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Landscapes of Postmemory

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Perturbing Names

> Various perturbing geographical names always come up in my mind in the same gloomy, stubborn, and intrusive fashion. Suffice that I am to move from any point A to any point B. For other travellers, who are equipped with better histories than I am, these names are but invisible. Names displayed on platforms move casually behind the window, between one sip of white coffee in a bar carriage and the next. Eyes slide on their surface, with no subtexts received.
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> M. Tulli, *Italian Stilettos*[1]

    Post-Holocaust topography in the above quoted passage from Magdalena Tulli's text seems to be devoid of any landmarks or clear-cut demarcation lines. One could divide it, in any chosen way, into an infinite number of segments with arbitrarily named end points: A and B. In this space, one should travel by train, yet not all travellers will see the same things through the window. The monotonous landscape without any defining qualities gets delaminated at times, revealing to the chosen ones its perturbing layers. These views are not defined by any distinguishing landscape, nor do they attract attention by presenting something exceptional or threatening; in fact, it would be impossible to recognise them without a verbal hint. What attracts the attention of some travellers,

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[1]   Magdalena Tulli, *Włoskie szpilki* (Warszawa: Nisza, 2011), 66.

what makes their heads turn and their bodies shiver are the geographical names – they introduce difference into the topographical homogeneity, and tear away the safe screen of the redundant landscape. For some, between any point A and B, where A is the departure and B the destination, an unknown is always in hiding, an *x* waiting for the equation to be solved. However, not everyone will be distracted by the view of a white sign with black letters, nor will they be provoked to throw a suspicious look on the view outside. The second layer of a given landscape is visible only to a few, and Tulli makes quite clear the nature of this distinction: delamination of cognition is not determined by any exceptional sensibility or acuity of the viewer; what uncovers the unknown, what lets one see an empty spot in the passage of meadows and hills is the heritage of the "cursed chest," "the legacy"[2] of the Holocaust past. The eyes of those equipped with better histories move casually on the surface, "with no subtexts received," while the eyes of those whose present is marked by a traumatic past will repeatedly stumble upon "perturbing names."

In Tulli's novel, those who discern the dark undertones of the peaceful landscape are descendants of Jews, Holocaust survivors, representatives of the generation of postmemory. The scenes that provide this specific experience of landscape are the "bloodlands" of eastern Central Europe,[3] a location of events that inherited memory is trying to rework. It is a "mythical territory «further to the East»,"[4] marked by sites of collective and individual death, where, however, "there is no longer anything there to see,"[5] as traces of historical catastrophes have sunk into the ordinary landscape of hills, forests and meadows. These territories, viewed from a posttraumatic perspective and constituting both its grounds and condition, create a particular phenomenon: landscapes of Holocaust postmemory. As I will try to show, landscapes of postmemory, construed both as a spatial disposition of an area that works as a correlative of historical experience, and as cultural representation (mostly photographic, cinematic, and literary), help rethink two problems that are crucial for studies on memory and trauma. Firstly, the spatial dimension of memory and the significance of place/landscape for the experience of postmemory; secondly,

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2   Ibid., 76, 64.

3   See Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

4   Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence. The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002), 72.

5   Georges Didi-Huberman, "The Site, Despite Everything," in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah. Key Essays,* ed. Stuart Liebman (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 114.

a reinterpretation of the archive of visual clichés related to representations of spaces marked by historical trauma, and hence identifying elements of this "traumatic" canon, its dynamic and cultural origin. As I will attempt to prove, in landscapes construed as figures of representation and as a cognitive matrix, categories of seeing and categories of space form especially interesting patterns and open new perspectives for an answer to the question of how we see the Holocaust.

The above mentioned geographical names, which abound in Polish landscapes and perturb some travellers in Tulli's prose, should be given a closer look for yet one more reason. White signs with black letters, placed among meadows and hills, seem to have an unclear semiotic nature. If one tried to put them into one of Peirce's three categories,[6] one would quickly find them avoiding any attempts at labelling. Firstly, the perturbing white signs are indexically linked with places that had recently been sites of camps, ghettos, and pogroms. Indexes, or signs that "establish their meaning along the axis of physical relationship to their referents,"[7] are tangibly related to what they refer to. In her analysis, Rosalind Krauss links indexes with Jakobson's shifters that take on meaning in a deictic gesture, and are "inherently «empty», its signification […] guaranteed by the existential presence of just this object."[8] Signs with names of sites of slaughter, recognised only by the descendants of the persecuted, locate their meaning in this very physical bond, with their roots in the place where they were installed. Their meaning is played out in a dialectical tension, cutting through a monotonous landscape, revealing its second layer anchored in the past, thus singling out previously undistinguishable geographical spots. On the other hand, their meaning cannot be realised anywhere else. It is topographically immobilised, ingrained in the very materiality of the Polish landscape. However, elements described in *Italian Stilettos* allow for a different interpretation as well. Seen from a train window, the white signs in the Polish landscape evoke cultural memories of a still from Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, a scene where as viewers we participate in a newly staged situation of a packed train arriving at the station in Treblinka. The still from the film, showing the conductor Henryk Gawkowski leaning from the locomotive in the backdrop of a sign saying "Treblinka" and the view of a spring landscape,

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6   See Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotics: The Theory of Signs," in *Philosophic Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).

7   Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1987), 198.

8   Ibid., 206.

has become one of the iconic images of the Holocaust[9] and works as one of the "memory cues"[10] which immediately refer us to a combination of facts and meanings collected under the umbrella term "Holocaust."[11] Therefore, the iconic nature of this image, which looks like what it refers to, takes on symbolic potential (forming meaning by an arbitrary link between sign and referent) – a sign with the name of a site of slaughter does not only refer to a certain point on the map, but also refers to all other similar locations, and the linguistic nature of this medium only enhances semiotic interpretation.

Still from *Shoah*

It is this very oscillation between contrasting dynamics of meaning that invests the category of postmemory landscape with interpretative

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9   See David Bathrick, "Introduction: Seeing Against the Grain: Re-visualizing the Holocaust," in *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. David Bathrick, Brad Prager, Michael David Richardson (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 1.

10 A term coined by Barbie Zelizer, see her *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

11 This still is usually used on the cover of most editions of the film.

potential: they indexically refer to the events that took place at these sites, they iconically-symbolically expand the visual repository of "memory cues," and finally, they redefine the notion of the traumatic.

Concentration Camp as a Site?

A disturbing experience of space is a common element of the Holocaust survivors' camp experience. In their memoirs, they refer to death camps as non-sites, unrecognisable landscapes, removed from a known territory by long journeys in a closed windowless train carriage.[12] What is clear in the attempts at working through the trauma of war is that the possibility of processes of memory and mourning depends on imbedding the traumatic experience in a concrete space. The experience of a camp as a place is inherently fractured, displaced and makes impossible any identification with the territory where events took place. The Holocaust brings a complete destruction of what the survivors identified as place; equally broken are memories of home from before the war – images of pre-war reality petrify in schematic, faded descriptions and are devoid of any dynamics.[13]

The dislocated experience of space during the Holocaust has resulted in a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenology and the dynamics of sites of memory in various fields of the humanities, working as a negative point of reference for these interpretations. For Geoffrey Hartmann, who conceptualised the notion of the memory of place on the basis of his analysis of Wordsworth's poetry, it constitutes a space transformed in the processes of recalling and describing past emotional states, which gains temporal consciousness.[14] Although Hartmann relates this term also to sites that witnessed the subject's traumatic experiences, an attempt to apply it in analysing places of the Shoah

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12   See for example Ruth Klüger's account: "Concentration camp as a memorial site? Landscape, seascape – there should be a word like *timescape* to indicate the nature of a place in time, that is, at a certain time, neither before nor after." "We passed summer camp for youngsters. I saw a boy in the distance energetically waving a large flag. [...] I still see myself rushing past him: I see him and he doesn't see me, for I am inside the train. But perhaps he sees the train. Passing trains fit into the image of such a landscape (part photography, part illusion); they convey a pleasant sense of wanderlust, the urge to travel. It was the same train for both of us, the same landscape, too, yet the same for retina only – for the mind, two irreconcilable sights." Ruth Klüger, *Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (London: Bloomsbury 2004), 73, 134.

13   See Anne Whitehead, "Geoffrey Hartmann and the Ethics of Place: Landscape, Memory, Trauma," *European Journal of English Studies* 7(3) (2003): 288.

14   See Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 49.

proves futile – radical negativity of the spatial experience of camps makes the category (strictly Romantic in origin) impossible to be applied elsewhere. For Pierre Nora, the meaning of *lieux de mémoire* is mostly based on their community-forming potential, since they are points in space around which collective memory is organised. However, Holocaust sites are deprived of this positive value – they are rather *non-lieux de mémoire* as Claude Lanzmann describes them – residues of trauma and disrupted experience.[15] Finally, Nora's analyses are used by James E. Young as a theoretical framework for his discussion of Holocaust memorial sites, focusing mainly on museum practices which, instead of creating active spaces of memory and working through trauma, often become more like agents fetishising objects, and sources of victimisation of Holocaust survivors.[16]

Therefore, analyses of the spatial dimension of the Holocaust experience have been dominated by interpretations of specific sites of the Shoah: concentration camps, ghettos, sites of slaughter, as well museums and other forms of memorialising. In the minds of witnesses, landscapes of the Shoah are often identified with death camps that they can remember to the minutest detail.[17] The usual elements of gate, barracks, guard towers and barbed wire, especially as related by former camp prisoners who visit them later on as tourists, form a kind of affective "micro-geography," an active landscape that lets one face the trauma of the past again.[18]

Landscape as Memory

The experiential disruption of space of concentration camp prisoners characterises also the experience of the so-called second generation – the descendants of Holocaust survivors, who spend their childhood and youth in the shadow of their parents' traumatic memories. They are connected with

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15 For a comprehensive phenomenological analysis of non-sites of memory and its history as a category see: Roma Sendyka, "Pryzma – zrozumieć nie-miejsce pamięci," *Teksty Drugie* 1–2 (2013). See also Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989); Dominick LaCapra, "Lanzmann's *Shoah*: Here There Is No Why," in *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

16 See Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 52; James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

17 See Baer's remark: "Trauma survivors may recall a particular place or area in great detail without being able to associate it with the actual event," *Spectral Evidence*, 79.

18 See Tim Cole, "Crematoria, Barracks, Gateway: Survivors' Return Visits to the Memory Landscapes of Auschwitz," *History and Memory* 25 (2) (2013).

their parents' history by the dynamic link which Marianne Hirsch calls post-
memory: an active form of memory whose relation with the past is medi-
ated not by remembering, but by the work of imagination, projection and
creation, an inter-generational structure through which traumatic experi-
ences recur. When this generation of postmemory is denied access to fam-
ily history, they experience this exclusion in the spatial realm as well; for
the children of Holocaust survivors, no place mentioned by their parents
is in fact accessible – neither death camps, hideouts and escape routes,
nor mythical hometowns from before the war. Hirsch writes that "«home»
is always elsewhere, even for those who return to Vienna, Berlin, Paris, or
Cracow, because the cities to which they can return are no longer those in
which their parents had lived as Jews before the genocide, but are instead the
cities where the genocide happened and from which they and their mem-
ory have been expelled."[19] Similar exclusion is experienced by descendants
of Jews who decided to stay in places that were the settings of their youth
and torments of the war – as in the quoted passage from Magdalena Tulli's
Italian Stilettos, the postmemory experience of space is of a powerfully am-
bivalent nature, and attempts at dealing with the parents' past are compli-
cated by fact that very often the children's Jewish identity remains a family
secret.[20]

Nevertheless, the second generation's disturbed, negative experience of
space is marked by a kind of shift; while in the case of their parents, the land-
scape of camps or the inaccessible spaces of pre-war cities and towns serve as
topographical points of reference, postmemory narratives and artistic projects
are devoid of any stable geography. For the second generation, the space of the
Holocaust becomes much more heterogenic: it is mediated by incomplete ac-
counts of their parents, often made taboo or mythologised through nostalgic
stories, and it spreads across a much wider territory than the indexical and
actual memories of parents.

Scholars examining literary and artistic representations of the experience
of space in works of artists who belong to the postmemory generation usu-
ally draw attention to the robust identity-forming nature of such works and
their focus on the audience. Following Simon Schama's intuition, according
to whom landscape is a formation deeply rooted in processes of memory
and imagination,[21] Anne Whitehead interprets post-Holocaust landscapes
described in Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* as the "gradual sedimentation

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19   Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile," *Poetics Today* 17(4) (1996): 662.

20   See autobiographies of Ewa Kuryluk, Magdalena Tulli, Agata Tuszyńska, Bożena Keff.

21   Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana Press, 1996).

of memory."[22] The materiality of geological forms, where memory is stored, supports the process of creating new posttraumatic identities for the protagonists. Jenni Adams reads landscape in postmemory narratives (again *Fugitive Pieces* and *The Winter Vault* by A. Michaels, *W ou le souvenir d enfance* by G. Perec) with a similar lens, looking at these works for "therapeutic linkings of memory and space."[23] In her interpretation, landscape plays, for the descendants of victims of historical catastrophes, a positive, consoling role as a screen onto which the protagonists project traumatic memories, and which becomes a substitute for memory.[24] Thus construed, landscape has a causative, process-based nature that enables it to interact with the experiencing subject – it oscillates between being the landscape *of* memory and the landscape *as* memory.[25]

This approach of understanding landscape as an active agent of experience and memory is taken up by Brett Ashley Kaplan in *Landscapes of Holocaust Postmemory*. The landscape of postmemory is rooted in the memory of Holocaust survivors, a constantly shrinking demographic, and its role is that of an "unstable witness" of events.[26] Kaplan links the terms "landscape," "Holocaust" and "postmemory" in casual semantic arrangements; landscape in her interpretation loses its strictly geographic or spatial nature, serving as an anthropological frame for discussing the history of a Nazi holiday resort in Obersalzberg, Holocaust-related photographs (including those taken by the American correspondent Lee Miller documenting the liberation of the camps in Buchenwald and Dachau, Susan Silas's postmemory work *Helmbrechts Walk*, Collier Schorr's postmodernist images of the Nazis), and finally the meaning of the word "Holocaust" in J.M. Coetzee's work and its dissemination in contemporary culture. Kaplan understands the spatial category in a double sense – as a geographical space and its representation,

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22 Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 61.

23 Jenni Adams, "Cities Under a Sky of Mud: Landscapes of Mourning in Holocaust Texts," in *Land and Identity: Theory, Memory, and Practice*, ed. Christine Berberich and Neil Campbell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 146.

24 Ibid., 154.

25 Distinction introduced by Susanne Küchler; cited in Katharina Schramm, "Landscapes of Violence: Memory and Sacred Space," *History and Memory* 23 (1) (2011): 8. See also Susanne Küchler, "Landscape as Memory: The Mapping of Process and Its Representation in a Melanesian Society," in *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, ed. Barbara Bender (Providence, RI and Oxford: Berg, 1993), 85–106.

26 Bret Ashley Kaplan, *Landscapes of Holocaust Postmemory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 2, 4.

taking as his subject of research the "geographical and psychological land-scapes of the after-effects of the Nazi genocide."[27] The other two terms get similarly dispersed: postmemory is understood here very broadly, as a type of collective cultural memory which is a repository of images of a "multina-tional landscape of the Holocaust,"[28] where the Holocaust itself becomes a global phenomenon, circulating both in discursive as well as geographical space.

What the above mentioned analyses also share is a conclusion that the spatial experience of the generation of postmemory is characterised by the incongruence of the observed landscape – the "misleading air of normalcy"[29] clashing with the knowledge of the events that happened in it. The landscape of postmemory is often an indistinguishable non-site of memory, where nat-ural processes have covered the traces of tragic history, rather than a museo-logically preserved space of former camps. "Holocaust commemoration is not site-specific,"[30] writes Ulrich Baer. Locating the phenomenon of landscapes of postmemory within the pictorial tradition of landscape, Baer analyses two photographs taken by artists of the second generation: a picture showing an inconspicuous space, previously the Sobibór camp grounds, taken by Dirk Reinartz (part of the project *Deathly Still: Pictures of Former Concentration Camps*, 1995) and a similar picture of Nordlager Ohrdruf by Mikael Levin (part of *War Story*, 1996). Baer traces the tension between the artists' romantic convention of landscape, which deludes with its explicit aura, seemingly positioning the viewer as a subject and point of reference for the observed landscape; and the exclusion of the viewer from the represented space by the implicit historicity of photography as a genre. As viewers, we have a feeling that our sight is called to identify what we already know, yet we have no access to events that the pictures seem to refer to, and the only referent is absence and emptiness that we are forced to confront. Therefore, images of landscapes of memory require the viewer to consciously reflect not only on w h a t is being seen, but also on the h o w   a n d   w h e n c e, and the ambivalent nature of photographs both protects us from the traumatic impact of the past, as well as exposes us to its power.

In her essay on the nature of non-sites of memory, Roma Sendyka points to the fact that Baer, in his analysis of works by Reinhard and Levin, remains in the idiom of aesthetic, modernist interpretations of singular and unique

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27   Ibid., 1.

28   Ibid., 5.

29   Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, 78.

30   Ibid., 83.

black-and-white pictures, thus sacrificing the singularity and authenticity of the photographed sites and their relation with surrounding nature.[31] Indeed, the monochromatic aesthetics of these works needs to be taken into account – especially if contrasted with Susan Silas's series of video works showing still images from four death camps: Treblinka, Bełżec, Chełmno, and Sobibór.[32] The coloured video image showing grass covered parts of no longer existing camps is gradually de-saturated, and the sound of birds replaced with the sound of moving tape. This sound, added to go along with the image in postproduction, quickly changes into a metallic noise that evokes a sense of threat. In her films, Silas deconstructs what works as an unstated premise of Levin's and Reinhard's works: namely that the visual experience of the Holocaust is grounded in a common knowledge of certain codes of representation and based on a repertory of easily recognisable clichés and mental shortcuts. It is only the decoloured still, now so similar to photographs analysed by Baer, that is endowed with qualities making it readable as a representation of the Shoah. Similarly, the accompanying sound of the projector – monotonous, malicious – makes one realise the basic source of the commonly shared images of "what the Holocaust looks like," namely the reproduced images of newsreel and press photos made by American and British correspondents. Finally, the immobile frame that characterises Silas's four films, capturing seemingly insignificant piece of landscape, helps recognise yet one more visual trope: long panoramic shots known from Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. As I will try to prove in the following parts of this text, despite the director's heatedly voiced protests, they establish a separate genre of iconic representations of the Shoah.

While the above quoted accounts focus on the indexical nature of landscapes of postmemory stemming from the subject's personal experience (both the secondary witness, as well as the viewer or reader), Silas's work helps identify the other side of these spatio-representational dispositions: the iconicity of some representations of post-Holocaust space, and their deep embedment in the network of pictorial and literary tropes and traditions.

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31   Sendyka, *Pryzma*, 327–328.

32   Films were recorded in 1998 and exhibited at Coolay Memorial Gallery in Portland. Information in Dora Apel, *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 219. See the video work online, accessed January 22, 2014, http://www.susansilas.com/video/untitled-may-2001.html
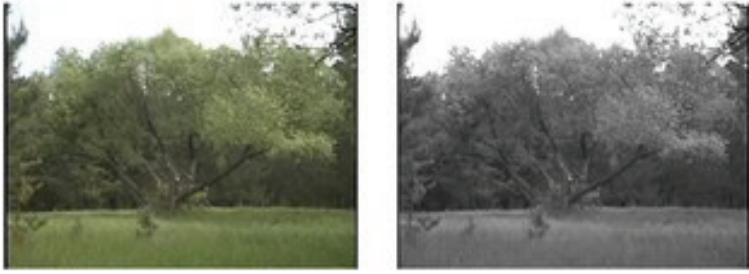
Stills from Susan Silas's *Untitled* (May 11–14, 1998) 2001: Sobibór

The Traumatic Canon

As Barbie Zelizer emphasises, "the Holocaust's visualisation is so prevalent that it has become an integral part of our understanding and recollection of the atrocities of World War II."[33] The visual archive of the Holocaust has been extensively analysed and catalogued: despite the common insistence on the fundamentally unrepresentable nature of the Shoah, it seems to remain a decidedly imaginable event. What is more, it is evoked by means of roughly a dozen clichés circulating incessantly in the cultural milieu, whose provenance however remains somewhat unclear: the boy from the Warsaw ghetto, Buchenwald prisoners staring straight at the camera, the gate of Auschwitz, piles of shoes, glasses and women's hair, and finally the train arriving at Treblinka. Images supposedly representing the atrocities of the Second World War work in our memory "like a familiar sequence of musical notes that seems to appear from nowhere."[34] The status of Holocaust photographs as indexical signs of what happened, physically linked with the past as a "result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface,"[35] as material traces of „that-has-been,"[36] is replaced by a conviction that due to incessant circulation, these images have reached a point of saturation,[37] and their authenticity and role as efficient markers of the past have been exhausted. These photographs have lost their spatial specificity and impact, and

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33 Barbie Zelizer, "Introduction: On Visualizing the Holocaust," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London: The Athlone Press, 2001), 1.

34 Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 2.

35 Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1," 203.

36 See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 77, 85.

37 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

have become merely iconic representations that work as "memory cues" and "representations without substance"[38] – pictures showing the liberation of Dachau, Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald (whose circulation in culture has been meticulously analysed by Barbie Zelizer) powering the imagery of the Holocaust up to the 1980s, as well as the still operating iconography of Auschwitz as a symbol of the "Holocaust as a whole."[39] These images, referred to by Vicky Goldberg as "secular icons,"[40] gain symbolic status because they refer not only to their physical referents, but also to the entire set of images and beliefs about the Holocaust. Memory cues work like a short circuit, an automatic recalling that refers one to superficial knowledge, with no embedding in an affective or ethical relation. Hence, iconisation of photographs of the Holocaust is interpreted as a negative phenomenon at least for two reasons: firstly, their repetitiveness and routinisation anaesthetises us to cruelty, blunts our sensibility, and the sterile, closed images make the suffering they are supposed to attest to quite invisible. Secondly, what has been selected for mass circulation after the war has been but a small fragment of vast photographic material. The small bunch of pictures, now deprived of their original context, have completely lost their contingent and singular nature. Iconic representations reduce the individual and the personal to the abstract, the non-particular, and the widely accessible form. In *After Such Knowledge*, Eva Hoffman states that "through literature and film, through memoirs and oral testimony, these components of horror became part of a whole generation s store of imagery and narration, the icons and sagas of the post-Holocaust world. In retrospect, and as knowledge about the Holocaust has grown, we can see that every survivor has lived through a mythical trial, an epic, an odyssey."[41]

It needs to be noted that this reduced inventory of Holocaust representations whose negative anaesthetic role is emphasised by Sontag, Zelizer and Hartman, consists of numerous images of strictly spatial nature. According

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38   Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 200, 202. See also Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 152.

39   On the change of paradigm in images of the Holocaust see Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust. From Auschwitz to Schindler. How History Is Bought, Packed and Sold* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

40   Vicky Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991); cited in Cornelia Brink, "Secular Icons," *History and Memory* 12 (1) (2000): 137.

41   Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge. Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2004), 12.

to Marianne Hirsch, they constitute a "radically delimited"[42] visual landscape of postmemory, whose repetitiveness, as she suggests, in the case of the next two generations, does not have to be "an instrument of fixity or paralysis or simple retraumatisation, as it often is for survivors of trauma, but a mostly helpful vehicle of transmitting an inherited traumatic past in such a way that it can be worked through."[43] It is possible thanks to the postmemory practices of repetition, displacement, and decontextualisation, which reclaim the authentic "traumatic effect" of photography, exposing the viewers anew to the disturbing work of the past, at the same time allowing for the processes of mourning and reintegration. Hirsch claims this is the essence of practices of artists belonging to the second generation, who make iconic representations of the Holocaust part of their collage-based work (Lorie Novak, Muriel Hasbun, Art Spiegelman), thus reclaiming their original authentic potential in the new context of a landscape of postmemory. Picture-collages form a peculiar relation with their viewers, one that Hirsch – following Margaret Olin – calls a performative index, an index of identification, with its power based on emotions, desires and needs of the viewer, rather than on the actual "that-has-been" of photography.[44] Similar conclusions are reached by Cecilia Brink, who in her analysis of "secular icons" states that "photographs install an ordered transition from paralysis to revival."[45]

Alison Landsberg seems to seek a comforting interpretation of the proliferation of Holocaust clichés as well. Prosthetic memories, as she refers to them, mass produced and distributed,[46] have the power to evoke empathy and widen the experience of people who do not own them, as well as offer access to knowledge often impossible to gain through traditional cognitive means.[47]

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42   Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images," in *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 107.

43   Ibid., 108.

44   See Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," in *The Generation of Postmemory*, 48. See also Margaret Olin, *Touching Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

45   Brink, *Secular Icons*, 147.

46   See Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 20.

47   Ibid., 113.

Images Without Imagination

There is yet another debate unfolding parallel to the discussion on the increasing anaesthetisation of visual representations of the Holocaust. Its main postulate is the inherently unimaginable and unrepresentable nature of the Holocaust and, what follows, its unknowable and incomprehensible aspect. According to some scholars, the enormity of the Nazi crime and the destruction of the majority of evidence determine the fact that the Shoah is an absolutely unique event, beyond history, and any attempt at representing it would mean an attempt to create an "image of the unimaginable."[48] The aesthetic ban of mimesis in the case of the Shoah (thus interpreting Adorno's famous statement on the impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz) is, in a quasi-religious interpretation, linked with the Biblical taboo of image production from the second commandment, the so-called *Bilderverbot*[49], and hence located in a moral context. Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) – because of the director's refusal to use any archival materials, relying instead solely on the testimony of victims, witnesses and perpetrators of Nazi genocide – has worked as a central point of reference for this discussion since the year it was produced. As Dominick LaCapra has persuasively explained, Lanzmann's *Bilderverbot* is closely linked with a different kind of taboo: namely *Warumverbot*, or the ban on asking "why"[50] – thus identifying any attempt at comprehending the Shoah with breaking a moral ban, and placing the event itself in the realm of an unknowable *sacrum*. According to the director, *Shoah* is firstly, "not at all representational;"[51] secondly, it "is not made to communicate bits of information, but tells everything."[52] According to Lanzmann, the former postulate is achieved by avoidance of any cinematic realism, as well as refraining

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48   Term of Gertrud Koch. See "The Aesthetic Transformation of the Image of the Unimaginable: Notes on Claude Lanzmann's Shoah," trans. Jamie Owen Daniel and Miriam Hansen, *October* 48 (Spring, 1989): 21.

49   See Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (2) (1996): 300–302; Karyn Ball, "For and Against the *Bilderverbot*: The Rhetoric of 'Unrepresentability' and Remediated 'Authenticity' in the German Reception of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*," in *Visualizing the Holocaust*, 163–185.

50   See LaCapra, *Lanzmann's Shoah*, 100.

51   Claude Lanzmann, Ruth Larson, David Rodowick, "Seminar with Claude Lanzmann," *Yale French Studies* (1990): 97.

52   Claude Lanzmann, "Le monument contre l'archive? (entretient avec Daniel Bougnoux, Régis Debray, Claude Mollard et al.)," *Les Cahiers de médiologie* 11 (2007):274; cited in: Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane Brendan Lillis (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 96.

from using any archival material documenting the Shoah.[53] Lanzmann refers to archival photographs calling them "images without imagination," as they offer an incomplete, fragmentary image of the Holocaust, based mainly on pictures of concentration camps such as Buchenwald or Dachau, while the undocumented slaughter of European Jews took place in smaller death camps: Chełmno, Treblinka, Sobibór, Bełżec. Lanzmann opposes these images with his cinematic "monument," the word (i.e. oral testimony) as his warrant.[54]

Significantly, the oral testimony in *Shoah* is accompanied with visual material that is not limited to mere documentation of interviews conducted by the director. A separate sub-genre in Lanzmann's film, serving as a background for oral accounts, includes long shots of rail tracks, trains, the speakers' surroundings, finally – empty landscapes, often devoid of any clear geographical identity.

Stylised Unrepresentability

The extended shots of forests, clearings, meadows, and field roads spread across the entire nine-hour-long film. Usually appearing when a witness speaks about a death camp destroyed by the Nazis, they make visible what Lanzmann called a *non-lieux*, and Didi-Huberman – a site *par excellence*, a site despite everything.[55] Nevertheless, it is impossible to define the role of the motionless images in each particular case – very often, they are not related directly to the story that is being told, and their work consists in both distracting and attracting the viewers' attention. When one follows the slow movement of the camera, the witness's voice is somehow detached from the person and one needs a moment to remember who is actually speaking. Sometimes remaining nameless, the stories of different camps echo in empty landscapes, making their image powerfully cast in memory. Yet, it is difficult to say what has actually been remembered as the repetitiveness and similarity of these views makes it impossible to list any distinguishable features: a field, a dark line of the forest, a clearing surrounded by trees, a path in the fields bordered by bunches of dry grass. Though Lanzmann dismisses

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53   See Debates that Lanzmann participated in: on realism in *Schindler's List* and pictures taken by Sonderkommando, interpreted by Georges Didi-Huberman and included in the exhibition catalogue "Mémoire des camps. Photographies des camps de concentration et d'extermination nazis, 1933-1999." See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, Hansen, "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah," Ball, "For and Against the *Bilderverbot*," Claude Lanzmann, "Why Spielberg Has Distorted the Truth," *Guardian Weekly* April 3, 1994.

54   Didi-Huberman, *Images in spite of All*, 94.

55   See Didi-Huberman, *The Site, despite Everything*, 114, 115; Sendyka, *Pryzma*, 325.

"images without imagination," images of the Shoah from archival materials preserved in viewers' memory, he creates at the same time his own aesthetics of "stylised unrepresentability."[56]

It is largely a topographical stylisation, where incomplete, traumatic narratives infect the observed space, forcing one to look for symptoms of history, and to gaze suspiciously at the calm landscape. "It's hard to see how the faces captured on the *Shoah* film could escape the status of «iconic» images," states Didi-Huberman.[57] Indeed, seemingly Lanzmann's trademark, this aesthetic is all but unprecedented: *Shoah*'s empty, frozen landscapes resemble equally still and heavy stills from Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog.* Made in 1955, the film begins with a famous shot of a calm Polish landscape, with a voiceover commentary written by Jean Cayrol: "Even a tranquil landscape, even a prairie with crows flying [...] can lead very simply to a concentration camp. [...] Today, on the same track, it is a daylight and the sun is shining."[58] If Resnais's

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56   See Ball, "For and Against the *Bilderverbot*," 168.

57   Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 126.

58   Jean Cayrol, *Nuit et brouillard* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 17, 21; cited in Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 129.

heterogenic work, which combines an immobile "haunted" landscape with archival material from a newsreel, were to be seen as a source of two parallel idioms of imagining the Holocaust, Lanzmann appears as a faithful follower of the former, "non-representational" line. *Shoah*'s influence, and Lanzmann's position within the discourse of representation of the Holocaust, contributed to the preservation of this way of seeing the space of the Shoah, a paradigm crucial for the experience of landscape by the generation of postmemory.

Still from *Night and Fog*

However, to provide a fuller picture of this experience, one needs to take a closer look at a special kind of "landscape" scene from Lanzmann's film. One of the film's introductory sequences is a story told by the daughter of Motke Zajdel – one of the survivors of the Vilnius ghetto annihilation who worked at the cremation site in the nearby forest of Ponari. When Zajdel beings his account, the viewers are shown Ben Shemen forest in Israel.

ZAJDEL: The place resembles Ponari: the forest, the ditches. It's as if the bodies have been burned here. Except there were no stones in Ponari.
LANZMANN: But the Lithuanian forests are denser than the Israeli forest, no?
ZAJDEL: Of course. The trees are similar, but taller and fuller in Lithuania.

The image on the screen changes – now we can see a slightly different forest, denser and greener, with three people walking. It is a forest in Sobibór which Lanzmann, assisted by an interpreter, discusses with Jan Piwoński, a pointsman at the local station. In the preceding scene – the famous opening of the film where Szymon Srebrnik tries to discern traces of death, the death of thousands of people in the forest clearing of Chełmno – as well as in many other similar shots, Lanzmann treats space as a symptom of history, where landscape is combined with testimony into one, inseparable whole. However, in the scene featuring Motke Zajdel, the situation is slightly different: firstly, the story of the survivor is told by his daughter (one of the few female characters in Lanzmann's film and the only representative of the second generation) who, instead of recounting her father's war experience, talks about her own childhood spent in the shadow of his stubborn silence about this period. When the voice of Zajdel himself is heard, a landscape can be seen as well, but not in the role of supporting the testimony, for it is a completely different forest located elsewhere. Secondly, the death of Jews in Ponari is not recounted at all. The only thing Zajdel refers to is an Israeli landscape: "It's as if the bodies have been burned here." Ponari remains an invisible referent, an unavoidable part of the comparison. A moment later, another landscape is presented, and before the name Sobibór is displayed, the viewer is

Still from *Shoah* (forest in Sobibór)

momentarily convinced that this is the forest in Ponari – an authentic place, where there is "no longer anything to see." The forest in Sobibór, though having its own tragic history, thus temporarily loses its exceptional identity – it is a traumatic landscape only by force of similarity. The triple order of this scene (emphatically opened by a representative of the second generation narrating) aptly illustrates the peculiar nature of the landscape of postmemory, taking into account the subject's identification of the "innocent" landscape of Ben Shemen with the traumatic memory of Ponari, bifurcating it into the past and present. In the observed landscape, the traumatic referent is reflected like a spectre – it haunts the former, rather than recalling its source, and accompanied by a view of a different forest (a different site of genocide), we are left confused by the similarity, incapable of ascertaining its particularity.

These non-specific landscapes can be collectively regarded as the iconographic reservoir, similar to the "images without imagination," employed by literary and visual representations of the Shoah, especially those created by members of the postmemory generation. Lanzmann's idiom can be spotted in Reinhard's work and Levin's *War Story* (both analysed by Baer), in Susan Silas's video works like *Helmbrechts Walk (1998–2003)* which includes pictures of landscapes taken during her journey re-enacting the death march of prisoners from Helmbrechts in Czech Republic,[59] as well as in Andrzej Kramarz's photographs.[60] What is typical for landscapes of postmemory is not the uniqueness of the place, but their visual uniformity, multiplicity, and redundancy that almost deprive them of their singularity.

Fragments of Mikael Levin's *War Story* (1995)

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59 Silas's work can be seen online, accessed January 22, 2014, http://www.helmbrechtswalk.com/portfolio/e/helmbrechts1.html

60 *A Piece of Land* (2008–2009).

Two Types of Arcadia

"As we get into his tiny Polish Fiat," writes Eva Hoffman on her journey to
Brańsk,

> Zbigniew tells me that Szepietowo was a stopping point for Jews who
> were being transported to Treblinka. Instantly, the pleasant station build-
> ing loses its air of innocence. Instantly, I flash to the scenes that must have
> taken place here. (…) Instantly, the landscape in my mind is diagrammed
> by two sets of meanings. How to reconcile them, how not to blame the
> land for what happened on it?[61]

History invests the picturesque view of a small station in a Polish provin-
cial town with another layer: the memory of events that took place in it. From
the moment of identifying its "actual" nature, the place can only be perceived
through two sets of meanings. Immediately, the affective dimension of the
observed space is changed: delight in its idyllic character transforms into
dumb silence, and the face of the viewer petrifies in anagnorisis: the pleas-
ant station, the cosy coppice, and the blooming meadow will never again be
the same. "As I walk around Brańsk with Zbyszek and contemplate its lovely
views," writes Hoffman later, "the angled slope of the riverbank, the gentle
curve of the river – I now cannot help but imagine: that flat stretch of land
leading away from the river was an escape route to ostensibly safer places."[62]
The act of identification (anagnorisis) – so crucial in both Hoffman's as well
as Tulli's prose – proves to be also an act of anamnesis: the past bursts through
the smooth surface of the landscape, marking and distinguishing what is in-
visible in the present.

A similar experience is shared by other second generation authors who
undertake their journeys to countries of East Central Europe with differ-
ent motivations. Describing his first impressions of Giby in Podlasie, from
which he begins his saga on memory and landscape, Simon Schama writes:
"[…] Something about [the hill] snagged my attention, made me feel uneasy,
required I take another look."[63] And though this moment of hesitation is ex-
plained further on when it turns out that it was the site of the death of Polish
partisans, this remark applies to the entire experience of the Polish landscape
which Schama here anticipates, a landscape which includes, according to his

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61   Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Bos-
      ton: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 20, 21.

62   Ibid., 245.

63   Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 23.

famous statement, also Treblinka: "brilliantly vivid countryside; [...] rolling, gentle land, lined by avenues of aspen."**64** In Martin Gilbert's *Holocaust Journey* – a journal itinerary of a two-week journey in search of traces of the Shoah – every time the author stops his account to provide a description of the land-scape, it is accompanied by a gloomy chorus: "The beauty of the scenery – grassy meadows in the valley, pine-clad hills above – is in extreme contrast to the grimness of the journey fifty-two years ago… We drive on through a wonderful, peaceful, pastoral scene, of gentle rolling hills and cultivated fields. To our left, just to the north of the road, runs the railway that in those days led to Belzec."**65**

Therefore, landscapes of postmemory are fundamentally characterised by incongruence and incoherence, as well as a sense of the uncanny – when the "misleading air of normalcy" is broken, when pastoral, monotonously similar landscapes disclose the knowledge of the events that they have witnessed. The discrepancy between what we know and what we see is a vehicle for this dis-sonance. Similarly, in Tulli's short story, the cue comes from the "geographical names" and the landscape itself does not really insist on disclosing its past. Postmemory images – as their photographic and cinematic representations clearly indicate – are like pictures devoid of *punctum* due to their torment-ingly inconspicuous nature: our gaze is not attracted by any particular detail where the process of understanding can be anchored. Nevertheless, the very confrontation leaves one full of anxiety. The meaning of these views is then formed in the dialectical split of memory and forgetting, observation and identification, the indistinguishable and the specific, the repetitive and the authentic. Landscapes of postmemory seem to yield to a basic mechanism of traumatic realism: the everyday and the trivial hides the extreme and the traumatic, escaping the language of representation.**66** Idyllic spaces turn out to be escape routes, the present is infected with the past, and the known and familiar become threatening and alien. Landscapes of postmemory are both indexical and iconic images: shifters related to overgrown sites of slaughter, as well as icons of the Holocaust referring to sequences of representational topoi.

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64   Ibid., 26.

65   Martin Gilbert, *Holocaust Journey: Travelling in Search of the Past* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 122, 196.

66   See Michael Rothberg, "Between the Extreme and the Everyday: Ruth Klüger's Traumatic Realism," in *Extremities. Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. Nancy K. Miller, Jason Daniel Tougaw (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); see also his *Trau-matic Realism. The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis–London: Univer-sity of Minnesota Press, 2000).

Sources of this iconicity can also be found in a slightly more remote tradition: "There have always been two kinds of arcadia: shaggy and smooth; dark and light; a place of bucolic leisure and a place of primitive panic,"[67] writes Simon Schama. The genealogy of the myth of Arcadia as a land originally marked by darkness is traced by Erwin Panofsky in his essay discussing the inscription "et in Arcadia ego."[68] From the point of view of syntax, he suggests that these words were not originally supposed to mean "And I as well was born in Arcadia," referring to a retrospective vision of a land of an ideal future, but rather "I am present even in Arcadia" – me, death, the dark lining present even in an idyllic scene. This dialectic in representations of Arcadia is inherent in the experience of postmemory landscape: the moment of realisation discloses the original flaw in the illusory calm of the observed space, the flaw becoming the fundamental point of reference for perceiving the idyllic scene.

The Traumatic of Landscape

The indexicality of postmemory landscapes is thus closer to performativity, as defined by Hirsch and Olin, than to any form of permanence relating the history of events that have transpired there, an inherent authenticity that Didi-Huberman seems to suggest when he writes about sites despite everything. A place takes on traumatic meaning when its traumatic aspect is discerned. However, the act of identification, the act of pointing out that "this is here," in many cases proves temporary and accidental. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's own search for the camp in Vapniarka in Ukraine, where their relatives were imprisoned, proves to be an almost futile task: "We had intended to connect memory to place… If through our visit, we brought the memory of its past back to the place, then that return is as evanescent as that hazy summer afternoon. It is an act, a performance that briefly, fleetingly, re-placed history in a landscape that had eradicated it."[69] Hirsch and Spitzer, equipped with drawings and memoirs of camp prisoners, look for a particular place, yet their experience seems out of place, and the traumatic aspect of the identified landscape is but a temporary effect. Yet, where can we locate the vehicle of transmission of this effect if we conceive of postmemory in a broader context,

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67   Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 517.

68   Erwin Panofsky, "*Et in Arcadia Ego*. Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition," in *Meaning and the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955).

69   Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2010), 230.

going beyond the experience of just family members of survivors and regard-ing "the relationship that the [whole] generation after bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they remember only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up"?[70]

In her *Originality of the Avant-Garde*, Rosalind Krauss analyses a passage from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* where a young provincial, Catherine Morland, goes for a walk with two of her friends: soon enough it turns out she knows nothing about the nature of picturesque landscapes appreciated by her com-panions. As Krauss indicates, it is not the landscape that constitutes the pictur-esque, but "through the action of the picturesque the very notion of landscape is constructed as a second term of which the first is a representation." Seem-ingly authentic and non-mediated, it becomes a "reduplication of a picture which preceded it."[71] The singular and the formulaic (the repetitive) each form two logical halves of the concept of landscape. "The priorness and repetition of pictures is necessary to the singularity of the picturesque."[72] As for the viewer, singularity depends on whether he or she can actually recognise it as such, and the act of identification is possible only thanks to the existence of previous models.

If in the case of postmemory landscapes, "the picturesque" is sub-stituted with "the traumatic," these landscapes become visual clichés of space related to historical or personal traumas, affectively linked with memory inaccessible for subsequent generations. At the same time, they serve as a repository of images whose apparent non-specificity and si-multaneously uncanny nature becomes an iconic mark of the traumatic, belonging to a certain "traumatic" canon of culturally diverse provenance. This repository of landscapes would include a majority of post-Lan-zmann visual representations of seemingly neutral elements of space that are invested with sinister meaning through the dissemination of the traumatic.

Nevertheless, the experience of the landscape of postmemory is not only based on a more or less intentional knowledge of iconic representations – cultural knowledge transmitted "by means of stories, images, and behav-iours" – but also on a certain cognitive disposition, prone to tracing flaws,

70   Marianne Hirsch, "Introduction," in *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

71   Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 163.

72   Ibid., 166.

to "paranoid reading[s]"**73** of the surrounding area, to constant suspicions regarding non-specific sights and idyllic views of the eastern Central European landscape. The Holocaust is crucial to understanding the phenomenology of postmemory landscapes not just in its own context, but more generally when it comes to other radical historic spatial ruptures in Polish history in the 20th century.

The status of landscape as an "unstable witness," as Brett Kaplan refers to it, gains new meaning in the case of postmemory landscapes because what is at issue is the role of the viewer as one who recognises the authenticity of a posttraumatic landscape, responding to its silent call. The relation between the viewer and the space should play out more in the tension between the active "connective memory to a place" and the common tropes of postmemory which evoke and preserve memory – "the priorness and repetition of pictures is necessary to the singularity of the traumatic."

Translation: Karolina Kolenda

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73   See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," in *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).