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## The Birth of Inclusive Studies from the Spirit of Critical Art. Disability in the Arts as the Inspiration for Practical Realization of Applied Social Arts Idea

### “Critical Art” and Disability

Criticism of oppressive systems and discourses associated with philosophy, sociology and politics, as well as commenting on the world-outlook has become a characteristic for so-called critical art at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. Informative and aesthetic functions (ordinary for art) are complemented here by the dominating persuasive, “didactic” elements. System, order, rules are criticized “prisons” and they should be replaced by other methods determining values, building personal identity and social relationships. Or at least modified within the context of such ideas as identity, religion, nation, gender<sup>2</sup>. Especially provocative and controversial may become artworks juxtaposing the “system” and “oppressiveness” issues with the most difficult life-problems – ageing, illness, death.

Such situations are common in Polish contemporary art. These are e. g. Katarzyna Kozyra’s installations *leitmotives*. Her presentations of old woman and

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<sup>1</sup> In the Polish art the term refers to „the activities of Polish artists of the 1990s, whereas the media attention their art received, the controversies and incessant attacks it engendered, effectively revealed this phenomenon’s critical force”, I. Kowalczyk, *Critical Art. Selected Issues*, <http://culture.pl/en/article/critical-art-selected-issues> (access: 08.03.2014). In Western Art, however, such attitudes appear much earlier, even in Dadaism and surrealism, and after the war very clearly in the “alternative” stream of the Situationists. This attitude is also present in the mainstream of art close to the 90s. See: S. Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrism to Class war*, AK Press 1991; G. Pollock, *Looking back to the future: Essays on Art, Life and Death (Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture)*, Routledge 2001. See also: *Critical Art Ensemble* of 1987 concentrated on “the exploration of the intersections between art, critical theory, technology, and political activism”, <http://www.critical-art.net/> (access: 08.03.2014).

<sup>2</sup> Critical art was often inspired by philosophers of the Frankfurt School (Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno). According to them, the prevailing economic, social and political system must be radically altered. See: *Frankfurt School*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt\\_School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt_School) (access: 14.01.2014).

artist herself under chemotherapy, both posed as Manet's *Olimpia* (1996) or naked people of different age dancing Stravinsky's/Nijinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1999–2002) engender shocking impressions. Confrontation with the “border experiences” was mixed with that what is marginalized and unclear. The aim was to evoke the strong reactions in face of the natural truth and the real heritage hidden under the cultural customs, stereotypes, traditions. Such reactions presented that what is subdued but intrinsic for humans. It is perhaps the free nature of human being liberated from oppressive systems and its release should become the foundation of the new values that critical art seems to encourage.

Most moving, however, are perhaps examples showing in the artistic activities how attitudes towards disability created by systems and discourses are the biggest barrier for people with disabilities. It seems that numerous works of the contemporary Polish critical art concern such a barrier, entering the wider trend of disability art<sup>3</sup>.

In 1983 Zbigniew Libera in the video installation *Obrzędy intymne* [Intimate Rites] showed himself and his senile grandmother almost completely infirm. Artist for about two years fed, washed, changed her, put her to sleep and filmed it to show selected scenes from daily care activities in a short (11'42'), synthetic, silent film. Detailed documentation showed inevitable weakness and, on the other hand, selfless love. Both (weakness and love) beyond social, cultural, political system (political oppression triumphed at that time in the martial law's Poland particularly hard). It might have seemed that showed “rites” were independent of any of them because of their “mystical-magical nature”<sup>4</sup>. However, the projections caused embarrassment and reserve because of the naturalism: “such things are not to be shown or to be talked about”, “it's too painful and challenging”. Installation started also this kind of thinking, critically commenting reluctance to open the truth hidden under the system of culture. The system (or public dominant discourse) provides tools to express sympathy and help, but often at the same time it brings an infirm, disabled and protected person to the role of an object. Help leads to objectification, paradoxically enough. A concern is out of will and opinion of the subject of a cease. However, someone who helps because “it should be done”, “it is appreciated, praised” is in “captivity” of discourse, too. Perhaps it was the reason why the Libera's film was meaningfully silent.

In 1998 in a video installation *Oko za oko* [Eye for an Eye] Artur Żmijewski presented himself offering his own leg to “replace” amputated one during help he

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<sup>3</sup> In the English-language theory art showing disability has its separate name: “The term «Disability in the arts» is different from «Disability Art». «Disability in the arts» refers to art that includes disabled people, whether in themes, in performance, or in the creation of the artwork. «Disability Art» refers to works focusing on disability as the central theme, taking a more direct, activist approach to promoting the concerns of people with disabilities to a wide audience”, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability\\_in\\_the\\_arts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability_in_the_arts) (access: 03.11.2013).

<sup>4</sup> *Zbigniew Libera*, [culture.pl, http://culture.pl/en/artist/zbigniew-libera](http://culture.pl/en/artist/zbigniew-libera) (access: 15.01.2014).

provided to a crippled man. Both were naked. They walked the path among the trees, went up the stairs together, both clearly tired, panted. Never with a smile. Then they lay and rested. All the time close to each other, touching the scars to replace the missing limb. Similar situations were filmed with the participation of other persons after amputation. Also while showering. Able bodied persons lent parts of their own bodies to people with amputated limbs. There were always clear signs of fatigue and embarrassment visible in filmed situations.

*Eye for an Eye* – this legal maxim of the *Code of Hammurabi* representing the equivalent recompense for the harm is removed from its original context and applied literally in order to prove how common discourse makes “help” embarrassing because it is “ordered”, organized by the discourse which in fact leads to objectification and social exclusion. Or at least it is perceived as such a way as a confusing trouble by both parties of the situation. Thus, the work can be understood as a criticism of a “facilitator” or “assistencialismo” idea (which suggests the serving assistance as a solution of disability problems)<sup>5</sup>. The intimacy of a touch is to overcome the embarrassment (and perhaps to be an example of co-existence of free subjects)<sup>6</sup>. Żmijewski’s film is found as “a story of intimacy and ways of overcoming the mechanisms of exclusion”<sup>7</sup>. It is also unpleasant and painful indication (and thus getting stuck in the memory and turning to seek a second thought), as well as illustrating the way how discourses themselves construct negative attitudes and moods. In spite of fact that situations do not have to be embarrassing themselves. Or perhaps the situations are not that difficult, they are just made such difficult by discourses, ordinances, duties, customs. This work (as well as Libera’s *Intimate Rites*) is finally found as a call to break discourses forcing rules and imposing orders.

Other examples of disability topic in the Polish critical video art (it might be the Polish disability art) are e.g. Żmijewski’s *Ogród botaniczny / ZOO* [Botanical Garden / ZOO] (1997) with juxtaposition of animals in the zoo and mentally handicapped children similarly (?) limited and peeped by satisfied “free” observers, *Sztuka kochania* [The Art of Love] (2000) where elderly patients suffering from Parkinson disease attempt to pass on to the others some pleasure with uncontrollable nervous acts, *Na spacer* [Out for a Walk], 2001 with paraplegics taken by healthy men for a walk which is apparently exhausting for both walkers or *Karolina* (2001) showing girl suffering unbearable pain from osteoporosis and awaiting death after subsequent doses of morphine<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facilitation> (access: 09.02.2015).

<sup>6</sup> See: N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance et al., Les Presses du Reel: France, 2002, i. e. p. 7–8, 109.

<sup>7</sup> A. Żmijewski, *Eye for an Eye*, Filmoteka Muzeum, <http://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/zmijewski-artur-okoz-za-okoz> (access: 14.01.2014).

<sup>8</sup> See: *Artur Żmijewski*, culture.pl, <http://culture.pl/en/artist/artur-zmijewski> (access: 08.03.2014).

A person as a subject in captivity of own condition and infirmity arising from biology, age, fate... But also in “prison” made by the discourse which teaches who is normal, how to behave towards people with disabilities. The most important of truths propounded is probably this: the biggest barriers for people with disabilities are mental barriers. Art is provocative to visualize better that the biggest barriers for people with disabilities are in the minds of both disabled and able-bodied, healthy, “regular” people. Because the minds are determined by the prevailing oppressive discourses. Even empathy and help are transformed in such works into psychical and physical oppression also for able-bodied “others”.

The picture of a society and human beings presented in contemporary critical art looks pessimistic. However, such an art also accuses, claims, presses, urges: “change it!”, “break the imprisoning discourse!”. Meanings and “instructions” to change our limited and oppressive way of thinking are usually similar. “Change the whole system completely” – say artworks. It finally concerns not only discourses, ways of thinking, social problems but often all the systems, especially political and economic.

It’s hard to resist the impression that the attitude to people with disabilities has been subjected to be criticized as part of larger oppressive system. Potential causes have been indicated to be removed or repaired. Information has been told in expressive, persuasive, shocking and embarrassing way. The experience was intense in order to feel, remember and consider “slavery” of discourse, oppression and the need for change.

### **Reception and its investigation**

However, have people (recipients of artworks) understood the information? Or just shocking intensity remained in their memory? The question can be extended with the following consideration: does scientific discourse use proper tools to analyze and speak about disability art? Does it, foremost, reflect on the fact that the situation of people with disabilities subjected as an example of the oppressive system still leaves them as objects rather than subjects?

Consideration may lead to suggest special tools for the analysis of the discussed art. It is possible to present video installations described above, complement it with a presentation concerning the disability art and disability in the arts and formulate psychological questions to investigate reception of such critical and persuasive art which is often controversial.

Sample slides from presentation, usually with descriptions necessary due to the nature of contemporary art<sup>9</sup>, are presented below.

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<sup>9</sup> As the survey is to be done mostly among Polish students, the descriptions are in Polish language (there exists also English version which was presented with films to Slovak students).

**Marc Quinn, Pregnant Alison Lapper. Fourth Plinth] (2005-2007)**

Quinn has made a series of marble sculptures of people either born with limbs missing or who have had them amputated. This culminated in his 15 ton marble statue of Alison Lapper, a fellow artist born with no arms and severely shortened legs, which was displayed on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, London from September 2005 until October 2007.[12] (The Fourth Plinth is used for rotating displays of sculpture.) In *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Ann Millett writes, "The work has been highly criticized for capitalizing on the shock value of disability, as well as lauded for its progressive social values. Alison Lapper Pregnant and the controversy surrounding it showcase disability issues at the forefront of current debates in contemporary art"



**JO SPENCE**

*Jo with Teddy Bear (Jo Spence in collaboration with Dr Tim Sheard)*

1989, silver gelatine colour print, 42x30cm.

*Decay project, from the Final Project (Jo Spence and Terry Dennett)*

1991-2, silver gelatine colour print, 30x21cm.

*Monster (Jo Spence in collaboration with Dr Tim Sheard)*

1989, silver gelatine colour print, 30x21cm.

*Death Mask, from the Final Project (Jo Spence and Terry Dennett)*

1991-2, silver gelatine colour print, 30x21cm.



**Ryan Gender – *The Artwork Nobody Knows* [2011]**

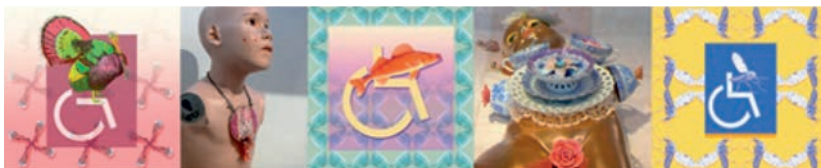
Gender is a wheelchair user with a long-term physical disability. His work for the 2011 Venice Biennale exhibition featured an action-figure sized sculpture that represents him while he falls from a wheelchair. "It is a self-portrait in the worst possible position".

Additionally, Gender's experiences as a disabled artist often make their way into his pieces. In 2006, his installation at the old Whitechapel Library, *Is this Guilt in your foot?*, where he filled the space with castles, detritus (scaffolds, reests), dead ends, and illusions meant to confound visitors and symbolize the inequitable difficulties faced by the disabled, was part of the Art Council's 'Adjustment' exhibitions whose aim was 'to address traditional thinking on disability, equality and inclusion'.

Lit only by the flickering half-light of a makeshift white-washed cinema screen that dominates one wall, careful squinting reveals you are in what appears to be a partially renovated store room. Discarded tools and building materials are strewn across the floor; probably part of the artwork but just as likely evidence of the gallery's ongoing refurbishment. A back-projected blurred film shimmers to a muffled soundtrack. A pool of clear sound close to the right corner of the screen draws you to a scratched patch revealing the empty auditorium beyond the glass. You're in the wrong place; you're on the wrong side of the screen.

To the left of the screen a door waits, promising entrance to the cinema. But the corridor beyond leads to a locked door. You're forced to retrace your steps and return to the space behind the cinema screen. It dawns on you about then that this is it. A dark empty room with rubbish covering the floor. A blurred, through the looking-glass vision of a film; the back-projected imagery rendered even vaguer and less distinct by the opaque painted glass standing in for the screen. A muffled, barely audible soundtrack; a directional speaker strategically placed to draw the audience to that one area where the sound is intelligible, where they can't help but discover the existence of the cinema they're excluded from.

His other works are normally not related to disabilities. However, Matthew Higgs argues, that his disability actually contributes to Gender's unique way of seeing: "The first thing I ever noticed about Ryan was that he uses a wheelchair. I mention this not in passing, nor as a gratuitous aside. Whilst I accept that some people might argue that this information is irrelevant, I would like to think that the fact that Ryan uses a wheelchair does - at least - have some bearing on my subsequent understanding of his work."

**Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, *Welcome Anomaly*, part 2**

An upside-down mannequin hangs by its leg from the ceiling, possessed of seemingly frivolously-chosen and undoubtedly fabulously-coloured body-parts. The work counsels caution in assessing perceptions as to the importance of foetal health; but also, in a light-hearted enough way, exposes the pickle the establishment seems repeatedly to make out of the simple processes of integration and inclusivity.



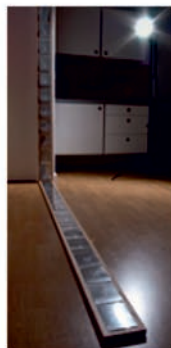
## Katherine Araniello

Katherine Araniello, *I Like That*, video  
 "gleefully plays her own nemesis – a crazy, mascara-ed, singing living-doll – in this highly entertaining video-installation"

Katherine Araniello uses subversive humour and wit in performances and films that address the social issues surrounding disability. The majority of her work have been short films and video blogs. In addition to this, she has staged performance pieces as part of the collective the Disabled Avant-Garde with Aaron Williamson. Her works are continued investigative and experimental observations that either highlight the tragedy and pity implicit in medical model representations of disability or present a completely alternative picture of physical difference. The prime focus is to subvert and parody complex contemporary issues which include assisted suicide, media representation and body aesthetics. Using a variety of media including film, performance and digital prints Araniello transforms these multifarious and serious issues to make works that are humorous and playful with a critical edge.



The exhibition moves equally and candidly between the inward and the outward: a stunningly beautiful and fragile membrane, *Latent*, Jo Paul; a cynical calling-card, *Arbeitsfähig* (Fit for work), Jon Adams; reflective ink drawing, *My left hand*, Stigmata/Hand of Glory, Annie Morgan; a life-changing dice, *...And The Odds and Sods, Aminder Virdee*; and above everything the exhibition strives at discourse: Beth Lau's *A-Z* (Work in progress) is an alphabetical design embossed in Braille which the viewer is invited to touch and in so doing leave their own marks.



The draft questionnaire prepared by a psychologist for such an investigations may look like presented below *Sentence Completion Test*<sup>10</sup>.

After viewing the presentation (or films), complete the following sentence with statements that best reflect your beliefs and state of mind. There is no right or wrong answer. It is important that you respond in accordance with your conscience. This survey is anonymous.

- 1) In relation to those presented on the slides you feel ..... fear / disgust / compassion / curiosity / surprise / fascinations / amusement / dismay / other
- 2) I believe that contemporary art .... should / should not deal with such topics
- 3) When I think about the heroes of the show, I think my body ... changes itself together with my psyche / is an independent product which scares me / is part of my "self" and I can control it / is weak, infirm, crippled and lame
- 4) Under the influence of these images .... I began thinking about old age and suffering as something universal / I'm afraid of my own disability, old age and death / I started to think about my family to be cared by me in the future / I feel happy that I'm young and able-bodied / I feel shock / I do not know how to respond
- 5) After the slide show, I try .... not to think of these images / to keep them firmly in the memory / to look for more information about the creators of this art / to create message of similar style and subject / to talk about it with others
- 6) In the past, .... I met already such communicates/ I have never seen anything like it
- 7) When I think about the motivations of artists whose works I have just watched ... I cannot understand them / they seem to me to be very clear / I wish I had in-depth knowledge on contemporary art / I think that everyone could come up with a similar theme / I think the artists wanted to gain popularity
- 8) Death, disability, illness ..... should never be the subject of art / should be the object of representation, because they are part of human life / should be shown, but less realistic
- 9) Disability in the artworks ... it scares me / I am attracted and fascinated by / it seems interesting cognitive / I find embarrassing
- 10) Artist sick, suffering, dying .... should publish his (her) suffering / can share with you ones pain or grief through art / can do with own fate in own art work / should "go into the shadows", like any average person in this situation
- 11) Art of such type I find as .... symptom of madness and bad taste / part of contemporary culture 'all for show' / form of marketing strategy aimed at popularity / a manifestation of artistic sensibility, an important document of artistic trends of our time

The results of studies performed on a group of 37 students dealing with communication problems<sup>11</sup> indicated frequent feeling of disgust (49%), own fear

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<sup>10</sup> The questionnaire was prepared by Professor Agnieszka Ogonowska, a psychologist and a director of cultural studies at the Pedagogical University in Cracow.

<sup>11</sup> Students of Marketing Communication and Advertisement at Mass-media Communication and Advertisement Chair of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra in Slova-



of disability and death (38%), reluctance to repeat viewing of such images (43%), illegibility of artists' motivation (51%), feeling of horror by the presence of disability in works of art (51%), perception of works as symptoms of madness and bad taste (51%). Nearly 60% of respondents said that art in general should not deal with such subjects. However, about 40% believed that it should. Other responses were more scattered, there were also annotations (e. g. concerning euthanasia).

The survey was complemented by further questions taking into account the reflection on the dominant discourse presented in contemporary art (examples not related to disability had been previously shown to students) and asking for metaphysical perspective, still important in art for many of its recipients. Questions were as follows:

After viewing the presentation (or films) circle the appropriate:

- 1) Do you understand presented works as illustration of a social exclusion problem?  
YES/NO
- 2) Do you understand presented works as information about the dominating social discourse and you want to change it? YES / NO
- 3) Do you understand presented works as information about a challenge justified metaphysically (i.e. religiously)? YES / NO

The answers to these questions indicated general understanding of social exclusion problem (85%), sensitivity to possible metaphysical context to some extent (68%) and a critical look at the dominant discourse (caused by artworks) to a smaller extent (60%).

Juxtaposition of responses of 40% respondents that art should deal with such subjects with the dominant reflection on illegibility, poor taste, discouragement and finally with the answer of more than half of the respondents that "I cannot understand the motivations of artists whose works I have just watched" indicated the need for further research and diversification of the group of respondents. Perhaps it shows also a need to develop a special method for describing and translating the difficult critical art connected with the issue of disability. Such a reflection confirm also scattering of other responses and limited understanding of the social discourse problem.

## Possible Interpretations

The results of the study indicated foremost the general need to strengthen education in the field of criticism and theory of contemporary art. It may be recalled in such a context that the art had already showed the "other", stranger, the man "different" than everyone else to indicate symbolically the social problems of

alienation, reification, enslavement, impotence, or deprivation of subjectivity. And contemporary art often uses the picture of an infirmity and man decrepit because of disability or age in similar manner. In turn, in relation to the theory of abject disability presented in contemporary art as “otherness” displaced to the periphery of the community could be seen as repressed or rejected in order to constitute the identity of “normal” community or person<sup>12</sup>. Such repression or rejection is often criticized and accused in contemporary art, as well as constructing the identity in such an activity. In Peter Sloterdijk’s terminology (used by Hal Foster) disability in contemporary art would be used as “kynical regression” manifested in order to accuse society of indifference, lack of care, poor care or even contempt<sup>13</sup>. Sometimes presented and used object “cynically” accepts the use of its image (often emphasizing disability) because the object wants to be noticed, subjected and protected (but it is an object rather than subject in such a situation). Finally, according to need for anaesthetics (announced by Wolfgang Iser)<sup>14</sup> which due to the particular intensity should cause any reaction in the indifferent society, trauma of disability exposed in artworks can be seen as striking transgression shocking to awake and cure the society and individuals. The gap arising due to the shock allows for the “leak” of the subconscious, revealing its role in personal identity. At the same time slot in the image of society reveals the political and economic determinants controlling reception of all differences, as well as insufficiency of bringing the Other only to the subconscious. The “Frankfurt” critic of system, discourse and power of media returns here.

However, these interpretations (many of them can be applied to the examples of the Polish art mentioned already) show conclusively that disability is actually used by artists for kind of manipulation to proclaim the social and political criticism, provoke intense experiences, reflections and specific activities, cause an intense experience, cause the crisis in society and in self-consciousness.

Sometimes people with disabilities can “cynically” approve the manipulating use (or abuse) hoping for protection, improvement of the social situation, change of treatment. Perhaps, however, both their real attitude and artistic manipulations using disability could be most accurately commented by disabled themselves.

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<sup>12</sup> See: Abjection, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abjection> (22.12.2014); T. Kitliński, *Obcy jest w nas. Kochać według Julii Kristevej* [Stranger in Us. Love by Julia Kristeva], Aureus, Kraków 2001.

J. Kristeva, *Potęga obrzydzenia. Esej o wstręcie* [Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection], trans. M. Falski, WUJ, Kraków 2007; H. Foster, *Powrót realnego. Awangarda u schyłku XX wieku* [The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century], trans. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Universitas, Kraków 2010, p. 181–183.

<sup>13</sup> See: H. Foster, *Powrót realnego...*, p. 189.

<sup>14</sup> See: W. Iser, *Estetyka i anestetyka* [Aesthetics and Anaesthetics], [in:] *Postmodernizm. Antologia tekstów* [Postmodernism. An Anthology of Texts], ed. R. Nycz, Universitas, Kraków 1997.

Therefore deepening education in the field of criticism and theory of contemporary art may rely on the inclusion of people with disabilities in assessment of such an art.

Specifically, it means that the studies on the art concerning disability should investigate and compare the reaction of people with different disabilities, mostly physical, but also with mental or cross-disabilities to contemporary art related to disability with reactions of healthy, able-bodied people (but of similar age and similar level of education). The comparison of “styles of reception” in such a diverse groups should be an important element of the final conclusions of the studies.

### Participation in the Interpretation of the Disabled Themselves

One of the most important elements of such investigations would be a basic question: how do people with disabilities speak about contemporary art concerning disability (especially in connection with their need to express themselves by art). Do they want to do it? There is an hypothesis that perhaps not using the terms popular among art historians and theorists, such as art of “embarrassing”, “disgust”, “exclusion”, “stigmatization”<sup>15</sup>. Although respondents may appreciate artistic criticism to express their views and emotions. It would be also useful to define precisely the role of emotions and attitudes such as feeling of loneliness, resentment, blame and aggression and, on the other hand, demands of responsibility, sensitivity, prudence, patience and commitment. In addition, it is possible to use philosophical concepts to indicate how the experiences of disability, disability art and disability in arts affect the personal identity and how it is displayed in contemporary art.

By the way, it seems interesting how such works contain the aesthetic elements. Can the intensity of the experience (intended as a persuasive facilitator to show, remember, teach and affect change of themselves) turn out to be part of subtle art closing intellectual message in a poetic form? How does the subversive poetic really work? Perhaps the simple, traditional focus on poetics and its aesthetic and hence metaphysical possibilities offers the best way to discuss disability art? Level of metaphysics still allows to understand that characteristics generally understood

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<sup>15</sup> On philosophy in such a context see i. e.: M. Foucault, *Nadzorować i karać. Narodziny więzienia* [Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison], trans. T. Komendant, Spacja, Warszawa 1993; E. Goffman, *Stigma and Social Identity*, [in:] idem, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Prentice-Hall, 1963; M. Karaś, *Władza, wiedza i dyskurs a niepełnosprawność. Konstruowanie podmiotu „niepełnosprawnego” w kontekście filozofii Michela Foucaulta* [Power, Knowledge and Discourse towards Disability. Constructing a Disable Subject “disability” in Context of the Michel Foucault’s Philosophy], „Przegląd Prawniczy Ekonomiczny i Społeczny” 2/2013; S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. On art and disability in various contexts see i. e.: C. Barnes, G. Mercer, *Niepełnosprawność* [Disability], Sic!, Warszawa 2008; A. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, University of Chicago Press 1997; A. Kleinman, *Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition*, Basic Books 1989; A. Radley, *Works of Illness: Narrative, Picturing and the Social Response to Serious Disease*, Inkermen Press 2009.

as imperfections are not “imperfections” or disabilities<sup>16</sup>. These are rather functional “tools” to discover the invalidity of our “excellence”. In such a context critical disability art would not just liberate free able-bodied people from thinking of themselves as healthy who help others. Neither it would just show how to be the Other of another human being<sup>17</sup> through feeling of own imperfections. So it might be worth to look for the poetics leading to metaphysics?

Possible reflections on contemporary use of simple *decorum* and *bienséance* concepts, as well as searching for metaphysical elements in contemporary art could even modify the thinking of artists inspired by radical anaesthetic proposals.

Or “critical” works including “social” efforts do not, and cannot lead to similar reflections. And also described works are just shocking show breaking taboos and *decorum* in the arts? Such a context may discover and stress the tendency to manipulate people with disabilities to promote artists and their works. Also to manifest their political attitudes.

Perhaps such questions and hesitations show again the need for a proper method to develop, present, describe and explain the synthesis of aesthetic, persuasive and social elements in the difficult and controversial art? Methods for universal application to various audiences. Understandable not only for critics aware of reflection on “discourse”, “power” or “stigmatization”.

Anyway, the examination of people with disabilities reactions could significantly influence reflections about the possible impact of persuasive critical art on society and on individuals. What’s more, the own artistic attempts, experiences, expectations of people with disabilities may both: influence the reception of art by disabled and modify theoretical reception of contemporary trends. Especially that the relation between professional artist and disabled person often lacks balance and mutual understanding.

Such reflections can cause unambiguous question: to what extent does disability art use the disability in arts experiences?

## **Announcement of Inclusive Studies Hidden in the Interpretation**

Taking into account the creative ability of people with disabilities could significantly influence the socio-critical trends in contemporary art. It could also lead to the crucial conclusion concerning the real participation of people with disabilities in art. Namely, relational and pro-social challenge undertaken by contemporary art could be particularly developed in the form of “inclusion studies”. Not only could such

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<sup>16</sup> See i. e.: J. Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community. The Wit Lectures*, Paulist Press 1992; J. Vanier, *Made for Happiness. Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle*, House of Anansi Press, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> See i.e.: H.-G. Gadamer, *Friendship and self-knowledge. Reflections on the role of friendship in Greek ethic*, [in:] idem, *Hermeneutics, Religion and Ethics, Hermeneutics*, trans. J. Weinsheimer, Yale University Press 1999, p. 140.

studies deepen education in the field of criticism and theory of contemporary art, but they also would extend critical art and transform it into a social art integrating educational, artistic, critical and technical-professional activities. Perhaps the practical realization of this idea would be the most appropriate way to study the problem of art connected with disability. It might be also specific implementation of applied social arts postulate<sup>18</sup>.

Perhaps during the investigations within the practical studies people with disabilities would see works showing their condition as postulates designed to change the dominating discourse, additionally burdening and aggravating them and people who help them. However, they could consider such works as manipulating, parasitic and repulsive also for them, most interested in the situation. While the own design and creative participation in the arts and artistic education could really change the social and psychological situation. The more so that within the framework of “inclusive studies” people with disabilities could show their real condition and abilities. Abilities often higher than average because of accumulation and sublimation of energy used by people without disabilities in their daily regular efforts.

### Indications during the Educational Practice

Suggested need for an appropriate investigative method, associated with the concept of “inclusive studies” emerged particularly clearly during the studies *Design, Innovation, Society* (Fine Arts Department, Pedagogical University in Cracow, 2011–2014)<sup>19</sup>. Courses *Social Space Design. Resistance Movement; Infirmity and Exclusion, Design and MS; Ageing: Autonomy and Integration* lead students to recognize closer the reality of people with disabilities.

Cycle of courses in practical field allowed students to realize how much the treatment of disabilities is focused on approvingly-perpetuating complement of deficiency (corresponding with the “facilitation” or “assistencialismo” idea) instead of recognition deficits as natural and identifying alternatives to deficiency and disabilities.

The students were also asked the questions from the survey presented above. Questionnaire was completed with a clear question whether the artists really want to help people with disabilities, or on the contrary they rather manipulate the problem to achieve artistic or political goals. Students hesitated whether art should at all deal with the subject of disability (50%) indicating often consternation, embarrassment and aversion to remember presented images or limited fascination

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<sup>18</sup> See: A. Żmijewski, *Stosowane sztuki społeczne*, “Krytyka Polityczna” 2007, nr 11/12, s. 14–24; English version: <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/English/Applied-Social-Arts/menu-id-113.html> (access: 23.12.2014).

<sup>19</sup> *Wzornictwo, Innowacja, Społeczeństwo* [Design, Innovation, Society] – project under the Human Capital Operational Programme 1/PKOL/4.1.2/2011.

with described art. However, most of the students declared understanding (50% declared understanding of artists' motivation), compassion, thoughts about the condition of closest relatives (the vast majority) and exclusion. Awakening of religious or metaphysical sensitivity was rarely pointed. Almost everyone agreed that artists manipulate the disability problem (but not always students recognized that it means lack of the real commitment to improve the situation of people with disabilities).

In the practical tasks students designed mostly the devices which could be estimated as examples of "facilitation" attitude or "replenishment accepting shortages"<sup>20</sup>. However, it was directly suggested in the last course to use in works for the elderly and infirm people the interactive and intense, synaesthetic tendencies in contemporary art, represented for example by the works of James Turrell, *Bridget's Bardo (Ganzfeld Piece)*, 2009; Robert Cahen, *Suaire [Shroud]*, 1997; *Françoise en Memoire [In Memory of Françoise]*, 2007; Anette Messenger, *Casino*, 2005. The own understanding of art as a project of relational, interactive (perhaps also synesthetic and somaesthetic) event was also expected<sup>21</sup>. It was also the aim of the presentation of potentially inspiring works of David Small or Masaki Fujihata combining the touch experience of material and texture, the feeling of highlighted space and the communication using book to awake the memory. Finally, presentation of specific installations was intended as a proposal for the creation of artistic projects that stimulate the unused areas of the brain, softly intensify sensual experience and perhaps open memory this way. The basic idea was "to activate to restore the efficiency".

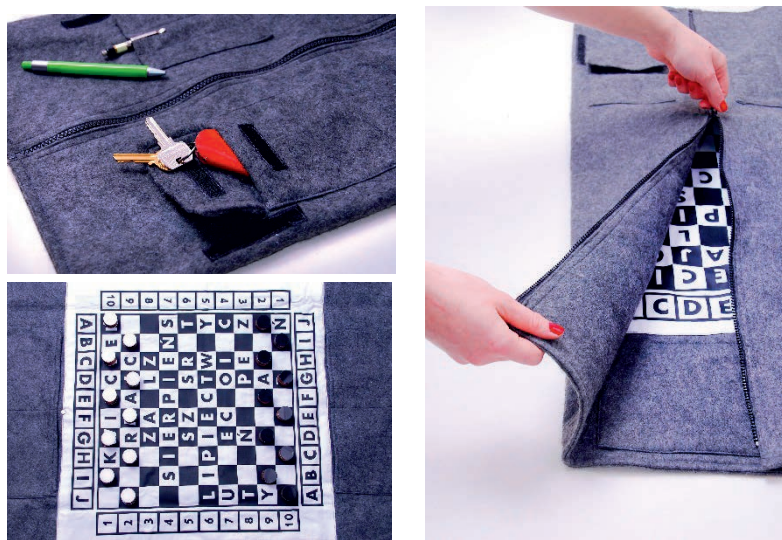
On the other hand the elaboration of projects and related reflections not only could lead towards the study of how socially engaged artists treat the problem of disability in their art, but also would include people with disabilities in the common perception of art and in creative activities. The actions of Paweł Althamer and Nowolipie group (presented also during the investigations using the questionnaire) were the examples.

Although there were interesting attempts to build a relationship based on the game, also the last projects (perhaps due to limited financial and time possibilities) proposed still common solutions to support by the replacement of deficiencies ("accepting" and "facilitating").

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<sup>20</sup> Commented negatively in the critical art described above, see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facilitation> (access: 09.02.2015).

<sup>21</sup> About interactive art see: N. Bourriard, *Relational Aesthetics...*; R.W. Kluszczyński, *Sztuka interaktywna. Od dzieła-instrumentu do interaktywnego spektaklu [Interactive Art. From Artwork-Instrument to Interactive Spectacle]*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2010; G. Coulter-Smith, *Deconstructing Installation Art. Fine Art and Media Art 1986-2006*, CASIAD Publishing 2006, <http://installationart.net/index.html> (access: 12.04.2014). About Somaesthetics see: R. Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2008. About synaesthetic studies see: M. Bal, *Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture*, "Journal of Visual Culture", April 2003, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 5-32.



Kaja Męclewska, Agnieszka Surma, Aleksandra Ochońska, Portable game for elder persons

Nevertheless, together with results of questionnaires and successful experiences of Arttherapy studies at the Art Institute of Pedagogical University<sup>22</sup>, it confirmed again the need to develop researches and experiences into a form of inclusive studies.

### Inclusive Studies as the Practical Realization of the Social Art

Consequently, many various roads led to the conclusion that not so much a sought for disability art testing methods (involving the development of the critical current, often threatening manipulation) seems to be appropriate course of action caused by critical art, but rather work on projects including and developing relational and common perception within the framework of integrating study. Co-education and cooperation would be the best way to become a subject instead of being object of facilitation programs (“kynikally” approving such forms of help).

Therefore, a proper response to the emergence of disability in the critical or social art and its increasing importance connected with the dynamic activities of people with disabilities should be the foundation of already advertised inclusive studies. I. e. as degree courses titled: *Communication, Design, Social Inclusion*.

<sup>22</sup> See: *Arteterapia – sztuki plastyczne*, [http://wydzialsztuki.up.krakow.pl/?page\\_id=245](http://wydzialsztuki.up.krakow.pl/?page_id=245) (22.12.2014). Also: I. Chalicka, *Twórczość w życiu osoby niepełnosprawnej* [The Artwork in the Life of a Disabled Person], <http://www.sosw3.edu.pl/2.pd>; P. Koppers, *Disability Culture and Community Performance: Find a Strange and Twisted Shape*, Houndmills and Palgrave, New York 2011; S. McNiff, *Art as Medicine*, Boston& London, Shambhala 1992; B.L. Moon, *Introduction to Art Therapy: Faith in the Product*, Charles C Thomas Publisher, 2008.

*Interdisciplinary Inclusive Studies* could be the practical implementation of Applied Social Arts idea. And the best illustration of co-operation in a real work as the relational co-existence of free subjects. The more so that interdisciplinary type of studies would have relational character, too.

Foremost, however, the social nature of such a project would cause the priority of practical demands. Thus the basic objective of the studies would be to prepare for the flexible work in a dynamic society and in a changing labour market (i.e. according to the chosen specialty as a journalist or assistant in the institutions connected with communication, culture and media, digital designer or art therapist). However, the practical skills would be extended on academic level by the context of an enlarged humanistic social and psychological knowledge. It should promote the ability to participate actively in contemporary social processes. Including art and especially studies on art concerning the disability problem. Investigations in context of a practical common effort could modify popular theoretical concepts. The more so that the separate objective of the study would be to build a sense of autonomy and responsibility of graduates in the real integration of people with disabilities, based on the joint implementation of educational and professional purposes. A disabled student, using specially adapted infrastructure and programs of study (i.e. work in small groups including task tandems) would acquire the competences needed in professional activities in the changing labour market and in social environments organized around career goals. The cooperation could also provide a better accessibility to the wide cultural space and social relations. What seems crucial to develop, study and estimate disability art and disability in the arts.

On the other hand, "regular", able-bodied students would similarly acquire the professional competences but also they would learn the specifics of working with people with disabilities, recognizing their problems and elaborating the ability to work in a group with people with special needs. These students could meet a variety of people with disabilities, recognize and estimate their work and cultural activities, understand the problems of exclusion, stigmatization, abuse, manipulation, traumatic limitations and abjection.

However, instead of facilitating efforts to access the sites and tools the co-operation would be a real co-existence and practical activation of the own efficiency of a subject (as th every student would stress the individual identity in the own activity).

Reluctance to implement such a project identified a number of problems. The most substantial was the argument that people with disabilities want to participate rather in the "normal" degree courses. The indications that the academic buildings are still not properly adjusted, such studies would be extremely expensive and there are no programs that could finance such an initiative. It seems, however, that the reluctance illustrated also the most important reason for exclusion – the fear of disability and the fear of "the Other".



Meanwhile, just an attempt to put into practice the idea of such inclusive studies could become truly social art (i.e. giving occupation, meaning, discovery and exploitation of abilities). In parallel, the study could allow to create, understand and properly comment the disability art and its reception (over reluctance or threat of manipulation). It seems, therefore, that degree courses titled *Communication, Design, Social Inclusion. Interdisciplinary Inclusive Studies* are the proper realization of the social art, that began with the study of critical art, but exceeded it in both practical and universal directions.

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## **O narodzeniu studiów włączeniowych z ducha sztuki krytycznej. Niepełnosprawność w sztuce jako inspiracja dla praktycznej realizacji idei stosowanych sztuk społecznych**

### **Streszczenie**

Tekst rozpoczyna omówienie przykładów polskich instalacji wideo, które poruszają temat niepełnosprawności oraz przedstawienie sposobów ich interpretowania. W związku z oceną najbardziej znanych sposobów koncepcji jako niewystarczających albo niewłaściwych, zaprezentowana zostaje ankieta, która pozwolić może na ocenę sposobu traktowania niepełnosprawności w sztuce współczesnej. Jednocześnie krytyka prowadzi do wniosku o potrzebie zapytania o reakcje na taką sztukę osób z niepełnosprawnościami, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem niepełnosprawnych aktywnych twórczo. Zapytanie taki upodmiotowiałoby osoby z niepełnosprawnościami i było próbą wykroczenia poza dyskursy determinujące widzenie niepełnosprawności przez osoby pełnosprawne.

Refleksje o tendencji upodmiotawiającej i o twórczości niepełnosprawnych prowadzą do ostatecznego wniosku o potrzebie powołania integracyjnych studiów włączeniowych. Komunikacja – Projektowanie – Włączenie społeczne, podczas których osoby z niepełnosprawnościami i pełnosprawne wspólnie pracowałyby nad zadaniami związanymi z komunikowaniem i projektowaniem w technikach cyfrowych. Połączenie wysiłku twórczego i praktycznej nauki zawodu byłoby realizacją koncepcji stosowanych sztuk społecznych a zarazem przykładem „współprzebywania wolnych podmiotów”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** stosowane sztuki społeczne, niepełnosprawność i sztuka, studia włączeniowe, sztuka krytyczna

## The Birth of Inclusive Studies from the Spirit of Critical Art. Disability in the Arts as the Inspiration for Practical Realization of Applied Social Arts Idea

### Abstract

The text is started with a discussion on the examples of Polish video installations, which tackle the issue of disability, followed by a description of the ways of its interpretation. In connection with assessing the most known means of conception as insufficient or inappropriate, the author presents a survey, which can allow for an assessment of the way of treating disability in modern art. At the same time the criticism leads to a conclusion that there is a need to ask people with disabilities about a reaction to this kind of art, especially including the disabled people who are creatively active. Such an enquiry would empower people with disabilities and was an attempt to reach beyond discourses of perceiving disabilities by non-disabled people.

The reflection on the empowering tendencies and creativity of disabled people lead to the final conclusion on the need to create the integrative inclusive studies Communication - Project - Social Inclusion, during the course of which people with disabilities would work together with non-disabled people on the tasks connected with communicating and projecting in digital technologies. Connecting the creative effort and practical profession learning would realize the concept of Applied social arts and also an example of "coexistence of free subjects".

**Key Words:** Applied Social Arts, Disability in the Arts, Inclusive Studies, Critical Art

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