

Abstract

The doctoral dissertation entitled *A Man in Peril – The Kafkaesque Josef K. in Documentary Film* constitutes a written annex to the documentary film *Against the Verdicts*, devoted to one of the most dramatic legal cases in post-1989 Poland — the wrongful conviction of Arkadiusz Kraska, sentenced to life imprisonment.

This work is an interdisciplinary study that combines film, literary, and legal analysis, examining contemporary mechanisms of institutional oppression through the lens of Josef K., the protagonist of Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*.

The aim of the dissertation is to demonstrate how documentary cinema can become an important tool for critiquing the justice system and a medium of resistance against soulless, bureaucratic procedures that alienate the individual and deprive him of agency and subjectivity.

The case studies include an original analysis of the film *Against the Verdicts* alongside interpretations of selected works by Polish documentary filmmakers: Maciej Drygas (*Hear My Cry*), Wojciech Wiszniewski (*The Carpenter*, *The Primer*), and Krzysztof Kieślowski (*The Office*, *Refrain*, *Curriculum Vitae*). These films are juxtaposed with the Kafkaesque literary model, exploring shared motifs such as the absurdity of accusation, powerlessness in the face of anonymous authority, the dehumanization of the individual, and the oppressive role of bureaucracy.

The dissertation also examines expressive means characteristic of both creative and investigative documentary forms, with particular emphasis on the role of archival materials, visual and sound narration, and symbolically charged editing in constructing a critical message.

A special place in the narrative is given to a VHS tape discovered years later, containing a recording of the crime. This objective video footage from a petrol station's surveillance camera is used in the film as a symbol of a hidden truth — one that was and continues to be suppressed by the official institutional discourse.

The dissertation shows that contemporary documentary film can serve not only as testimony, but also as a form of artistic and ethical protest against institutional oppression. Through the analysis of Arkadiusz Kraska's case and references to the literary and cinematic archetype of Josef K., the study argues that the figure of the Kafkaesque protagonist remains a valid model for describing the individual's experience in the absurd labyrinth of modern state institutions.