

***Odmieńcy*. Performances of otherness in Polish transition culture**

The aim of the project is to investigate how the Others appear and act in Polish transition culture. In times of radical social, political, and cultural change, new models of identity emerge from existing ones, which not only require new mechanisms of manifestation, new gestures, and behaviors - I call them performances - but also new reactions of the community and even new models of being together. By examining artistic practices - art, literature, theater, film, and the documentation of those artistic activities that can be called ephemeral, looking at them as traces and scenarios of social action, I want to investigate how otherness was performed in times of transition. An important assumption of the research is based on the observation that in the transition culture different kinds of otherness are not yet treated as identities and included in the framework of what we today call identity politics, the idea that it is possible to trace the emergence of otherness before it is named and included in the figures we know today: the Jew, the gay, the woman, the Black, etc. I refer to this transformative otherness as *odmienność*. What is striking is that the word *Odmieniec* translates into English as Queer (tht is used in its original form in Polish scholarship and art). It appears in Polish humanist reflection as early as 1982 in the famous volume edited by Maria Janion and Zbigniew Majchrowski entitled *Odmieńcy* to denote precisely that otherness which today could be described as pre-queer. Following this line of thought, I would like to examine how these concepts overlap, how they intersect and diverge, seeing in this process the influence of the transition culture.

The very notion of transition culture is taken from the vocabulary of Western transition studies, which examines the process of transition from an authoritarian system to democracy from the perspective of political, economic, market and, above all, institutional change. By treating transition culture as a cultural formation, authors such as Michael D. Kennedy have tried to point out the tension between Western models providing the goals of transition and their local actualization, realization, and even transgression or rejection. This perspective, transposed to cultural studies, seems very useful for the study of social change as registered by art and artistic practices. Precisely as a cultural formation, a culture of transformation, it reveals certain recurrent scenarios and strategies for negotiating meaning between pattern and local situation or need.

In exploring otherness as performance rather than as figure, I will focus on just such recurrent scenarios archived or triggered by artistic practices. I will explore what gestures, acts, choreographies, and spectacles of otherness have been captured in the archives of the wider arts, and what audience reactions have given them meaning and significance. In this way, I hope to capture the process of the emergence of *Odmieniec* in its changing dynamics, avoiding the uniformity and seeming coherence that otherness imparts to the figures. Since the transition culture is still a living reference point for contemporary cultural practices and the discourse of otherness remains at the center of social attention, the project seems to me especially important and significant not only academically but also socially.

Since the aim of the project is also to reflect on the category of *Odmieniec* and to use it as a methodological and theoretical key to transformative otherness, the project carries a comparative potential and has a chance to become an important addition to global studies on otherness.

The project will result in an academic monograph and a series of articles presenting various performative strategies of producing otherness in Polish transition culture, along with a reflection on the models of community that emerge from the clash with *Odmieniec*, before the perspective of identity politics and the identity-creating power of exclusion appears.