

Karol Pałka

*Odmieńcy [Misfits]*

Doctoral thesis - abstract

Faculty of Graphic Arts

Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków

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Thesis adviser

dr hab. Agata Pankiewicz, Professor of the Academy of Fine Arts

Reviewers

prof. dr hab. Andrzej Sapija

prof. Andrzej Tobis

In the *Odmieńcy [Misfits]* thesis, I address the subject of broadly understood otherness. The work combines themes from art, sociology and the author's own practical background in ethnography. I ask questions about the meaning of otherness. What is otherness? Where does it position itself in relation to the category of normality? Does it fulfil a positive function? Does the concept of otherness prove itself to work in artistic practice?

To find out, I explore how the image of misfits in art has evolved over the centuries. I make the point that both high culture and popular culture are failing in the discourse on otherness, creating a lot of stereotypes, generalising and succumbing to prejudice and fear. There is not much fondness for the misfits.

In an attempt to define otherness, I focus on selected sociological theories that to this day evoke many doubts and emotions. Finally, I question the validity of the use of the term "misfit" in visual arts and create my own category of "invisible person". I am referring to people of low social standing who break with certain standards but are not stigmatised or socially excluded only because they remain "unnoticed". We do not notice them because there are strong defence mechanisms at work, including fear of being shocked, perceptual laziness and the comfort of ignorance.

In the next part, I quote the transcript of a conversation with one of the characters of my film about spirituality. In this context, I recall the threads of Slavic mythology functioning in our cultural area, known from many scientific studies, and compare them with what I heard in the interview. It turns out that many Slavic myths – in a somewhat modernised form – are still present in rural Poland.

In the last part, I describe my own artistic practice – a photography exhibition I organised for one of the characters of the film – and reflect on what made it special. Finally, I focus on myself and the film that was created. This is the most personal part of the thesis, where I analyse what the process of making a documentary film is for me. I describe the temptations and doubts faced by documentary filmmakers. I also ponder on the reasons for the presence of metaphysical themes in documentary filmmaking and explore the sources behind the artist's decision to create a given work.

The *Odmieńcy. Bukolika [Misfits. A bucolic]* documentary I made tells the story of 65-year-old Danuta and her 35-year-old daughter Basia. The women live on the outskirts of a small village. At the beginning, the space of interaction with the characters is limited only to the backyard of their house. We look at them with distrust and wonder. The living conditions of the women are shockingly tough. What frightens us at first, slowly turns out to be something beautiful. Their lives are intertwined with the rhythms of nature, the elements, the spirits, and all the things primal. In one scene, we witness the *Dance of Spring*. From a withdrawn, distrustful person Basia transforms into a happy, laughing girl, dancing carefree among the fields. From that moment on we take part in the mystery of the secrets of time and the forces of nature.

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