

CONTAMINATED LANDSCAPE

A type of landscape of remembrance connected with tragic and traumatic history.

The term contaminated landscape comes from the title of Martin Pollack's essay "Contaminated Landscapes" ["Kontaminierte Landschaften"], describing places marked by the tragic history of the 20th century. Pollack, son of an SS officer, finds forgotten traces of Nazism and Stalinism in the inconspicuous landscape of Central and Eastern European countries. He reflects on the human habitation of a landscape which, in the symbolic sphere, is a "great graveyard of Europe". The contaminated landscape is a space that brings with it the experience of the war past; a place of mass murders, carried out secretly, with efforts to conceal them, often intentionally camouflaged by the tormentors with the help of densely growing vegetation.

The notion of contaminated landscape, currently used in studies on trauma, research into the history of the Second World War or the archaeology of the present day, indicates that research into the topography of landscapes makes it possible to lay bare the illusory innocence of the environment and to restore the dignity of the victims of crimes hidden for many years. Their tragic history is most often discovered by accident, and witnesses of past events are few or nonexistent. Pollack points out that the contaminated landscapes are often inconspicuous, frequently banal, less idyllic and usually do not have any features that would suggest that they were places of mass executions or acts of war terror. The apparent innocence of the existing landscape should not, however, lessen our vigilance - neglecting the memory stored in the contaminated landscape, ignorance of tragic events, lack of testimonies or perfunctory knowledge make the war criminals win, and turns the landscape into a natural monument to the victory of violence and hatred.

[M.St.]

Literature:

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