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# The Essays of Contaminated Landscapes

The essay as a literary form, and the essayistic mode of thinking<sup>1</sup>, has been applied in the discussions of so many problems and topics that it would be difficult to try and find some content-based associations between the essay and specific issues. Nonetheless, it seems that the relationship could be reversed, i.e. sometimes certain topics – and especially perspectives from which people try to approach a specific topic – attract or push away certain literary forms. It is the essay that has proved to be such a form of literature in the case of remembrance and knowledge about genocide. The direct reaction to the experience of genocide usually comes through works of literature which is based on the record of own experiences, i.e. various autobiographical forms as well as short stories which utilise first-person narrative. As time goes by, though – as remembrance ceases to constitute the element of the nearest experience in temporal terms and it becomes an element of knowledge, including academic knowledge – it is the genre of the essay that offers an opportunity to combine various forms of that which is intermediate with the reflective synthesis of knowledge and moral judgement. It is the essay that finds a place for a historical analysis of past events as well as for outlining the problematic place of the writing persona, their moral doubts, and cognitive hesitations. Finally, the essay offers an opportunity to

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between the essay as a form – i.e. a literary genre – and the special mode of thinking and writing it represents has been discussed by various theoreticians and philosophers of the essay. The major discussions include essays by György Lukács and Theodor W. Adorno. Vide G. Lukács, *O istocie i formie eseju: List do Leo Poppera*, transl. R. Turczyn, [in:] idem., *Pisma krytyczno-teoretyczne 1908-1932*, selection and introduction by S. Morawski, Warsaw 1994, pp. 82-92; Th.W. Adorno, *Esej jako forma*, [in:] idem., *Sztuka i sztuki. Wybór esejów*, transl. K. Krzemień-Ojak, selection by K. Sauerland, Warsaw 1990, pp. 79-99.

arrange in a text one's own personal involvement in the past being described. The common combination of the essay and travel<sup>2</sup> as well as the fact of recording events, thoughts, and pieces of information gathered during a journey are both major elements of the tradition of the essay and of the various reflections which form based on visits to genocide locations. Many of the formal and historical features of the tradition of the essay make it an extremely capacious genre for writing about genocide, particularly when it is necessary to have some time separation as well as the transcending of the limits of an academic study or a reportage.

I would like to discuss several works by Martin Pollack – an Austrian journalist, writer, reporter, and essayist – as an example of that particular essayistic knowledge about genocide. These various professional and geological divisions often fluctuate in the case of the indicated author. Many of his texts possess a clearly journalistic and reporting nature, especially those which concern the recent political history. Yet his various works about the past, even if nearing the form of a historical reportage, possess a rather essayistic style<sup>3</sup>. Pollack stresses not only his own epistemological position, but also his family's history, which forms the moral context for his texts about genocide.

In 2014, Pollack published a collection of essays developed based on guest academic lectures. *Kontaminierte Landschaften* [*Contaminated Landscapes*] became not only a major work which triggered extensive studies and reflection on the issue of forgotten and hidden genocides, but also a catchy metaphor which has been present ever since in the titles of academic conferences and collective works<sup>4</sup>.

In this article, I shall analyse the intertwining of two threads of Pollack's prose works. The first one is the history of his family, the recollections about Nazi ancestors, and the dissonance which formed inside him regarding his family's past. The other one is the study of space understood as uncovering its "contamination", the sinister past which has marked the specific portion of the landscape. Pollack merges these two threads throughout his essays, which is particularly visible in *Kontaminierte Landschaften*<sup>5</sup>. In the final part of the article, I shall discuss the argumentative role of this intertwining. I would like

<sup>2</sup> Jan Tomkowski listed journey as the first possible topic for an essay. Vide J. Tomkowski, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Polski esej literacki. Antologia*, ed. J. Tomkowski, Wrocław 2017, p. XLIV.

<sup>3</sup> One example of a historical essay is his book about Galicia, which has the structure of a historical reportage on his journey through Galicia and Bukovina. Pollack based his work, however, not on an actual visit to the areas of the USSR at that time, but on his readings of the regional press from the turn of the 20th century, as well as various books about Galicia. Just as his later books, this one also met with an interesting academic reception; it triggered extensive studies into Galicia, which intensified after 1989. Vide M. Pollack, *Po Galicji. O chasydach, Hucutach, Polakach i Rusinach. Imaginacyjna podróż po Galicji Wschodniej i Bukowinie, czyli wyprawa w świat, którego nie ma*, transl. A. Kopaćki, Wołowiec 2017. Vide also C. Moos, *Habsburg post mortem. Betrachtungen zum Weiterleben der Habsburgmonarchie*, Vienna–Cologne–Weimar 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Vide, e.g., 'Kontaminierte Landschaften'. *Mitteleuropa inmitten von Krieg und Totalitarismus. Eine exemplarische Bestandsaufnahme anhand von literarischen Texten*, ed. A. Höllwerth, Berlin–Bern–Vienna 2019.

<sup>5</sup> M. Pollack, *Skażone krajobrazy*, transl. K. Niedenthal, Wołowiec 2014. Quotations indicated directly in the text refer to this edition.

to pose a question about the possibility of decontamination, i.e. expunging that contamination from these landscapes in order to make them once again locations which foster life instead of being empty cemeteries.

### Family stories of Austrian Nazis

Similarly to many other essayists, Pollack also eagerly refers to the myth of happy childhood, one that in his case was unfortunately fatherless, but with loving grandparents instead. However, he confronted the carefree images of hiking with his grandpa or hunting stories with other stories. His beloved grandpa was a member of the Nazi party since 1931. As a lawyer, he participated in the 'de-Jewing' of real estate and, after the Second World War, he was arrested and spent two years in prison. The writer's grandmother held similar views. He terminated any contact with her after she had disputed his choice to pursue Slavic studies. He was able to challenge his family's Nazism owing to the experimental school he attended, where he met pupils from other countries<sup>6</sup>. Thus, Pollack tells his biography as a departure from his family and the abandoning of his emotional ties, especially with his father's family. Yet the main figure which defined the mode of writing about his family's past seems to be the figure of multi-faceted denouncement. He wrote: "Yet I remembered my childhood as being carefree, safe and happy"<sup>7</sup> (TP 60) just to note soon afterwards that that idyll was false and the time of his early childhood posed various threats caused by, e.g., the necessity to move frequently. Probably the best definition of that condition is the title of the chapter about his grandpa, i.e. "Niesamowita normalność"<sup>8</sup> ["The Incredible Normality"]. It contains the warm recollections of the stories of the former hunter or of the loving care of the writer's grandmother as they remain forever contaminated with the later realisation that until their dying days they both remained confident national socialists for whom their post-WWII inconveniences were instances of unjust persecution. Therefore, in their own narrative, they could have placed themselves in the position of the victims while denying knowledge of their own crimes.

Pollack discussed the problem of his family's sins to the fullest in the book titled *Der Tote im Bunker. Bericht über meinen Vater*<sup>9</sup> [*Death in Bunker: The Story About My Father*], devoted to Gerhard Bast, who was murdered in 1947 at the Austrian-Italian border. The SS officer attempted to flee a trial which he would have faced in Austria for his many war crimes. In this example of the literature of reckoning, the author reconstructed his family's story based not on memory – as it was either shattered or blocked – but, rather, on various archived documents; he was forced to seek out reliable information in these as his relatives avoided difficult topics.

<sup>6</sup> Vide K. Bielas, *Tropiciel ztych historii. Rozmowa z Martinem Pollackiem*, Wołowiec 2018.

<sup>7</sup> M. Pollack, *Topografie pamięci*, transl. K. Niedenthal, Wołowiec 2017, p. 60. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish]

<sup>8</sup> He referred to the title of a collection of essays regarding Austrian Literature, i.e. W.G. Sebald, *Unheimliche Heimat*, Frankfurt am Main 2003.

<sup>9</sup> M. Pollack, *Śmierć w bunkrze. Opowieść o moim ojcu*, transl. A. Kopacki, Wołowiec 2006.

An interesting mode of indirect learning about one's family – one's father in this case – came in the form of the encounters and interviews by Pollack the reporter. In the reportage titled *Ścigający i ścigany. Dalsze życie numeru SS 107 136* [*The Hunter and the Hunted: Later Fortunes of Number SS 107 136*], he presented Rolf-Heinz Höppner, an SS officer accused by Julian Leszczyński of playing a key role in designing mass killing of Jews. When the reporter met the SS man, he began reflecting about his own father: "Maybe today this is what my father would have looked like if he was alive. Maybe. Their stories were so similar."<sup>10</sup> He also quoted a question by his friend who suggested that the conversation could be "an ersatz encounter with father."<sup>11</sup> Thus, the reckoning with the past of his dead father became a broader attempt at settling the score with the suppressed unofficial history of the entire society which had had to apply complex processes of suppressing its recent history.

Another example came from the introduction to the *Topografie der Erinnerung* [*A Topography of Memory*] collection. Owing to the popularity of *Der Tote im Bunker*, Pollack was able to talk to a witness of the exhumations of the bodies of hostages shot by his father's order in Radziejowice in 1944. That meeting became the starting point for a double reflection: on the recollections of a witness, a teenage altar boy during the 1945 exhumation, who kept silent about those events for seventy years; and, most of all, on the fake recollections of the writer's family who, for many years, considered themselves the victims, not the perpetrators of the crimes. That short text about the meeting with the witness concludes with a rather complex reflection on the responsibility of private family memory. Pollack started with his recollections on the breaking off of his relations with his father's family, and he discussed the filling of the white gaps in his biography, but he ended up with an important discussion of the complicated (lack of) dialogue between generations:

Sitting opposite him I wondered what it would have been like if grandma and uncle suddenly started telling us everything. (...) I think I would rather not hear their recollections. Not from those years. There were many issues in our family which, even when they were alive, I considered as wrong. Despicable. Evil. All those years I was afraid that I might learn too much; I preferred not to ask about anything and leave many understatements.

Today, I am cross with myself for doing so as no one should allow themselves to be driven by such reasons, no one can shut their eyes and cover their ears trying to avoid those recollections whenever they are confronted with them. And certainly not when that applies to the recollections of the perpetrators, even if they are our loved ones.<sup>12</sup>

This statement revealed the basic problem of Pollack's essays. It is not simply the knowledge of Nazi past, nor is it some inherited guilt for the

<sup>10</sup> M. Pollack, *Dlaczego rozstrzelali Stanisławów*, transl. A. Kopacki, Wołowiec 2009, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> M. Pollack, *Topografie pamięci...*, p. 15.

crimes of his ancestors or the society. Another tension moves to the foreground, i.e. the tension between the will to gain knowledge and the will to remain ignorant. The former one transitioned into the ethical imperative to remember about the perpetrators and their victims, one that is as intense as the strength with which knowledge about family or collective crimes have been suppressed and passed over in silence for decades; as intensive as the will to remain ignorant or the effort not to learn anything new in order to contain the crimes within the set of suppressed low-key gossip and topics which should not be raised.

## Space

Therefore, Pollack's family story was marked by an obligation to expose to the greatest possible extent the political aspects of family life, in particular the stories of his father and grandfather, who were active in the Nazi movement. That will to acquire the broadest possible knowledge on war activities and attitudes of his relatives was expanded to include other issues. However, the writer did not intend to track other similar stories or expose the forgotten biographies of Austrian war criminals. Instead, he focused on space, on the uncovering of mass graves, many of which are located in Central and Eastern Europe.

In order to describe those spaces with hidden graves, Pollack created the notion of "contaminated landscapes", which he defined as follows:

These are landscapes which were the locations of mass killings which were, however, perpetrated covertly, away from other people, often in utmost secrecy. They were in a place where after a massacre the killers did everything to cover their tracks. Inconvenient witnesses were taken care of, the pits into which corpses were tossed were filled with soil, levelled, and in many cases sowed with grass and carefully planted over with trees and bushes to enable the mass graves to disappear. Those places are hidden carefully. (SK, p. 20)

Some examples of such mass graves include Babi Yar, Katyń, and Ponary; they have started to function as symbols of many other places where similar events had taken place. Yet the writer did not focus on these well-known places which have entered collective memory as well as the politics of memory of nation states. Those already uncovered contaminated landscapes have often received a status similar to World War One cemeteries (vide SK, p. 15), which Pollack also mentioned – a kind of cities of the dead (vide SK, p. 17), in many cases looked after and referenced during state celebrations for many years. Those spaces – excluded from everyday activities – seem to be the destination of Pollack's essays, a model of commemorating collective death which defines a special *nomos* of contaminated lands, a law which excludes them from regular usage and reserves them for various mourning ceremonies, e.g. in the form of state celebrations and – in recent years – also for historical tourism, which is particularly concerned with, *inter alia*, the locations of grand battles.

Yet specific stories do not apply to the best-known locations of mass killings or the very process of killing. The writer closely examined the area where thousands of corpses had been hidden, and he even mentioned “landscapes conducive of crimes” (SK, pp. 56-58), i.e. locations where nature overgrows, quickly levelling the dug-up terrain.

The very fact of hiding and concealing graves in everyday regular space drew Pollack’s attention. The story does not centre around already uncovered places but, rather, it is founded on the possibility or an intuition that somewhere else, possibly quite close, such locations of crimes might also exist. One example of such an obsession with contamination is the story about a fork which the writer dug up in his backyard. That piece of cutlery included the SS symbol, a fact which in itself can constitute a starting point for discussing the secrets hidden in the writer’s space. In the calm normal surroundings, a crime may be hidden – incredible, filled with terror, yet forgotten and suppressed.

Pollack compared the search for locations of mass killings to the work of archaeologists (SK, p. 52) spotting sites for possible digs based on a careful analysis of the terrain. A similar effort should be made in the case of contaminated (at least potentially) landscapes, i.e. first, one needs to identify possible locations where mass crimes might have been committed and bodies might have been hidden; only then can one conduct studies and exhumations. Pollack’s drive requires him to uncover such places. He declared: “We need to do everything to tear unknown victims from mass graves in contaminated landscapes and from oblivion, and to restore their names, faces and stories” (SK, p. 43). As was the case with his family’s Nazi past, also here there exists the tension between banned memory (and often forced suppression) and attempts of some recollective compensation – as if the ban on remembering demanded some excessive commemoration, which should never be forgotten as is the case with other dead, about whom new generations gradually forget. That memory against the perpetrators appears to be without limits, be it temporal or personal, and it is rather supposed to touch the space of a crime for ever, just like Babi Yar will be for ever marked by the stigma of history (SK, p. 23). Referring to Karl Schlögel’s book titled *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit*<sup>13</sup> [*We Read Time in Space*], Pollack even wrote about a map of contaminated landscapes on which the known places of mass crimes would be marked. Please note that this would entail the establishing of a new territorialisation of Central Europe, which would make it dependant on the events from many decades back.

### Inhabiting contaminated landscapes

Archaeological or cartographic studies are supposed to uncover and maintain the contamination. Considering the fact that “[c]ontaminated landscapes are everywhere” (SK, p. 30), the contamination would cover the entire

<sup>13</sup> K. Schlögel, *W przestrzeni czas czytamy. O historii cywilizacji i geopolityce*, transl. I. Drozdowska, Ł. Musiał, Poznań 2009.



space, turning it into a huge cemetery. Pollack's goal is to ensure memory which will maintain contamination; which will prevent the contaminated space from being brought back to life. Such an ethical imperative is motivated by the intention to counter the actions of the perpetrators whose goal was to conceal and mask their crimes so that they can become forgotten. And the places were supposed to grow over and level in order to one day continue to function as regular environs, a regular landscape<sup>14</sup>. Allowing the locations of crimes to fall victim to amnesia (SK, p. 103) would mean that the perpetrators won (SK, p. 103).

There appears another perspective – one of a major group of people interested in contaminated landscapes, i.e. the inhabitants of the areas where mass killings took place. These are people who during the Second World War performed various functions: from witnesses forced to keep silent, to participants, helpers, and the perpetrators of the crimes. After the war, contaminated landscapes often became the sites of amateur digs where, among the corpses, people tried to find valuable items, and the fact of the existence of an “Eldorado” (SK, p. 96), i.e. a gold mine at the site of a crime, also usually becomes ousted from the official memory<sup>15</sup>.

Pollack often asked about how one lives in contaminated landscapes, “how such events impact people who live here. How do they react to the fact that under the field where their cattle grazes and in the forest from which they get their wood for building their houses or for keeping warm there is a mass grave?” (SK, p. 69). And he continued: “Do we see such a landscape, a location where despite that we live (we have to live) – because that is our land, those are our houses, our fields – after discovering a mass grave the same way we once used to?” (SK, p. 70). These questions open a somewhat different problem area, which Pollack did not attempt to discuss, i.e. the question of how one can bring contaminated landscapes – which, mind you, are everywhere – back to life. The examples which Pollack analysed indicate how difficult, probably impossible, the process of cleaning contaminated landscapes is; landscapes which always carry the threat that they might become something like Rechnitz, a town in Austria where towards the end of the Second World War guests to an aristocratic reception in the castle killed approximately two hundred Hungarian Jews; after the war, no one to date has been able to identify the specific location of their mass grave. Today, according to Pollack, Rechnitz is “a condemnable example of being an accessory to the crime and of an obstinate denial” (SK, p. 35)<sup>16</sup>. In this case, ethical judgement does not apply to past crimes, or even the memory of them, but, rather, to the attitudes of the inhabitants who, for various reasons, have not been able to complete the expected rituals of guilt and mourning. And for

<sup>14</sup> In order to learn more about the problems of the ‘normalisation’ of various un-places after the Holocaust, vide the *Inne przestrzenie, inne miejsca* book, in particular its part titled “Ślady (nie)obecności”. Vide *Inne przestrzenie, inne miejsca. Mapy i terytoria*, ed. D. Czaja, Wołowiec 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Pollack referred to the book: J.T. Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust*, Oxford 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Pollack discussed Rechnitz in more detail in *Topografie der Erinnerung* (pp. 83-93). Vide also: M. Muskała, *Między Placem Bohaterów a Rechnitz. Austriackie rozliczenia*, Kraków 2016.

that reason, Rechnitz is somewhat twice as contaminated: once due to the mass killing and, secondly, due to the terrible symbolism which turned the town into a sign of that which is condemnable. How could the inhabitants react to such a symbolisation of the place of their everyday lives? Clearly, they will develop various defensive reactions to protect their good name and the good name of their space.

Another case which Pollack mentioned applied to Oświęcim and his conversation with an owner of an ice-cream parlour, whom the writer asked:

What is it like to live a town which has this name? He became irritated. He could not stand it anymore, all he was hearing was Auschwitz this, Auschwitz that... He only wanted to sell ice cream, in Oświęcim, in Auschwitz (...) He was proud of his products (...) and there was nothing he could do about the fact that seventy years ago such things happened there. He lived in Oświęcim, he had to earn a living there, support his family (...) nothing else mattered for him. (SK, pp. 103-104)

That scene was supposed to document the indifference of the local community to the contaminated landscapes, yet it actually indicated something quite different. Pollack came from the outside – as a descendant of Austrian Nazis – to ask Poles around how it was to be living in a place where Jews had been murdered.

In another instance, the writer quoted a question by a Ukrainian: “How are we supposed to live with all those dead people underneath our pastures and fields?” (SK, s. 91) Bear in mind that the intention behind this question was not only to uncover contaminated landscapes and to commemorate them, but also to turn those spaces into places for living; to do something so that they can stop being contaminated fragments swelling around with a toxic mixture of remembrance and forgetting. Pollack’s project came close to this problem, but it stopped at the imperative of memory, which is supposed to maintain the contamination, not expunge it.

## Conclusion

Martin Pollack’s essays draw their moral strength from the rhetoric of exposing and denouncement. The combination of discussions about his own family, the history of Austria’s complicity in the Nazi genocide, and his reflections on contaminated images creates a strong argumentative interrelation, the central figure of which is a child’s unawareness and ignorance, which the author gradually overcame by learning about the views and actions of his loved ones. Pollack transferred this construct of denouncement onto space; hence the obsession that even his nearest surroundings, e.g. his background, may prove contaminated, just as his father – whom he barely knew – and his beloved grandpa were. The ‘normality’ of the landscape which he used to perceive was a mere product of his childhood naivety. However, the transfer of his family’s framework onto space leads to an obsession of expecting incredible and criminal things everywhere. The space



of Central Europe offers many examples of such stigma, e.g. the Slovenian Gottschee, which in Pollack's grandpa's stories "was a synonym of simple life in accord with nature, without tension or ethnic conflicts" (SK, p. 41), while after the Second World War it became the site of a mass grave.

Remembering the victims and marking mass graves are the two main goals of Pollack's essays. Yet the fact of uncovering the contamination of a landscape does not result in a simple introduction of a piece of information onto a map. It mainly entails an interference with the space where many people were once killed, but where today there are people living; people who often have little to do with those past events. Therefore, contaminated landscapes cannot commemorate past crimes as much as they contaminate and destroy the current lives of people living there. This is why the act of uncovering the contamination of landscapes should lead to cleaning them and making them favourable for future life. This could be the positive outcome of writing: not so much the memory of some terrible past, but, rather, making a space favourable for living a regular everyday life.

Unfortunately, this is not Pollack's aim. It is visible e.g. in the quoted conversation with the owner of the café in Oświęcim, whom the writer kept asking about how he could continue to do business in such a place. A whole town cannot be reduced to a monument of the Holocaust; it is now also a regular place of living. Pollack displayed a similar attitude towards his Austrian neighbours, whom he tried to remind of long-forgotten sins. Of course, such gestures match the long tradition of the works by Thomas Bernhard or Elfriede Jelinek, and it would be difficult to challenge their moral purpose<sup>17</sup>. One might, however, debate their effectiveness, i.e. do they truly incline inhabitants to try and tackle their difficult past? Or maybe they only consolidate them in their opposition to discussing the historical events? Therefore, is the fact of exposing these contaminated landscapes a sufficient strategy? Perhaps it should be supplemented with a system of commemorating contaminated landscapes by thinking of how to restore them for usage. Life continues in the bloodlands, it must continue. The question, then, for humanists is about what can be done for this life to be free from the stigma and not haunted by various past spectres.

Timothy Snyder suggested an alternative metaphor for areas located slightly more to the east<sup>18</sup>. The title *Bloodlands* metaphorises genocide spaces as places where the blood of millions of victims was spilled, yet the lands remain almost entirely outside the researcher's focus. However, the metaphor of contamination entails a different perspective: while the fact of spilling blood belongs to the past, contamination persists, it is present now and it is going to remain here, it is supposed to remain for the future. This excellent metaphor – which enables one to grasp the current problems with contaminated space – requires to be complemented with another metaphor, e.g. that of Bernhard's *Auslöschung*, namely one about expunging, a gesture of annihilation in which the act of overcoming guilt requires one to also abandon

<sup>17</sup> Vide K. Franczak, *Kalający własne gniazdo. Artyści i obrachunek z przeszłością*, Kraków 2013.

<sup>18</sup> T. Snyder, *Skrwawione ziemie: Europa między Hitlerem a Stalinem*, transl. B. Pietrzyk, Warsaw 2011. Pollack also referred to Snyder (vide SK, p. 55).

their heritage, their family history. Yet another option for the 'decontamination' of landscapes comes in the form of the ideas presented by Ewa Domańska in *Nekros*, in which the author tried to accept the presence and the decomposition of corpses, which are not supposed to negatively stigmatise the space of living but, rather, be included in the rhythm of nature<sup>19</sup>.

In reference to the ethical dimension of Martin Pollack's essays, Katarzyna Szalewska mentioned that it is the ethics of "un-membering", the restitution of meaning and the reanimation of memory<sup>20</sup>. Ethics does, however, establish a law in this case, the *nomos* of the contaminated lands, which is supposed to stigmatise them with death even more. Nonetheless, the purpose of studying contaminated landscapes could be to try and regain those lands and suspend their incredible spectral influence. Instead of memory – entangled in a web of complicated relations with the perpetrator-devised forgetting of the crimes – a much more neutral knowledge might emerge; knowledge that at those locations crimes had been committed, but that they do not have to mark or stigmatise the entire area anymore.

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<sup>19</sup> E. Domańska, *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała*, Warsaw 2017.

<sup>20</sup> K. Szalewska, *Przyroda i stygmat historii – o 'Skażonych krajobrazach' Martina Pollacka*, [in:] *Poetyki ekocydu. Historia, natura, konflikt*, eds. A. Ubertowska, D. Korczyńska-Partyka, E. Kuliś, Warsaw 2019, p. 134.

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## SUMMARY

The article presents an analysis of the essayistic knowledge about genocide. For this purpose, the author used works by Martin Pollack. Further, the article indicates the intertwining of two threads in Pollack's prose. The first one is the history of his family, recollections about Nazi relatives, and the dissonance which formed inside him regarding his family's past. The other one is the study of space understood as uncovering its "contamination", the sinister past which has marked the specific portion of the landscape. The aim of the article is to check whether it is possible to decontaminate, i.e. expunge that contamination from these landscapes in order to make them once again locations which foster life rather than are mere empty cemeteries.

## Keywords

genocide, essay, "contaminated landscape", 'place once again favourable for life'

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