

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a modern building with a complex, grid-like facade. The building's structure is composed of dark, rectangular elements forming a grid, with some lighter-colored sections. The perspective is looking down from above, creating a sense of depth and architectural scale. The building is surrounded by other structures and greenery, though they are less distinct.

Non-Absent Past: *Swimming Pool* by Rafał Jakubowicz

Izabela Kowalczyk

History is one of the issues that Rafał Jakubowicz deals with throughout his artistic work. In some of his works, he asks about the significance of the traces of the Holocaust have for our imagination. But above all, he analyzes how the past leaves a mark in the present, he examines the influence it has on our reality. Instead of speaking explicitly of the Holocaust, his works provide suggestions that trigger an entire chain of associations. Jakubowicz reaches towards the very depths of our consciousness. He shows us images from the contemporary reality surrounding us, and we are the ones who associate some of its elements with history. Therefore, the main issue is our collective imagination, which has been radically transformed after Auschwitz. As Eleonora Jedlińska wrote, "a railway track will never mean just a «railway track» anymore"¹. The same applies to goods wagons, barbed wire, tightly stacked bunk beds, vertically striped clothing, etc.

One of the projects that bring about associations with the Holocaust is *Swimming Pool* (הייחש-תכירב, brekhat schiyat) (projection, two videos, postcard — 2003). It consisted in projecting

¹ E. Jedlińska, *Sztuka po Holocaustie*, Biblioteka Tygla Kultury, Łódź 2001, p. 197.

the words הייחש-תכיר (meaning "swimming pool" in Hebrew) over the front wall of the former synagogue in Poznań. The artist carried out his project on July 4th, 2003, which was exactly the 63rd anniversary of the day, when the Nazis began transforming this building into a swimming pool, which in fact remains there until today. In Jakubowicz's project, the Hebrew letters projected on the former synagogue were incomprehensible for the majority of spectators. The postcard shows the same building with the word Swimming Pool written on it, while its other side is a picture of swimming young boys.

This projection was in fact an intervention², disclosing the incompatibility of the two realities: the former synagogue and the present swimming pool. Its intention was to provoke a discussion about the actual meaning of this place. This incompatibility was revealed only temporarily, during a very short time (one evening)³, which is why one of the critics described the project as a "temporary monument"⁴. The concept of temporariness can also be applied to the swimming pool itself. One could expect, that a swimming pool constructed by the Nazis in a former synagogue should definitely have a provisional character, but it seems that the inhabitants of the city do not hesitate to enjoy this "gift".

This temporary character of Jakubowicz's project resembles the public projections by Krzysztof Wodiczko, aiming at "revealing", "uncovering" the relations of power, the hidden violence and the suffering of an individual. Wodiczko himself attempts to convince the public, that all the excluded, the marginalized, the publicly invisible, the silently suffering ones can be seen and heard by the public, thanks to the artists; whereas the art should be critical and make use of its healing capacities. In his speech, delivered on 3.10.2007 in the National Museum in Poznań on the occasion of receiving a honorary doctorate of the Poznań Academy of Fine Arts, Wodiczko mentioned the monuments that remain inactive, silent and need to be revived. According to him, this is the only way to overcome the trauma they are related to. Public projections are precisely this kind of act of revival⁵. Something similar happened in the case of Jakubowicz's performance. By projecting the Hebrew equivalent of the word "swimming pool" on the wall of the former

² L. Ronduda described this project as a "projecting intervention", cf. *Idem, Rozmawiamy poważnie o projekcji "Wyobrażenia Holocaustu"*, 9.03.2006, [in:] www.obieg.pl, http://www.obieg.pl/calendar2006/lr_holocaust_video_art.php

³ It is worth saying, that there have been several other projects related to the Poznań Synagogue. The problem of the above-mentioned "incompatibility" tends to surface in a somewhat accidental manner, for instance on the occasion of *Sacrifice*, performance carried out in front of the Synagogue on October 2nd 2006 by Adina Bar-On, an Israeli artist. It was a sound presentation, which resembled a mourning prayer, a cry of despair, a ceaseless moan. What was truly interesting, was the contrast between the painful scream of the artist in front of the Synagogue and the reality of this place: the people who were simply going in and out of the swimming pool. Cf. I. Kowalczyk, *Pod powierzchnią wspomnień — o wystawie izraelskich artystów w Galerii ON*, [in:] "Obieg", 17.10.2006, http://www.obieg.pl/calendar2006/ik_memoris.php. The sacral meaning of this building is also recalled during Poznań's "Dni Judaizmu" and through the artistic performances of Janusz Marciniak (e.g. the installation entitled *Atlantyda*, 2004).

⁴ Jakubowicz's performance appeared under this title e.g. in Piotr Kowalik's article in "Sekcja" (Piotr Kowalik, *Rafał Jakubowicz — w służbie pamięci i zdrowia*, [in:] "Sekcja", http://www.sekcja.org/miesiecznik.php?id_artykulu=79). Rafał Jakubowicz also indicated, that his performance was given this name in one of the reviews in a local newspaper.

⁵ K. Wodiczko, *Miasto, demokracja i sztuka* (City, Democracy and Art), speech delivered during the 2007/2008 Academic Year opening ceremony, at the Poznań Academy of Fine Arts, following the official session of the the Academy of Fine Arts, dedicated to the honorary doctorate of prof. K. Wodiczko, October 3rd 2007, [in:] *Krzysztof Wodiczko. Doktor honoris causa Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Poznaniu* (wydawnictwo okazjonalne), ASP, Poznań 2007, p. 33-47.

synagogue, the artist managed to reactivate this place, to revive its memory, to transform it into a living monument. The monument, according to Wodiczko, instead of facing the past, is, above all, a project for the future, as the Polish word "pomnik" (monument) is closely related to the words "pomnieć" (be mindful of), "upomnieć" (admonish), and, consequently, to the word "ostrzec" (warn)⁶. It is also worth mentioning, how Wodiczko explains the concept of "public projection": "The word «projection» derives from the Latin: *proiectio* (extending), *pro*— (forward). In a broader sense, a projection equals an action, a process, a state, a technique, the effect of showing up, defining itself, coming up to the surface, in the background or in the surroundings, coming up to light, stepping out. A projection as a *pro-jec-tion* indicates motion towards something new. It is also related to throwing, pushing something forward from within oneself, or even re-jec-ting something or somebody"⁷.



R. Jakubowicz, *הייחוס הבריכי*, light projection, An indoor swimming-pool, Poznań, Wroniecka Street 11a, Friday, 4th of April 2003

In case of Jakubowicz's projection, we can say that it brought to light the Jewish part of the history of this place, it threw out to the surface an important problem of this city. The word "swimming pool" written in Hebrew sounded like a shameful accusation in this context. These words are like a signature, like an inscription, but at the same time, due to their inner contradiction, (as we would have rather expected the author to place the Hebrew word "Synagogue" on the front wall of the building; it would even be our first guess, not knowing the language) they indicate the inadequacy, the incompatibility, the confusion or loss of the primordial meaning of that building. Therefore, if this projection rejects something, if it throws something away, it rejects precisely this Nazi heritage that

⁶ Ibidem, p. 41.

⁷ Ibidem., p. 43.

is still present within this place. Thus, Jakubowicz's projection no longer asks questions about this place's past, but it is rather concerned with its future.

Using the words *היחש-תכיר* is, in a sense, a tautology, as it confirms the actual condition of the building, as well as its current function. The artist's intervention has been reduced to its minimum, so as to switch the attention towards the visual form of the surroundings. Placing the words "swimming pool" written in Hebrew directly above the Polish inscription "pływalnia miejska", the artist, paradoxically, makes us perceive the building as a synagogue. Oddly, even though the actual translation of the projected words is related to the current function of the building (as their purely lexical meaning is "swimming pool"), semantically (the Hebrew letters, having a sacred character themselves, and being directly connected to the Jewish culture⁸) they send us back to its primordial role as a synagogue, which still remains unspoken of, unmentioned, it is still unnamed. Somehow, the projected inscription fills the void that appeared when the memory of this place was erased. There remains no reference to its primordial function, except for a memorial plaque situated beside the former entrance to the Synagogue.

The history of the building itself reflects the complex fate of the Jewish community in Poznań throughout the ages⁹. The first Jewish inhabitants appeared in the city in the 13th century, and at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, there was already a local Jewish community. Until the end of the 18th century, the Jews, as a kind of a separate estate, were isolated from the rest of the inhabitants. The age of prosperity for the Jews came to an end, at the same time as in the other parts of Poland: in the 17th and 18th century, during a series of destructive wars that ravaged the country. Several pogroms took place in the city, the largest one occurring in 1667. The Jewish community became increasingly impoverished. When the Greater Poland, together with Poznań, became a part of the Prussian partition in 1793, the Jews were subjected to a stricter state control and a harsher legal system than their coreligionists in other provinces of Prussia. The aim was to convince Jews to adopt the German language and culture. At the end of the 18th century, the Jewish community represented nearly one fourth of the inhabitants of Poznań. At the beginning of the 19th century, Poznań was home to the second largest (after Wrocław) Jewish community in Prussia. After the great fire in Poznań in 1803, the ghetto, which was full of narrow, winded alleys, was destroyed and replaced by Żydowska Street — a single, broad avenue. At the same time the idea of constructing a large, monumental synagogue appeared, and it was going to be built according to the oldest classical standards. The first project, presented by an architect called Schildener was not carried out¹⁰. After the fire, Jews were allowed to purchase real estate and settle anywhere, without any limits. Their principal occupations were trade and craftsmanship, and they inhabited mostly the area around the Old City. This is also where they constructed their houses of prayer. By the middle of 19th century, the city already had six synagogues and six houses of prayer. The oldest synagogue was situated in Żydowska Street number 15-18 (the quarter surrounded by Żydowska, Mokra and Wroniecka Streets), it was constructed between the 15th and 16th century. It was called the Old Synagogue (Stara Synagoga), as opposed to the New Synagogue (Nowa Synagoga), built at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1883-84

⁸ Cf. A. Kamczycki, *Sztuka pamięci, czyli żydowski Boltansky*, [in:] "Artluki", nr 2(2) 2006, p. 54.

⁹ History of the Jews of Poznań: T. Sztyma-Knasiecka, *Między tradycją a nowoczesnością. Żydzi poznańscy w XIX i XX wieku*, Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, Poznań 2006.

¹⁰ E. Jedlińska, *Rafał Jakubowicz — Synagoga/Pływalnia*, [in:] "Pro Memoria. Biuletyn Informacyjny", p. 91.

both synagogues were renovated, their ridge roofs replaced by flat ones, and their walls decorated with neo-romantic ornaments, very common at that time in German architecture.

It was in the 19th century that the Prussian authorities attempted to win the favor of the richest among the Jewish community, so that they adopt the German culture. The idea was to assimilate wealthy and educated Jews with Germans, and turn them into a part of its policy directed against Poles. This is why people involved in academic work, or those financially advantaged were permitted to apply for "naturalization", which required the applicant to use German as the only language in his public and professional life. German also became the official language in Jewish schools. It was not until 1843 that 58 naturalized Jews were given citizen rights. The antagonism between Poles and Jews increased during the European Revolutions of 1848, as a large majority of Jews were mostly pro-German at the time. In 1848 they obtained full citizen rights, and in the second half of the 19th century their political, economical and cultural activity became increasingly noticeable. The amount of Jewish intellectuals (doctors, lawyers, teachers and scientists) increased substantially. Jews enjoyed all the rights of Prussian citizens, but at the same time they continued to preserve their Jewish religion and heritage. However, certain conflicts started to appear even within the Jewish Community itself. Because of the disruption between the traditionalists and the reformists (those in favor of reforming Judaism and assimilating the Jewish community to their environment), a new community, called the Community of Brothers (*Gmina Braci*) appears in the middle of the 19th century, separating itself from the Orthodox community, which then took the name of United Community (*Gmina Jedności*). The new community built its own synagogue at the junction between *Dominikańska* and *Szewska* Street.

The construction of the new synagogue in *Stawna* Street was a sign of the wealth of the Jewish community of Poznań at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and of their great attachment to Judaism. Wolf Feilchenfeld, who at the time as the rabbi of the United Community, had already began his endeavours aimed at the construction of a new synagogue in 1880, as both synagogues in *Żydowska* Street were in a bad condition. This plan was carried out in 1902, when Friedlander established a commission for the construction of a new synagogue for 1100-1200 believers. The parcel between *Stawna*, *Wroniecka*, *Mała Garbary* and *Żydowska* Streets was chosen as a construction site. The corner-stone was laid down on March 6th 1906. The construction work lasted about a year and a half, and the opening ceremony took place on October 5th 1907. The synagogue was built and designed by the Cremer and Wolffstein, a construction company established in Berlin.

The synagogue is a large, central-plan building in the shape of an equal-armed cross, and its easternmost part is an apse, surrounded by a few rooms. The building is covered with a huge dome. The *Aron ha-kodesh* was situated on a large, raised platform at the center of the main hall, and had two symmetrically located semi-circular stairs. In front of it, there was a reading desk and an openwork balustrade decorated with marble. There were special galleries for women (*babiniec*), with one entrance each, placed in two lateral risalits. The interior of the synagogue was richly decorated, and figurative decoration, unusual in synagogues, was placed inside the dome: four cherubs and arcades symbolizing the twelve gates of Jerusalem. The new synagogue was called "temple" (*tempel*). The symbolic references to Jerusalem were supposed to show the assimilation of Jews and emphasize the fact, that they were loyal citizens of their country (in this case, Ger-

many) and that they did not await their return to the Promised Land. The Poznań Jews were closer to the German neo-orthodoxy than they were to the Polish Orthodox Jews. They have adopted a number of elements they shared with the reformed movement, such as sermons given in German, the secular education of rabbis, and the introduction of choirs.

However, this enormous synagogue soon became deserted, as the germanized Jews began to move to Germany, and some other Jews emigrated to America. Deportees from the eastern parts of Poland began to replace them in 1918, as they expected to find a better economic situation in the well-developed Greater Poland. The Synagogue in Stawna Street survived until 1940, when its inside and outside architecture was redesigned, and it was transformed into a swimming pool for Wehrmacht soldiers. On April 4th, 1940, the last hexagrams were torn off from the dome of the synagogue. The change of function of the building was tantamount to desecrating a Jewish holy place.

After the war, the function of the building remained unchanged. Oddly, the condition of the building was accepted just as it was encountered, even though it had been transformed by the occupants. It could be connected to the communist authorities' lack of interest regarding the monuments and other buildings important for other cultures¹¹. After the war, the concepts of "national heritage" ("dziedzictwo narodowe") and "national monument" ("zabytek narodowy") were in constant use, and only the buildings that matched this criteria were renovated and restored. As a consequence, not only synagogues were decaying, but also many of the protestant churches in the Recovered Territories became restaurants and fire stations. Secular buildings from former German territories also decayed, only because they were not originally Polish, some of them were very high-rated buildings, such as the neo-Gothic castle in Kamieniec Żabkowicki, designed by K. F. Schinkel. Bricks and stones from this castle were stolen to be used for the construction of the surrounding houses, and they were also used by the Wrocław Academy of Fine Arts¹². The same thing happened to a number of other monuments, and only today does it become clear, how much damage was done by this particular attitude, oriented to protect only "national monuments". This ignorance towards other cultures could be the main reason why a Nazi swimming pool was left in a former synagogue in Poznań.

However, it is possible, that the reasons for this situation are more complex and could also be connected to the post-war antisemitism. Alina Cała points to the plundering of abandoned houses, ruined synagogues and cemeteries by the Poles, that took place after the war. The authorities were also involved in the destruction of Jewish cultural monuments. A few waves of devastations ravaged Poland. Between the 1940s and the 1950s, the initiatives were mostly taken by the administration, which justified its actions by the difficulties they experienced due to the insufficient amount of properly constructed and ready-to-use buildings. According to Alina Cała, it can be suspected, that the idea of placing the pigsty of a collective farm precisely in a former synagogue (which happened in Dukla, Krosno voivodeship) did have an anti-Jewish intention¹³. In the 1950s, the acts of vandalism were of a purely destructive character, several cemeteries were destroyed,

¹¹ This attitude was described by Elżbieta Gieysztor-Milobędzka, *Polska Historia Sztuki — jej konserwatyzm i próby jego przewyciężenia*, [in:] "Kultura Współczesna. Teoria, interpretacje, krytyka", nr 4 (26), 2000, p. 58-76.

¹² Ibidem, p. 71.

¹³ A. Cała, *Wizerunek Żyda w polskiej kulturze ludowej*, Warsaw 2005, p. 179.

and a mass grave of Nazi victims in a Jewish cemetery in Okopowa Street in Warsaw was partially dug up. After 1968, the devastations were done by the so-called "unidentified perpetrators", but they could have been organized by members of security forces. Monuments of Nazi victims were being devastated, while the authorities began to carry out their plan of erasing the material evidence of cultural diversity¹⁴.

The building of the Old Synagogue in Poznań is still an important place for the Poznań Jews, a symbolic place, as there is no other site in the city that would commemorate the Jewish culture, which had been present there for ages. In 2002 the city authorities delivered the building, together with the parcel, to its legitimate owners, Związek Gmin Wyznaniowych Żydowskich RP (The Association of Jewish Communities in Poland). The authorities of the Jewish Community would like to transform the former synagogue into a "Centre of Judaism and Tolerance" and to open a House of Memory to commemorate more than 30 000 Poles that have been awarded the medal of Righteous among the Nations by Yad Vashem, for having saved the lives of Polish Jews during the Nazi occupation. However, the creation of the Center is uncertain, due to the lack of funds for the renovation of the synagogue¹⁵.

Jakubowicz searches for traces of the primordial function of the building and for its history (the so-called memory of the place), particularly in his video, entitled "Swimming Pool" (*Pływalnia*) (13 min) showing the interior of the building¹⁶. The artist enters the building with a video-camera, and scrupulously records everything inside. His journey through the former synagogue takes place according to the pattern of using a swimming pool: first he crosses the entrance hall, then enters the dressing room, then films the showers, whose metal endings and tile-covered walls carry ominous associations: "The images of an empty room with showers is what makes the strongest impression. The hydraulic installations, sticking ominously out of the walls, evoke the tragic images of concentration camps. This is when we can feel satisfied with the results of our search, and understand the associations that provoke the ventilation holes, or maybe it's already a sign of paranoia?"¹⁷. Later, we follow the video-camera towards the swimming pool, where we — as true swimmers — remain for a while. The artist records a monotonous, static film showing the swimming pool and the entire interior of the building. Thus, it reveals the structure of this place, designed to serve for religious purposes. We see the walls, windows and the dome reflecting on the water. Then suddenly, in the viewer's imagination, the water assumes the sacred function of this place¹⁸. We can see wonder and mystery in the light reflecting on the surface. It is worth mentioning, that water has

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 180.

¹⁵ See: the internet page of the Jewish Community of Poznań and Greater Poland (*Spółeczność Żydowska w Poznaniu i Wielkopolsce*) devoted to the Poznań Synagogue <http://www.synagoga.org.pl> and E. Stęszewska — Leszczyńska *Poznańskie Synagogi*, "Kronika Miasta Poznania", 1992, nr 1/2, p. 102-118.

¹⁶ Jakubowicz made one more video, that documented the projection on the front wall of the building.

¹⁷ Kowalik, op. cit.

¹⁸ This association seems equally inevitable. It is also used by other artists, who deal with the subject of this building throughout their artistic work. For instance, Janusz Marciniak, in his painting entitled *Pływalnia* (*Synagoga w Poznaniu*) (*Swimming Pool — The Poznań Synagogue*) (acrylic paint, 31x19,3 cm, 2003) showed a swimming pool filled with water, covered by the reflections of long windows, made of small, glass bricks. This light, reflecting on the water, seems to have a sacred meaning, as it gives a feeling of sublimity to this deeply profane place. The sacred function of water was used differently by Noami Braslavski, an Israeli artist living in Berlin, who, on May 1st and 2nd 2007 in this very building, filmed a happening, which

a purifying meaning in Judaism. The ritual baths of Orthodox Jews are traditionally performed in a mikveh (Hebr. מִקְוֶה). A mikveh is similar to a small covered pool, that should contain a minimum of 200 gallons of rainwater, mixed with water from the municipal system. A ritual bath in a mikveh is tantamount to a spiritual purification, a renewal of one's relation to paradise. Hassidic Jewish men perform the ritual bath daily, before the prayers, whereas the women have to bathe ritually after childbirth and after each menstruation. Impure utensils are also cleaned there. A ritual bath (tvilah) is also performed by those converting to Judaism¹⁹. In Jakubowicz's film, the swimming-pool can be associated with mikveh, but this impression disappears, as soon as we see the users of the swimming pool and we observe the everyday reality of this place. Afterwards, we leave the pool, we walk underneath a BOSCH neon sign hanging above the door (BOSCH was one of the companies involved in the Holocaust). While leaving, we stop by the gaming machines, where a fictitious war is taking place and shots can be heard. Finally, we leave the building, watching the exterior elevations.

The artist explores with his camera all the corners of this place, as if he was looking for traces of the former synagogue. He tries to track them down, he follows them, searching for hidden meanings. But he not only shows the meaning of those traces, but he also shows how they lose their meaning (e.g. the above-mentioned association with mikveh, which quickly disappears). The trace, above all, points to the lack of the object it follows. Ewa Domańska, in her book entitled *Historie niekonwencjonalne* (Unconventional Stories), when writing about the bodies of those, who disappeared in the "dirty war" in Argentina (1976-1983) mentions the category of "non-absent past": "When we focus on it, we avoid the desire to bring the past into the present, to re-present it, turning towards the past, that is somehow still around, it does not want to leave, or it is impossible to get rid of it"²⁰. In spite of the radically different subject, that Jakubowicz deals with in his artwork, which is still, however, a traumatic subject, relating to the Holocaust, it seems that in the film we can track down precisely this "non-absent past". This way, the artist, by means of his artistic method, comes close to deconstruction, which asks questions about absence, about deficiency, about what is unsaid, kept secret, forgotten. The spectator, through Jakubowicz's work, is also introduced into this state of confusion, following the traces and losing them (which evokes the association with hunting).

In the case of the Poznań swimming pool, there is no physical trace of its sacred character. The only signs we can mention, are the symbolical ones, appearing in our imagination. However, our imagination takes us even further. The character of this place (white tiles, showers, swimming pool) is mainly associated with hygiene. Knowing the context of the creation of the swimming pool inside a former synagogue, we are reminded of the entire hygiene discourse in the Third Reich. Piotr Kowalik, in his text entitled "Rafał Jakubowicz — w służbie pamięci i zdrowia" (Rafał Jakubowicz — in Service of Memory and Health) also mentions this association: "All the elements of interior design, such as industrial lamps and white tiles, suggest the inhuman character of the place, whose principal function is maintaining hygiene — which in the rhetorics of Nazi Germany, and in

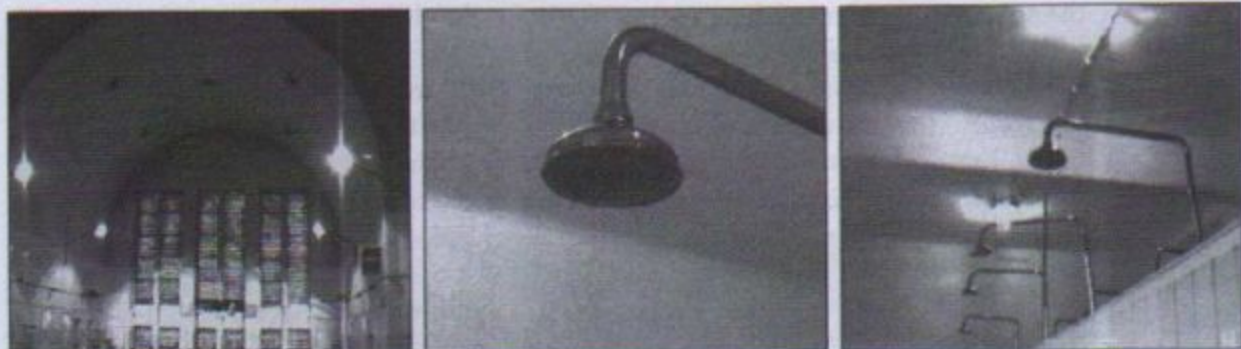
consisted in performing Jewish ceremonies (bar mitzva, marriage and kaddish) inside the water. Cf. <http://www.synagoga-basen.prv.pl/>

¹⁹ Cf. <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mykwa> and A. Grupińska, *Najtrudniej jest spotkać Lilit. Opowieści chasydzkich kobiet*, Cracow, Budapest 2008, p. 181.

²⁰ E. Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne. Refleksja o przeszłości w nowej humanistyce*, Poznań 2006, p. 186-187.

other countries and environments, was used to discredit the Other. At the same time, the net of white tiles, reaching towards all sides, brings to mind the hospital oppression and the authoritarian character of Cartesian geometry²¹.

In 1933, when Hitler came to power in Germany, he announced his claim of constructing a great Third Reich and reviving the German nation, by maintaining a strict racial purity. The German society was receptive to those postulates, as the mindset of the poor peasantry and small bourgeoisie was looking for a scapegoat to blame for their poverty and overall bad condition. Jews became such a scapegoat and were persecuted during the last six years before the war. They were associated with impurity. This is the typical rhetoric of destroying the Other — the rhetoric of disgust, of associating the object of hate with physiological functions, with repulsiveness²². The Nazis described Jews in their propaganda as a plague, a disease, bacteria and worms, which is why hygiene became an ideological slogan in the Third Reich, an instrument of struggle and oppression.



On the 4th of April 1940, the stars on the domes on the Wroniecka Street synagogue were taken down with the use of ropes. Afterwards, city authorities gave order to transform the building into an indoor-swimming-pool

In a strange way, Jakubowicz's film contrasts the meanings related to ritual baths performed by Orthodox Jews in a mikveh on one side, with the meanings related to hygiene and cleanliness taken from the ideological discourse of the Third Reich. Meanings related directly to the Holocaust also appear, as the showers that bring to mind the bath prisoners had to take before they entered the gas chambers. The contradicting associations can be related to the contradiction in the very heart of this place and its history.

The site chosen for the presentation of the project in 2006, The Jewish Center in Oświęcim (Centrum Żydowskie w Oświęcimiu), was also especially meaningful, as this place's context triggered a further circulation of meanings between the building of the former synagogue, which now houses a swimming pool, and the concentration camp. What is common for those seemingly remote places is the Holocaust — in the first case understood symbolically (the liquidation of the Synagogue understood as a destruction of Jewish culture, the discourse of hygiene that brings up the idea of racial purity), in the second case — as the literal memory of the place.

Eleonora Jedlińska also emphasizes the aspect of far-reaching associations provoked by Jakubowicz's work: "The municipal swimming-pool in Poznań has never been a place of genocide, it has been a swimming pool since 1940. Why do the images recorded in

²¹ Kowalik, op. cit.

²² See J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, New York 1982.

the video bring the Holocaust to our minds? The meaning of the film clearly seems to recall the memory of this place (which was initially a sacral object), and the memory of the destruction of the Jewish nation²³. Piotr Kowalik reflects upon how easily such associations are made by the viewers. He indicates, that it shows the great power of the images, or, we could even say, the great power of the whole visual sphere. It also shows the meaning of visual associations that appear before we verbalize specific problems. History operates in our minds taking the form of certain images-icons (Zbigniew Libera turns the attention to a similar issue in the series *Pozytywy*, 2004). This can also be applied to the history of the Holocaust, which, according to Katarzyna Bojarska, is dissolved in an increasingly monotonous stream of images. "The representations have distanced the unimaginable trauma of the reality standing behind them, and they have become the signs that people use to communicate with one another"²⁴. Each historical, visual or literary pronouncement triggers an entire chain of associations, it animates what is already included in our imagination. This is precisely the problem that nurtures the artist, the problem of the visual associations, the clichés, through which we perceive reality, and by which we are forever burdened²⁵.

The activation of visual associations is characteristic to our projecting capacity, described by Ernst H. Gombrich in *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*²⁶. The idea is that we match the images we see with the schemes that are already familiar to us, we see and we hear what our memory supplies. According to Gombrich, understanding dominates perception. This is why we see traces of Holocaust in the case of the *Swimming Pool*²⁷. Gombrich calls it a "programmed projection". We are not aware of how much of our perception depends on our knowledge and mental dispositions. According to the author of *Art and Illusion*, all art plays with our imagination and with our memory²⁸. But we also have to remember, that our imagination is deceitful, it creates and adds certain images and situations that we have not seen and in which we have not participated, but nonetheless they match a certain pattern. Those images infiltrate our imagination by means of popular culture, art, history. And inside our imagination, the truth is always meshed up with fiction. In this case, like in other Jakubowicz's works, the main idea is not to build a project of saving memory (as a lot of art commentators would like it to be), but rather to get to know the meaning of the traces of Holocaust in our collective imagination.

The artist demonstrates, that dramatic historic facts have made their mark in our imagination (they are present, for instance, in the form of visual associations), although they have been pushed away to its dark corners. They reappear when we become conscious of an absence, related to certain fragments of history that have been erased (such as the history of the Synagogue in Poznań).

²³ E. Jedlińska, *Rafał Jakubowicz, Synagoga/Pływalnia*, text included in "Pro Memoria". Biuletyn Informacyjny Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, courtesy of the author.

²⁴ K. Bojarska, *Obecność Zagłady w twórczości polskich artystów*, Culture.pl, Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, http://www.culture.pl/pl/culture/artykuly/es_obecnosc_zagłady

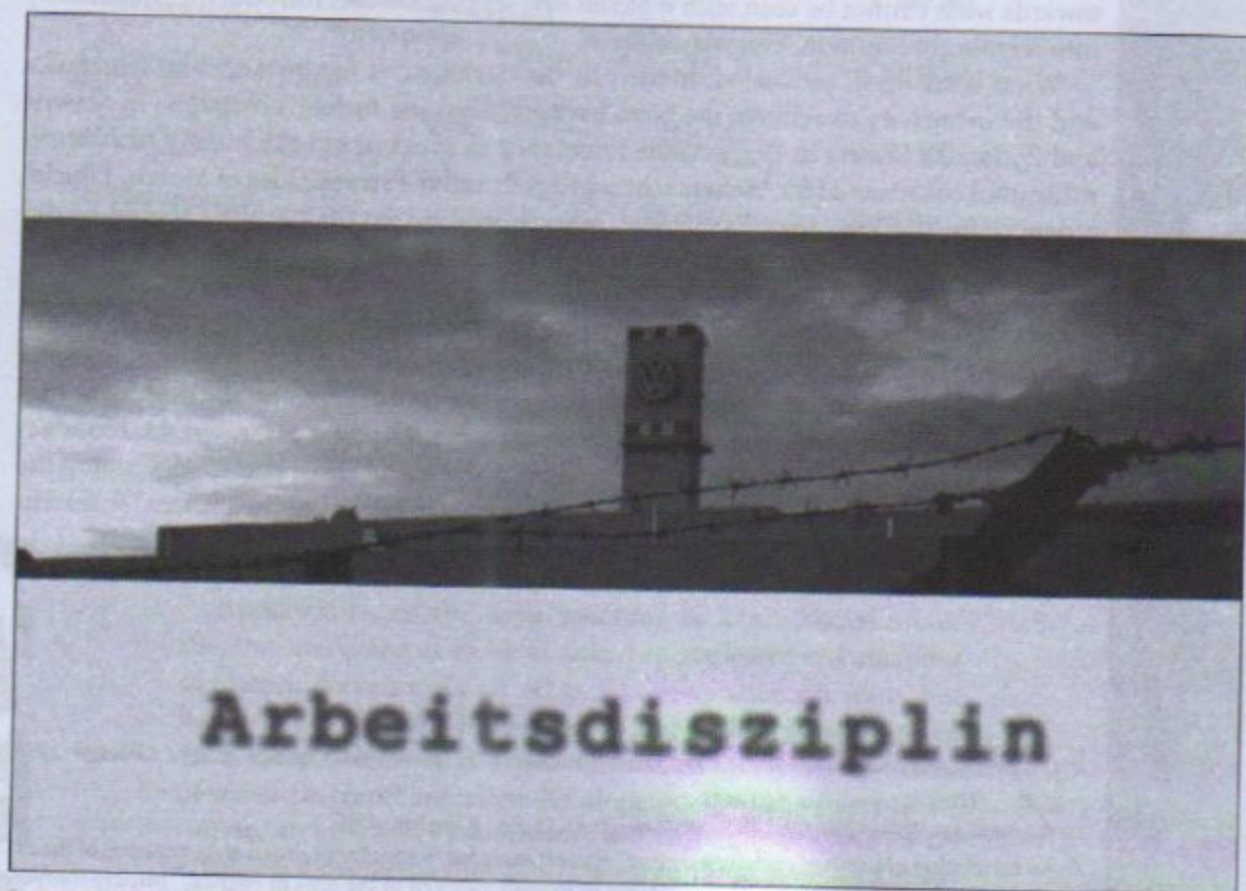
²⁵ *Sposób myślenia*, Rafałem Jakubowiczem interviewed by Justyna Kowalska, [in:] *Rafał Jakubowicz: ti tabu dibu daj*, op. cit.

²⁶ E. H. Gombrich, *Sztuka i złudzenie. O psychologii przedstawiania obrazowego*, przeł. J. Zaraniski, Warsaw 1981.

²⁷ These associations are likely to be made by most spectators watching Jakubowicz's film. When I presented the film during the classes, all the students spoke about a similar perception of this work.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 182-280.

The art of Rafał Jakubowicz can be interpreted in the context of Michel Foucault's "counter-history", which originates, according to this philosopher, in racial struggle, in the struggle of the oppressed for a representation. The author, who repeatedly described knowledge as a discourse of power, has a similar attitude towards history, which serves as a foundation and as a justification for power, and its strengthening. "History, similarly to rituals, unctons, solemn funerals, ceremonies and legendary tales is an operator, an intensifier of power." — said Foucault in one of his lectures in Paris²⁹. The contrary of this medieval type of history is a counter-history, that destroys the continuity of glory. "It shows, that the shine, this famous, blinding shine of power is not something that petrifies, joins and immobilizes the entire body of the society, keeping it in order, but it is actually a light that divides, that shines on one side, leaving the other side of the social body in the darkness, pushing it to the shadow"³⁰. The counter-history speaks precisely about the darker side, it reveals what was hidden in the darkness, what was not said, what remained intentionally concealed.



R. Jakubowicz's *Arbeitsdisziplin*, 2002

It is worth mentioning, that light is particularly important for an artist. Projections normally take place after sunset, when it is already dark and when the projected objects

²⁹ M. Foucault, Wykład z 28 stycznia 1976 roku, [in:] *Trzeba bronić społeczeństwa. Wykłady z Collège de France, 1976*, przeł. M. Kowalska, Warsaw 1998, p. 72.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 76.

become clear, visible, enhanced. The metaphors of light, of enlightenment should not be in this case associated with the violence of Enlightenment³¹, but rather with the purely technical function of light. Here, it is rather a metaphor of light, that produces a particular shape on a photographic print. The artist takes the role of a seeker, a detective, but it is clear that it was by chance that he became one. In different interviews, the artist says, that he started working on the building of the former synagogue and on the Volkswagen building in Antoninek near Poznań (*Arbeitsdisziplin*, 2002) mainly because he could see those buildings nearly every day, as he was traveling to the Poznań Academy of Fine Arts by bus or by tram. This brings to mind the main character of *Blow-up*³², where it is precisely a photo taken by accident, out of boredom, that becomes an evidence of murder, it reveals something that could not be seen with a naked eye. In *Blow-up*, a fashion photographer begins a private investigation, whereas Jakubowicz also becomes a detective by means of his art (in this case, a history detective) and he forces the viewer to participate in his investigation. His projects are ambiguous, unclear, they guide us precisely towards what cannot be seen with a naked eye, leaving a trace, introducing uncertainty into seemingly common, everyday objects.

What is silenced, concealed, hidden in the darkness, is for instance the reluctance and the incapacity to remove the Nazi heritage from the former synagogue in Stawna and Żydowska Streets in Poznań, the reluctance to speak about the history of a swimming pool constructed for Wehrmacht soldiers³³, and the strange idea of Marcin Libicki, a deputy for the European Parliament, who proposed that the building should be demolished³⁴, what could be called, sarcastically, a "final solution" of the problem of the synagogue in Poznań.

Art, in this context, becomes an impulse to bring back the memory of places; to take a different look at the public space — as a space full of conflicts, full of painful, rejected stories, erased memories, a space whose meaning is transformed by the dominant ideology of power. Thus, the art that speaks about a memory of a place, speaks about actual, current problems. As Hayden White says, history is in fact a science describing the present: "All the questions that we pose to the past, are related to the present"³⁵. Surely, this sentence can also be applied to Rafał Jakubowicz's art.

³¹ J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1978, p. 91 — 92.

³² *Powiększenie (Blow-up)*, Michelangelo Antonioni. United Kingdom, 1967.

³³ An interesting example of such "concealing" is a text included in the album edited on the occasion of the exposition organized for the 10th Dni Judaizmu in Poznań, devoted to the Jews of Poznań, "Między tradycją a nowoczesnością. Żydzi poznańscy w XIX i XX wieku" (Between Tradition and Modernity. Poznań Jews in 19th and 20th Centuries), National Museum, Poznań. The history of the synagogue transformed in a swimming pool was neither presented nor analyzed here, even though there is a detailed description of the former history of the synagogue. The fact, that it now houses a swimming pool can only be found on the last page. See: T. Sztyma-Knasiecka, *Między tradycją a nowoczesnością. Żydzi poznańscy w XIX i XX wieku*, catalogue, Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, 2006, p. 76.

³⁴ D. Kolbuszewska, *Czy poznańską synagogę można zburzyć?*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 12.01.2006.

³⁵ *Pisać historię, z którą można żyć*, Hayden White interviewed by Sławomir Sierakowski, [in:] "Krytyka Polityczna", nr 7/8, winter 2005, p. 228.