

# PHD DISSERTATION SUMMARY

## **Visual forms of narration in the documentary film**

### ***The Signs (Znaki)* dir. Wojciech Klimala**

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This dissertation presents and discusses the research and the analysis of the documentary film *The Signs (Znaki, 2018)* directed by Wojciech Klimala. The events portrayed in the film are a story of a deaf woman, Iwona Cichosz, who invites us into her world of silence.

The heroine of the film is not a typical member of the Deaf community, as her genetically challenged hearing does not limit her everyday life. Despite her disability, she seems to possess a sort of a divine power which allows her to achieve the most daring goals. The woman quickly became a role model for her community in Poland and across the globe. As I was observing the protagonist, I got the impression that she had a set of additional, highly developed senses that make her absolutely unique.

There was a sense of a dramatic tension within the protagonist. On the one hand, she was fighting for recognition but, on the other hand, she was also struggling with her fame. This resulted in an inner conflict and allowed us to create a film about both the disability and the life of a celebrity.

The dissertation begins with a general description of the Deaf community, providing the readers and the viewers with information necessary to understand the actions and motivations of the protagonist, and bringing them closer to a world whose beauty they have not yet experienced on this scale. Then I move on to describe the mechanisms of auditory perception of the hearing in the contexts of their dysfunction in deaf people. I describe both the education system and the culture of the Deaf.

In the following chapter, I discuss the origins of the idea for the film *The Signs (Znaki)*, my first linguistic and communicative confrontation with the future protagonist of the film.

I base my research on the observations of the protagonist's behavior in her everyday life and the conversations with her about her participation in the documentary. I share my conclusions arising from the documentation prepared for the film.

Moving on to the essence of the dissertation, I carry out a detailed analysis of various levels of *The Signs*, focusing on three crucial ones – the narrative, visual, and sound layers.

In my analysis, I talk about the search for the adequate visual form of the film whose protagonists use sign language – a film without voice over or dialogues, based solely on signs.

Then, I pose the fundamental questions. How to tell such a story? How to compose the images, so that the camera would not miss anything meaningful?

My goal is to present an in-depth analysis of this and other subjects, from the general idea for the film, through pre-production and shooting, to final editing, post-production, and the official premiere of the film.

The research is based mostly on direct contacts with the protagonist of the film, the survey of family archives, documentation, later partially used in the film, the search for relevant forms of visual narration, and on compiling the cinematographer's statement and its confrontation with the actual style of cinematography used.

I present the conclusions from the research conducted, focusing on both the use of cinematic means of expression in creating the dramaturgy of the film, and the visual narration in the context of working with a deaf protagonist.

I search some existing documentary films for cinematic inspirations which will help me set my own artistic direction in the making of *The Signs*.

I am convinced that *The Signs* are original in terms of dramaturgy and unique aesthetically, but the film is also quite controversial. It shows the behind-the-scenes drama of a star being born and her abrupt fall from fame. I believe its great additional strength lies in allowing the hearing audiences to identify with the Deaf community and in presenting their world in an original way, never before seen in a documentary film.