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Postmemory in Popular Culture Based on Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz and Krystian Rosenberg's Graphic Novel "Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna"

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(Gniezno)

**POSTMEMORY IN POPULAR CULTURE BASED ON KRZYSZTOF
GAWRONKIEWICZ AND KRYSZTIAN ROSENBERG'S GRAPHIC
NOVEL "ACHTUNG ZELIG! DRUGA WOJNA"**

Abstract

The article addresses the issue of diverse contemporary manifestations of postmemory. Although works of literature, graphic arts, architecture and sculpture, belonging to the so-called high art culture, have already been analysed with respect to post memory and post-traumatic culture, the domain of popular culture remains practically excluded from such analyses. Meanwhile, it is precisely popular culture that has a considerable impact on the attitudes and views of the people living today. The omnipresence of pop-culture, the pressure it exerts prompts re-evaluation of entire culture, not only its entertainment-related domains. Post-traumatic culture is largely shaped within and through popular culture, which is evinced in the popularity of the graphic story entitled "Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna" by Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz (art) and Krystian Rosenberg (story), displaying numerous traits defined as postmemory. A detailed analysis of the comic book permits the author to reveal those qualities.

Key words

postmemory, post-traumatic culture, popular culture, comic book

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF POSTMEMORY

The term postmemory was coined by Marianne Hirsch in her work “Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory” as a category in the description of the mental state of the children of Holocaust victims¹. The researcher described the attributes of individuals who were raised in the shadow of stories about the events that occurred before they were even born. Their own memories had to make way for the histories of their grandparents or parents which were formed in traumatic circumstances. Soon afterwards, however, the term postmemory began to be used to describe situations that go beyond those of the children of Holocaust victims to denote, for instance, the memory borrowed or outright claimed by people “remembering” events they did not participate in. There is the known case of the Swiss Benjamin Wilkomirski who in 1995 published the book “Bruchstücke” in which he described his supposed experiences from childhood when he was a prisoner at a concentration camp². A few years after the publication of this “autobiographical” book it was revealed that the author’s memories were actually made up³. Aside from this form of postmemory where one claims as one’s own the suffering of another individual’s, one can identify another form, for example the various attempts at falsifications leading to a personalized view of the past, aimed at creating a new mythological interpretation of the past, as in Steven Spielberg’s “Schindler’s List” (1993), Roberto Benigni’s “Life is Beautiful” (1997), or Quentin Tarantino’s recent “Inglourious Basterds” (2009).

Postmemory goes beyond the circle of direct participants of traumatic experiences or the experiences of their closest family members. It is a memory repeated and borrowed, acquiring the aspect of myth-creation, embracing modern culture in which the voice and testimony of the victims are replaced by the monumentalism and fetishism of the past. This phenomenon is written into the scope of “post-traumatic culture” which spread in the 1980s as a reaction to the “culture of silence” (the Holocaust as the unsaid, as emptiness, as the inability to create poetry after Auschwitz) which dominated at that time⁴.

¹M. Firsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Cambridge 1997, p. 22.

²B. Wilkomirski, *Bruchstücke. Aus einer Kindheit 1939–1948*, Frankfurt 1995.

³J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Rzeczy mgliste. Eseje i studia*, Sejny 2004, p. 98.

⁴D. La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore–London 2001; E. Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne. Refleksja o przeszłości w nowej humanistyce*, Poznań 2006, p. 195–220.

Inasmuch as literal, visual, architectural and sculptural works belonging to so-called high art have been repeatedly analyzed from the perspective of postmemory phenomena and of post-traumatic culture, the genre of popular culture remains excluded from analytical discourse (films are an exception, probably due to the visual narrative of the media and the social impact that comes with it.) Meanwhile it is popular culture that, to a considerable degree, shapes the figures and opinions of people who live today. The omnipresence of pop culture and the influence it has bears highly on the assessment of the whole culture, not strictly limited to the sphere of entertainment it belongs to. The post-traumatic culture is shaped to a considerable degree in and through popular culture, which is reflected by the popularity of the graphic novel “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” (“Attention Zelig! The Second War”) by Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz (graphics) and Krystian Rosenberg (text)⁵, points to the many forms of the idea of postmemory.

THE RECOVERY OF THAT WHICH WAS REPRESSED

The graphic novel “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” was published in 2004 by Zin Zin Press. What makes this work exceptional is the specifics of its theme and the method of its presentation. The work revolves around the theme of anti-Semitism, fascism and genocide — history which has already been overwhelmingly translated, altered even, through cultural (that is, through literature, art and film) representation. We are faced here with a graphic novel which presents history as something that has passed through the prism of the culture of media. Proof of this are the literary, artistic and commercial inspirations of Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg — inspirations whose influence can be seen in the content and graphic form of “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna”. In an interview in the fall of 2003, Gawronkiewicz said that one of the inspirations for the creation of the graphic novel was a book, a memoir of a woman, who, along with her daughter, tried to get through a patrol of German soldiers. Memories of the war are presented in a modern commercial showing a father and son walking hand-in-hand. The pictures from that advertisement were re-drawn by Rosenberg, resulting in the father taking on a monstrous form and the son resembling an amphibian. Since the woman whose memoirs Gawronkiewicz

⁵K. Gawronkiewicz, K. Rosenberg, *Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna*, Warszawa 2004.

read was a Jewess, the graphic artist decided that the heroes of his new comic book would likewise be Jews⁶. This narrative reveals the aspects of postmemory — that is, a story inspired by the memories of others as well as memories borrowed by the media. It can be deemed symptomatic that Gawronkiewicz harked back to myth-creating narrative-fantasies about the Second World War popularized in Polish television series such as “Czterej pancerni i pies” (Four Tankers and a Dog) and “Stawka większa niż życie”, about the exploits of Polish double agent Captain Hans Kloss. In this way we enter into the vision of war that is unreal, though it has to be made clear that in “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” one is not dealing with a conscious falsification of the past but rather its modernification in the present: the mediated, the deformed and the re-drawn form of postmemory.

The action of the comic book is set at the beginning of World War II, in German-occupied Poland, and its heroes are two Jews (a father and his son), who were detained by a patrol of German soldiers. This work does not take the form of a memoir (as it does in the graphic novel “Maus” by Art Spiegelman). It was created by people who were born many years after the war, and the heroes are fictional characters. The authors, however, tell the story as if it were a recollection of a Jew who lived through the Second World War. This form in itself contains the traits of borrowed memory. On the first page of the comic book, Zelig (the title character) utters the words: “I am now old and through all these years I have not for a single moment regretted the choice that I made, though the history of my nation is an unending journey, a stream of suffering and tears...”⁷. The reader-viewer is under the impression that in a moment they will hear the personal story of a witness and participant of tragic events from decades past. In fact, what we have here is something else — a personal element of myth creation on the theme of Holocaust trauma feeding on — which is characteristic for postmemory — the obsession over an open wound. From this point of view, the quote cited above — “the history of my nation is an unending journey, a stream of suffering and tears...”⁸ — is characteristic. In this way we draw out the context in which we determine the complexity of the shared

⁶M. Herman, *Wizja wojny nieprawdziwej — o powstaniu komiksu “Achtung Zelig! i przyszłości rozmawiamy z Krzysztofem Gawronkiewiczem*, <http://www.esensja.pl/komiks/wywiady/tekst.html?id=664&strona=1> (23.01.2011).

⁷K. Gawronkiewicz, K. Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁸*Ibidem*.

responsibility of Europeans for the Holocaust crimes, though in varying degrees of awareness and diversely accentuated. This is revealed in the analysis of the stories of the old Zelig: “A man does not choose his nation; it is the nation that chooses the man. One is not born — let’s say — a Swiss. What can we do? It is a higher power”⁹. The anonymous Swiss referred to by the protagonist can be interpreted as an allusion to the formal neutrality of Switzerland during World War II, but also, in a wider sense, as an allusion to the apathy of many Europeans to the fates of Jews during the war. This open wound, the feeling of mental discomfort towards the victims, has taken on various forms in post-traumatic culture which I will try to analyze under the category of kitsch.

KITSCH AS AN (UN)ETHICAL CATEGORY

Hermann Broch in the essay “Several remarks on kitsch and other essays” (“Einige Bemerkungen zum Problem des Kitsches”) explained that the essence of kitsch is mistaking the ethical for the aesthetic. Kitsch works beautifully, but not well. It transforms human life into a work of neurosis, imposing an unreal convention upon reality¹⁰. Lisa Saltzman attempts to follow this path to a certain degree in the article “Awangarda i kicz raz jeszcze. O etyce reprezentacji” (“Avant-Garde and Kitsch” Revisited: On the Ethics of Representation) she notes that the issue of presenting the Holocaust in modern popular culture is just as much aesthetic as ethical. According to Saltzman, popular culture, in opening up to the aesthetics of kitsch, has abandoned all pretense to nobility and has turned towards a studied, refined and ironic distance. From her point of view “Kitsch paired with the presentation of history, the history of fascism, Holocaust and genocide makes that history too understandable, familiar and ready for consumption”¹¹. From this perspective, the graphic novel “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” appears as a work of kitsch, though from the aesthetic point of view the work has been planned to the most minute detail (including the graphic errata). It is through its neurosis that kitsch seems dangerous

⁹Ibidem.

¹⁰H. Broch, *Kilka uwag o kiczu i inne eseje*, Warszawa 1998, s. 114–115.

¹¹L. Saltzman, *Awangarda i kicz raz jeszcze. O etyce reprezentacji*, transl. by K. Bojarska, *Literatura na Świecie* 1–2, 2004, p. 204 (The first press: “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” Revisited: On the Ethics of Representation, [in:] N.L. Kleeblatt (ed.), *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery / Recent Art*, New York–New Brunswick 2002, p. 53–64).

or — according to the criteria defined by Borch — bad and false; it is not art. The pop cultural representation of the Holocaust unmasks the kitsch used in fascist aesthetics, but at the same time gets involved in a game with kitsch and regards it as an artistic strategy, engendering a feeling of extreme discomfort among the readers. The proposition put forward by the authors of “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” depends on this dialectics as well, which is evidenced by the numerous elements of the “redemptive kitsch” which I will try to reveal. By redemptive kitsch I mean the representation which transforms traumatic experience into fictional melodrama or which gives historic catastrophes a cathartic dimension and, most importantly, where the pain is replaced by the pleasure of the constant obsessing over an open wound. The analysis of several frames and scenes from the work of Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg will show that such an understanding of redemptive kitsch most definitely belongs to the formation of postmemory.

THE IMAGE OF JEWS AS CREATURES OF UNIDENTIFIABLE PHYSIOLOGY

The lead characters who were detained by the German soldiers are represented as figures of vague physiology: they do not look human nor do they remind one of any other species of animal. While the head of one of the protagonists resembles that of a frog's, his back is anthropomorphic, which does not allow for a definite identification with any type of animal. On the other hand, the second protagonist reminds one more of the alien in Ridley Scott's 1979 science fiction film “Aliens” than of any earthly creature. This artistic process could be interpreted as a travesty of the fascist ideology in which the Jewish people are defined as subhuman, but at the same time failing to explain what ‘subhuman’ means. The negative connotation of ‘subhuman’ does not exclude the aspect of ‘human.’ Presented as an opposing pair of asymmetric ideas, “human” and “subhuman” do not provide any definite definition of what is “subhuman.” Rather, it is an empty slogan used for ideological aims and to perpetuate the position of Nazi groups holding power from the turn of the 1930s to the 1940s. The semantic emptiness of this term was recognized by the authors of “Achtung Zelig!” and presented in graphic form, as in the image of the figures who could not be identified as any type of species. The outer appearance of Zelig and his father could be defined as grotesque, terrifying and monstrous precisely because they do not fit the Nazi's ideal specimen of the pure, superior race.

One can follow this premise further with Theodor Adorno. In “Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments” the philosopher noted that the social scheme of perception among anti-Semites was probably formed in such a way that they do not perceive Jews as humans at all¹². From this perspective the appearance of the heroes of the comic book is seen as a travesty of this “pathological projection.” Their monstrous appearance could be a reflection of the firmly fixed European perception of Others in general (Other in terms of race, religion and traditions), which is magnified in the public imagination about Jews as Others threatening their homestead. Jews are perceived as “Others” — a separate social group with different traditions and religion. But in a state of danger — real or imagined — their Otherness becomes a source of threat and, in the eyes of their neighbors, they become menacing Aliens based on arbitrarily accepted assumptions of the identified and the excluded. In “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” this message is enhanced in the scene where Zelig was identified as a Jew by a German officer (in the strange guise of a dwarf-sorcerer). Zelig wonders how the dwarf recognized his ethnic background. In the scene, Zelig’s bewilderment is graphically punctuated not by a question mark but with a measuring device — a craniometer (an instrument for measuring the cranium or skull). This measuring device could be seen as a symbol of the questionable racial-anthropological research conducted by Nazis which aimed to prove the superiority of the Aryan race over other races. This way of presenting the protagonists, however, contains a hidden danger inasmuch as the monstrous form of the Jews confirms — through repetition and exaggeration — the bias against Jews as inhuman or subhuman. The basic question which keeps on returning in the context of these presentations is “Is this human?” and the mere formulation of this question in relation to the historical awareness of the mass murders of Jews on the basis of their inhuman (subhuman) ontological status is dangerous. One can assume that the goal of Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg is exposing the fascist rhetoric and aesthetics which would discredit the non-human status of Jews. Instead, however, one only gets the impression of their mutilation, as elements of Nazi ideology enter into the repertoire of pop cultural representations of war trauma. This is one of the reasons why we can include this graphic novel among postmemory formations.

¹²M. Horkeimer, T. Adorno, *Dialektyka oświecenia*, transl. by M. Łukasiewicz, Warszawa 1994.

A DWARF HUNTING FOR CATS

Another reason why “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” should be deemed as belonging to the formation of postmemory is its technique of presenting signs. The reader-viewer who has to make the effort of deciphering the overlapping and ill-fitting pieces of the puzzle would rather focus on the inter-textual and contextual games which the authors propose. In this game the problem of anti-Semitism and the oppression of Jews before the Second World War and during the war, Holocaust takes back seat, or rather it becomes neutralized, providing the readers first and foremost the pleasure of recognizing and then solving the puzzle.

One of the most intriguing characters in the graphic novel is the dwarf Emil who leads the German patrol. He is not seen in a uniform (as the other soldiers) but in a long, fur-lined coat and peaked cap with a swastika emblazoned on it. Portraying the patrol leader as a dwarf could be interpreted as a satirical answer to the propagandist image of Aryans from the 1930s and 1940s: a person of athletic build, with a distinct face and sharply defined features. The swastika ornament on the cap forces the reader to place the character in a fictional, even fantastic, context and at the same time in a non-fictional historical one. The dwarf dressed as a fairy-tale sorcerer appears as a lord of life and death of immense powers, corresponding to the exceptional privileges and authority of the members of the SA and the SS. In this context the swastika on the dwarf's cap is a somewhat weak substitute for the German officer's uniform, nevertheless stressing affiliation with a specific movement and ideology.

In analyzing this character and its role in this narrative about oppressed Jews one can however follow another trail in the storyline. In Western Europe of the Middle Ages, the peaked, yellow caps were negative ways of distinguishing Jews (later it was the Star of David in the same color)¹³. While the swastika today is associated with the ideologies of the fascist movement, it was previously known in many cultures as a symbol of good fortune, including Judaism. This symbol was discovered in Palestinian synagogues built 2000 years ago. In this context the image of the peaked cap with the swastika worn by the patrol commander could be interpreted as an indication of the perennial deprecation of Jews, which reached its peak in the fascist plan of The Final Solution.

¹³L. Poliakov, *Historia antysemityzmu*, transl. by A. Rasińska-Bóbr, O. Hedemann, Kraków 2008.

One can also consider a completely different interpretation — the comic appearance and bizarre outfit of the graphic novel's heroes have the aim of debunking assorted Nazi symbols, their religion and their followers, an interpretation which finds support in the part of the narrative where we find out that the patrol commander used to be a circus clown. In this way the seriousness (or even nobility, understood as a figure of ethical-aesthetic avant-garde) makes way for a studied and at the same time ironic distance. The reader-viewer, in focusing primarily on the myriad of possibilities in interpreting each specific scene, treats the comic book as a labyrinth-puzzle, which, when solved, can bring immense pleasure and in the process pushes the problem of Nazi ideology and its symbols into the background.

Another reason which makes one incline to the conclusion that “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” belongs to the formation of postmemory is the method of telling the story of the two Jews as if it was a story about something else. According to the classic definition, trauma causes the splintering of effect (experience) and representation (cognitive senses). A person in this state feels something that could not be described and in this state of numbness attempts to explain something which he cannot feel¹⁴. As a consequence the presentation becomes cut off from reality and made into a sublime (in a psychological sense) vestige of something else. In the work of Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg this is revealed in the story about hunting for cats. The animals caught by the soldiers are thrown into a car trailer and taken to an unknown place. The cat hunt brings to mind the hunt for Jews organized by the Nazis, and their eventual transport to concentration and death camps. In the comic book “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” there is a prominent frame showing the protagonists standing in front of a car trailer in which many animals, including two Jews, had already been caged, as if the authors could not point out nearly often enough to the parallel fates of the cats caught by the so-called dog-catchers and the fates of the Jews captured by the fascists. From a psychoanalytical perspective the story about hunting for cats could be interpreted as a defense mechanism, an attempt to represent that which one has not personally experienced and that which in no way could be understood with the aid of the cognitive senses. Here we come to the most important quest: that of resolving the traumas of the Holocaust in “Achtung Zelig” as a record of dreams written down directly after waking.

¹⁴J. Tokarska-Bakir, op. cit., p. 102.

THE HOLOCAUST AS A NIGHTMARE

In reviews of Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg's graphic novel, attention was called to the surreal aesthetics of the work without developing the theme further¹⁵. One therefore needs to specify that comparing the images of the work concerned to the methods used in surrealism makes sense mainly in referring to the oneiristic path of this direction and the so-called paranoiac-critical methods of Salvador Dali, based on the method of analyzing dreams¹⁶. In this type of paranoiac-critical perspective the graphic novel "Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna" presents itself as an artistic text representing the past. In the work, imaginary visions are understood (by surrealists) as lucid dreams, half-conscious apparitions, sleeping dreams, and in certain situations as hallucinatory illusions, appearing as a fusion of that which is imagined and that which is real: protagonists of fantastical appearance coexisting with heroes portrayed realistically. Combining characters that look real with fantastic-looking ones, or putting people, animals and things that actually exist in surprising situations functions here as an artistic record of dreams written down right after waking up, as some surrealists have done. In this sense "Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna" could be interpreted in the category of experiments done on one's self (on one's own consciousness and subconscious) but as a creative process and even as a perception of that which in artistic avant-garde understanding from the beginning of the 20th century was treated as true hallucinations (Hyppolyte Taine, and after him Andre Breton, claimed that "perception is true hallucination")¹⁷.

From the constructive point of view, we are dealing in the graphic novel with something in the form of a box-within-a box narrative (a story-within-a-story narrative) — the story of Zelig and his father is dreamed, and then re-told, by Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg, and in their dreams the heroes dream their own dreams. The young Zelig and the cats trapped in the car trailer dream of door locks with key holes. One can also see the character of the boy floating in the air and he "floats" through the open door. The message is clear: Zelig dreams of escaping from the place in which he is confined. In accordance with the typology of Sigmunt Freud, we are dealing here with a clear and logical waking dream, which are had most often by children. According to psychoa-

¹⁵W. Orliński, Surrealistycznie o Holocauście, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 3rd-4th 2004.

¹⁶R. Passeron, *Encyklopedia surrealizmu*, transl. by K. Janicka, Warszawa 1993, p. 63-78.

¹⁷*Ibidem*, p. 66.

analysis these types of dreams are a “reaction to daily experiences which have left traces of resentment, yearning and unfulfilled wishes. Sleeping dreams bring about the direct and unmasked fulfillment of these wishes”¹⁸. Following this track we can say that the sleeping dreams of Zelig about “floating” through the door constitutes a reaction to his situation: escaping from the Germans, being captured by the patrol, imprisoned in the car trailer.

Zelig’s father, on the other hand, has nightmares of being trapped in a tram where he is surrounded by kind-looking and solicitous old folk, grannies and women with children who are waiting for him to give up his seat for them. Citing Freud, one can say that these sleeping dreams aim to replace the distorted forms of the dream content by evoking other substitute objects¹⁹. In interpreting this dream one can relate the images surrounding the hero in the tram to the situation of Jews in Nazi Germany, and later in occupied Poland, when they were denied their rights to settlement or to hold office, when their property was confiscated, or their sacred relics destroyed. The network of exclusion and restrictive behavior towards this nation also involved regulations on travelling by tram, where Jews were obliged to give up their seats to Germans. One can surmise that the suppressed sleeping dreams of the protagonists of “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” refer specifically to the manifold ways of humiliating Jews.

In the dreams of the authors (but not in the dreams of the two main characters), the intricate, institutionalized mechanism of oppression is symbolized in the graphic novel by the aforementioned patrol commander dressed as a sorcerer. The behavior of this character, who is full of complexes but is kind and courteous and at the same time fully dedicated to the task of catching cats and Jews he is entrusted, brings to mind the numerous discussions among historians, philosophers and publicists on the topic of the moral responsibility of ordinary people — fathers and sons — who in military ranks became murderers. One of the characters in the graphic novel puts it this way: “I am only following orders”²⁰, echoing the defense of many of the accused in the Nuremberg trials in 1945–1949. In this sense the work of Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg is a story of a nightmare which happened for real.

¹⁸S. Freud, *Wstęp do psychoanalizy*, transl. by S. Kempnerówna, W. Zaniewicki, Warszawa 1984, p. 141.

¹⁹*Ibidem*, p. 130.

²⁰K. Gawronkiewicz, K. Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The idea and process of creating the graphic novel revealed by Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg in the interview referred to in the beginning of this article and particularly through the analysis conducted on specific frames and scenes of the work allows one to assert that “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” exhibits many attributes of postmemory.

Firstly, the graphic novel reveals traits of repeated, borrowed memory; the authors were not direct participants of the events presented in the narrative (due in one part to their age), and the story they presented was largely presented through the cultural media such as: memoirs, war films, advertisements.

Secondly, the authors used elements of fascist rhetoric and its visual representation, for instance as when the main characters were introduced as non-humans. While this technique most probably had the goal — employing shock — of undermining fascist ideology showing Jews as not being a part of the human race, the overuse of such images in the context of the knowledge about the murders committed against this nation supporting its nonhuman ontological status also signifies its mutilation. Introducing Nazi forms of representing Jewish people into the repertoire of iconography of popular culture can also serve to confirm the stereotypes, familiarizing recipients with the perception of Jews as subhuman, thus the act of presentation in itself is part of the process of the cultural acceptance of the problem of anti-Semitism.

Thirdly, in the graphic novel of Gawronkiewicz and Rosenberg the previous stance of noble silence made way for the studied and refined aesthetics and ironic distance which at times get lost in its superficial pastiche, a trait belonging to posttraumatic culture. The work is based on the postmodern understanding of kitsch as part of a “body of work” and as an integral part of the artistic message. In the comic book this is revealed as the cited, recalled, overdrawn and even a surreal set of signs. The work induces one to find contextual and inter-textual references providing receivers of the message first and foremost with the pleasure of the possibility of multiple interpretations and the discovery of varied meanings in the set of signs, and this — as I pointed out in the beginning — belongs to the traits of postmemory.

Fourthly, the story told in the graphic novel gives the impression of a record of dreams, which was enhanced through the artistic form of the work, in which realism is fused with fantastic realism. With the authors of “Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” placing themselves in the role of the dreamers and then later as the presenters of a dream about the oppression of Jews, the readers, in order

to decipher the sets of symbols and their meanings, are given the role of psychoanalysts. In effect, we are dealing with a situation in which there is neither a presentation of the past nor an analysis of it. Rather, there is a presentation of that which was repressed and returns later in the form of phantasmal imaginings. We can only hope that their revelation will provoke the reader/viewer to form critical questions. If this was the challenge posited in the comic book "Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna", then it is to its credit. In other words, the element of provocation plays an important role, on the condition that it does not leave the reader-viewer indifferent to its message, but rather moves them to confront their knowledge about the past (or to the acquisition of this knowledge) and distinguish it from the forms of its presentation and recollection. One question remains open without a single definite answer, whether "Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna" lives up to this challenge; how far the reader-viewer goes to confront this problem and how successful the work is in providing them with the pleasure of deciphering the symbols with these games of convention.

Grażyna Gajewska

**POSTPAMIĘĆ W KULTURZE POPULARNEJ NA PRZYKŁADZIE
OPOWIEŚCI GRAFICZNEJ „ACHTUNG ZELIG! DRUGA WOJNA”
AUTORSTWA KRZYSZTOFA GAWRONKIEWICZA I KRYSZTIANA
ROSENBERGA**

Streszczenie

W artykule podjęto szczegółową analizę powieści graficznej "Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna", by dowiedzieć, że należy ona do tzw. kultury posttraumatycznej i wykazuje cechy postpamięci. Przez postpamięć rozumiem pamięć wtórną, zapożyczoną, przybierającą często charakter mitotwórczego żywiołu ogarniającego współczesną przestrzeń kulturową, w której głos i świadectwo ofiar zastępuje się monumentalizmem i fetyszyzowaniem przeszłości. Zjawisko to wpisuje się w przestrzeń "kultury posttraumatycznej", która rozszerzała się od końca lat osiemdziesiątych XX wieku jako reakcja na wcześniejszą wzniosłą "kulturę milczenia" (Holocaust jako niewypowiedziane, jako pustka, niemożność tworzenia poezji po Auschwitz).

O ile utwory literackie, graficzne, architektoniczne, rzeźbiarskie należące do tzw. kultury wysokoartystycznej były już wielokrotnie analizowane z perspektywy zjawiska postpamięci oraz kultury posttraumatycznej, o tyle obszar kultury popularnej pozosta-

je właściwie wyłączony z tych analiz (wyjątek stanowią filmy, być może ze względu na swą narracyjno-wizualizacyjną nośność, a co za tym idzie spory oddźwięk społeczny). Tymczasem to właśnie kultura popularna w dużym stopniu wpływa na kształtowanie postaw i poglądów współcześnie żyjących ludzi. Wszzechobecność popkultury, presja, jaką wywiera, wpływa na przewartościowania całej kultury, nie tylko tej związanej ze sferą rozrywki. Kultura posttraumatyczna w dużej mierze kształtuje się w kulturze popularnej, o czym świadczy poczytność opowieści graficznej „Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” Krzysztofa Gawronkiewicza (rysunki) i Krystiana Rosenberga (scenariusz) wykazującej wiele cech określanych mianem postpamięci.

Po pierwsze, w komiksie ujawniają się cechy pamięci wtórnej, zapożyczonej, autorzy utworu nie byli bezpośrednimi uczestnikami przedstawianych wydarzeń (choćby ze względu na wiek), a ukazywana przez nich historia w dużym stopniu została zapośredniczona przez media kultury, takie jak: literatura wspomnieniowa, filmy wojenne, reklamy. Po drugie, w utworze wykorzystano elementy faszystowskiej retoryki i jej wizualnych reprezentacji. Po trzecie, w opowieści graficznej Gawronkiewicza i Rosenberga dawna postawa wzniosłego milczenia ustąpiła miejsca wystudiowanemu wyrafinowaniu estetycznemu oraz ironicznemu dystansowi, który momentami zatracą się w jego pozorze — pastiszu, co należy do cech kultury posttraumatycznej. Po czwarte, historia opowiedziana w komiksie sprawia wrażenie zapisu snu, co uwydatnione zostało w formie artystycznej tego utworu, w którym realizm miesza się z realizmem fantastycznym. Jeśli autorzy „Achtung Zelig! Druga wojna” stawiają siebie w roli śniących, a następnie przedstawiających sen o prześladowaniach Żydów, to odbiorcy, by rozszyfrować zestawione znaki oraz ich znaczenie, postawieni zostają w roli psychoanalityków. W efekcie mamy więc do czynienia z sytuacją, w której nie dochodzi do analizy ani przedstawienia przeszłości, lecz tego, co wyparte, a następnie powracające w formie fantazmatycznych wyobrażeń o niej.