourse of pedagogy, in which disability is treated, explicitly or, increasingly frequently implicitly, as an anomaly, as a deviation from the standard. Stepping beyond the area of universally practiced pedagogical searches and broadening them to include the sphere of art allows us not only to search for certain common areas, assumptions, discourses and meanings of the border area breaking the heretofore dominating voice, but also to find different interpretations, new threads, and definitions of reality constructed in a different way. It therefore allows the generation of a different type of knowledge concerning the problems and categories studied as a part of pedagogy, to adopt a different interpretative horizon, a different model of reality and social relations. I will again refer here to A. Żmijewski, according to whom, although art and science generate different types of knowledge, each of them can tell us something important³⁶. The discourse of science creates a structured network of notions, definitions, and analyses, which mutually refer to one another. It includes strong nodal points (knowledge on certain phenomena, considered certain and true) and empty places, which science cannot yet fill, and which group problems it is unable to explain and solve, or even perceive. On the other hand, the discourse of art creates a network of non-structured meanings, in which there are no nodal points, but only local turbulences grouping certain fragments of knowledge. Since elements of the network may move freely and in any way, all re-configurations of senses and meanings are possible, and so there are no 'impossible associations'. The type of knowledge generated in the areas of art and discourse on art, which are interrelated, allows one therefore to cross the borders between disciplines, undermine the scientifically-sanctioned 'truth' considered to be obvious, and gives a voice to 'local knowledge', to the personal experience staying on the margins of the dominating knowledge. What are the consequences of the above for the reflections concerning disability perceived as a social and cultural phenomenon and a certain theoretical category? The area of the *border* between pedagogy and art as well as the pedagogue moving there as a *border-crosser*, stepping beyond the borders between disciplines and areas³⁷, hides the potential of the breaking of the inevitable oppositionism of meanings (notions) shaping the discourse of normativity, and the practices (stemming from traditional knowledge and cladding such discourse)³⁸, which include specific ideologically-determined entanglements and relations of domination and oppression. It is an act, as S. Hall understood it³⁹, of a specific cultural recovery of

³⁶ A. Żmijewski, *Trembling Bodies. Conversations with Artists...* (the quotation comes from a fragment of S. Cichocki's conversation with the artist from the Introduction to the book).

³⁷ See H. Giroux, *Pedagogia pogranicza w wieku postmodernizmu* [Pedagogy of the Border Area in the Age of Postmodernism], [in:] *Edukacja i sfera publiczna. Idee i doświadczenia pedagogiki radykalnej...* [Education and the Public Sphere. Ideas and Experiences of Radical Pedagogy...], p. 227.

³⁸ In the pedagogical discourse, the knowledge is constructed and accumulated in the area of special education, and its sources can be traced to biology, medicine (mainly rehabilitation, neurology, psychiatry, and genetics) as well as psychology (in particular clinical and developmental) and sociology (e.g. deviation sociology, social identity theory, group sociology).

³⁹ See S. Hall, *Ethnicity. Identity and Difference*, "Radical America", Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 9–20; H. Giroux H.A. Giroux, *Wobec wyzwania tożsamości i różnicy (poza dyskurs edukacji międzykulturowej)* [Facing the

everything the discourse of normativity consigned to the margins of social life and into the area of 'special' (meaning: professional) knowledge on disability. Therefore, it can constitute a starting point for a change, for politically-conscious actions directed at oppression, which, however, require the understanding of its mechanism, often not visible, hidden behind the practices of assistance and support. It can constitute the basis and the beginning of a change which in relation to the phenomenon of disability, strongly rooted in the biological determinism characteristic for the essentialist understanding of the subject, is present in the very possibility to notice and recognize that a different point of view is possible.

Summary

Critical contexts of the creation of knowledge at the border area between radical pedagogy and the contemporary engaged art

This paper presents some considerations focused on the search for new areas of generating knowledge at the border between various disciplines, social life and culture. They are based on the thesis that there are some joint issues and common shared contents in the space of the critically-oriented pedagogy and contemporary art's currents, which are defined as critical and politically involved. These issues, among others, refer to fact that both the field of art and the field of education are shaped by socio-cultural practices in which the symbolic representations and meanings are generated, so they both create some kind of knowledge. Learning about reality on the borders is especially directed at searching for interpretations breaking the dominated narratives constructed in the area of formal knowledge and transgressing the sphere of beliefs which consist of the professional, scientific discourse of a disabled body. As an exemplification, the author presents an analysis of meanings connected with the category of the impaired body/corporeality, based on some chosen works coming from A. Żmijewski's *An Eye for an Eye* series [1998].

English translation: Anna Moroz-Darska

Challenges of Identity and Difference (Beyond the Discourse of Intercultural Education)), [in:] H. Giroux, L. Witkowski, *Edukacja i sfera publiczna. Idee i doświadczenia pedagogiki radykalnej* [Education and the Public Sphere. Ideas and Experiences of Radical Pedagogy], Impuls, Kraków 2010, pp. 201–220.

Tłumaczenie sfinansowano ze środków Ministerstwa Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego na podstawie umowy nr 661/P-DUN/2018 z dnia 13 lipca 2018 roku w ramach realizacji zadania 1 – stworzenie angielskich wersji wydawanych publikacji w 2018 roku.

The translation was financed with funds made available by the Ministry of Finance and Higher Education under contract No. 661/P-DUN/2018 of 13 July 2018 as a part of the execution of task 1: the creation of English-language versions of the issued publications in 2018.