

Framing loss and figuring grief in Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida*

Article (Accepted Version)

Mroz, Matilda (2016) Framing loss and figuring grief in Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida*. *Screening the Past* (41). pp. 1-13. ISSN 1328-9756

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/63147/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Framing loss and figuring grief in Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida* **Matilda Mroz**

Abstract

This article concentrates on the formal and aesthetic aspects of Paweł Pawlikowski's 2013 film *Ida* in the context of an increasingly visible interest in the history of Polish-Jewish relations in Poland, and with the loss of its Jewish communities in the Holocaust. The film encourages us to pose certain questions: how can something that is no longer present be represented or framed? How can loss be given visual shape, and grief a visible form? In exploring these questions, the article considers how the framing of space becomes intertwined with the process of unearthing, with, that is, the excavation of human remains alongside the extraction of repressed or denied memories and histories. The film's framing is also warped by grief, which is here understood not only as an individual reaction to loss, but also as inhering in material objects and taking shape in formal structures. Drawing on the writing of Eugenie Brinkema and Roland Barthes, the article explores how grief distresses visibility and illuminates absence.

Bio

Matilda Mroz is Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Sussex. She held a British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at the University of Cambridge (2008-2011), where her research focused on Polish cinema, and where she also completed her PhD in film theory (2004-2007). She is the author of *Temporality and Film Analysis* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), which explores duration through the films of Antonioni, Tarkovsky, and Kieslowski. She is the co-author of *Remembering Katyn* (Polity Press, 2012) and co-editor of *The Cinematic Bodies of Eastern Europe and Russia: Between Pain and Pleasure* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016). Her current research examines the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations in Polish and transnational film.

Ida (Poland/Denmark/France/UK 2013) is the first feature film to be made by Paweł Pawlikowski in Poland, a country that he left as a teenager. It is set in the early 1960s, as Poland stagnates under state socialism and proves itself incapable of addressing the lingering traumas of the Holocaust and the loss of over three million Jewish citizens. Against this background, two very different women encounter each other: Anna, a convent-raised novice and orphan who learns that she is, in fact, Ida Lebenstein, and a Jew; and her aunt Wanda, a judge, once renowned for her ruthlessness in pursuing the executions of 'enemies of the people'. Although set in a climate of amnesia, *Ida* was made in a period of increasing interest in the Polish-Jewish past, and in exploring the continuing presence of what has been lost. Such an interest manifests itself in the smallest and seemingly most innocuous details in the film. For example, following Wanda's suicide, Ida arrives in her empty apartment and tidies the flat. The film pauses briefly to show us, in close-up, a section of the kitchen table on which sugar has been spilt. The sugar has been sprinkled carelessly over a piece of bread; we have watched Wanda prepare a meal like this once before. With

the bread removed, the granules of sugar frame a void. The image becomes at once an indexical trace of Wanda's presence, like a footprint or a photograph, as well as encapsulating the film's invocation of certain questions: how can something that is no longer present be represented or framed? How can loss be given visual shape, and grief a visible form? These are questions that have emerged with particular force in the context of the revival of interest in Polish-Jewish memory, of which *Ida* is inescapably a part, despite Pawlikowski's emphasis on the universal aspects of the film's narrative.¹ The film was intensely controversial in Poland, testifying to the heightened level of emotion circulating around the issue of Polish-Jewish memory.²

It was largely the publication of Jan Gross's historical work *Neighbours: the Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, in 2000 that attracted a renewed attention to particular aspects of Polish-Jewish relations.³ In *Neighbours*, Gross details how in 1941 a group of Polish villagers in Jedwabne murdered almost all of their Jewish neighbours and took ownership of their property. Gross's work provided the most controversial 'counter-memory' of the Holocaust for a country whose state socialist government had repeatedly promoted the role of Polish rescuers of Jews, while downplaying Polish anti-Semitism or violence.⁴ While histories of non-Jewish Poles risking their lives to rescue Jews in German-occupied Poland are still frequently depicted, the formerly repressed events in which Poles harmed or even murdered their Jewish neighbours are becoming more visible in the cultural landscape of Polish-Jewish memory.⁵ *Ida*'s narrative engages with many elements of this historical shift. As we learn partway through the film, *Ida*'s and Wanda's family (*Ida*'s parents Róża and Haim Lebenstein, and Wanda's baby son Tadzio) were in hiding with their Catholic neighbours, the Skibas, during WWII, before their murder by Feliks Skiba, who then buried them in the forest and appropriated their farmstead. *Ida*, meanwhile, was sent to a Catholic orphanage as a baby. Her discovery of her Jewish roots echoes the similar discoveries that have recently been made by many Poles, a phenomenon which has been charted in academic work and the cultural sphere.⁶ With such a discovery, however, tends to come the realisation that many of one's ancestors perished in the Holocaust, bringing the 'survivor-descendent' face-to-face with loss.⁷ According to anthropologist Erica Lehrer, the metaphors for 'missing coherence' that come up in conversations with survivor-descendants often involve the 'search for a kind of missing "frame", the borders of a jigsaw puzzle into which one could fit inherited cultural fragments to give them meaning and stability.'⁸

It is precisely the idea of the frame, in *Ida*, that this article seeks to explore. The sense of attempting to find a coherent frame for remnants of cultural memory is significant for a film that continually manipulates the possibilities of framing to suggest something missing. The characters are frequently pushed to the edges of the frame, occupying small portions of it, while often featureless spaces fill in the remainder. The framing repeatedly bisects the characters to remove limbs and facial features from vision. Rather than accruing a stable symbolic significance, *Ida*'s framing is multivalent and multiply resonant. In part, it seems to point to the difficulty of rendering visible *Ida*'s particular narrative, as well as gesturing towards the broader loss of the Polish-Jewish community as a whole. Particularly in the deep-focus shots of sparsely-populated landscapes, the film conveys a sense that something has slipped away from us, whether into the depths of the pictured space, or outside the boundaries of our field of vision. It is an apt rendering for the ways in which Polish-Jewish history and memory continually comes up against absence. There are several moments in *Ida* that become suggestive of the way in which the film bridges its individualised fictional traumas and a more general sense of loss. It is hinted at in

Wanda's response to Ida when she expresses her desire to visit the graves of her parents: 'they have no graves. Neither them nor any other Jews.' It is indicated when, amongst Wanda's family photographs, we catch a glimpse of an image of Irena Sendlerowa, the head of the children's section of the Polish Council to Aid Jews (*Żegota*), which was active during WWII.

Ida, then, is set in a post-traumatic landscape in which the individual and the collective intersect. The film's characters are variously marked by the trauma of the murder of the Lebensteins and more generally of the war and Holocaust. Wanda is perhaps most visibly scarred by the loss of her son and sister. Notably, she decries her decision to leave her child in the hands of the Skibas to fight in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Many of her fellow insurgents, though of the non- or anti-Communist persuasion, are likely to have come before her court after the war, as they were denounced as 'enemies of the people' In her incarnation as 'Krwawa Wanda' (Bloody Wanda), Wanda's ruthless pursuit of the death penalty may be both revenge and self-punishment. The trajectory of Ida's life has also, of course, been indelibly marked by the murder of her parents, though, as an infant, she has no memory of losing them. As such, her experience presents a fascinating overlap with those of trauma survivors, where the event that traumatised the individual is not able to be 'integrated into experience or directly remembered', instead, it is (unsuccessfully) repressed.⁹ An unwitting repression of her Jewish identity is suggested in Ida's movement towards devoting her life to the Catholic Church. Like a trauma survivor, Ida 'carr[ies] an impossible history' within her, becoming herself 'a symptom of a history' that she cannot entirely possess.¹⁰ Many theorists, however, consider a focus on individual psychology as unnecessarily narrow in theorising trauma. For example, Joshua Hirsch argues that trauma should be seen as 'a broad social phenomenon, exemplified in individual psychology and in public discourse alike.'¹¹ In *Ida*, trauma seems to seep from the individual to infect the sparse, almost deadened landscape; arguably, the film, as an element of 'public discourse', is itself a response to past traumas.

This article's approach to *Ida* shares some of the concerns of trauma theory, not least in emphasising the ways in which cinema can bring us up against the limits of meaning, "'the gaping, vertiginous black hole'" of the experience of the trauma'.¹² However, I want to locate my own queries slightly to the side of this to focus attention on two interrelated issues: the framing of cinematic space, and the framing of grief. In relation to the latter, the article will consider how the framing of space becomes intertwined with the process of unearthing, with, that is, the excavation of human remains alongside the extraction of memories and histories. The bulk of the article will, however, examine how grief shapes the film's aesthetic. In this, I follow the work of Eugenie Brinkema, who encourages us to think of grief as not limited to individual psychology, but as inhering in material objects and taking shape in formal structures.¹³ Where Brinkema's work is orientated towards separating subjectivity from the intensity of grief, my interest lies equally in moments of psychological grief and the intertwining of these with a formal grief that structures the *mise-en-scène*. Formal grief points towards an unspecified sense of loss over a historically traumatic past that is continually, paradoxically, present. The film does not, I believe, attempt to 'work through' such grief and pain, but instead allows it to shape its very presentation.

Unearthing: *Birthplace* and *Ida*

For its casting of Poles as the perpetrators of Jewish murders during WWII, *Ida* is rare amongst Polish films, though it is by no means the first to do so. *Ida* has a vital antecedent in a film that pre-dates the Jedwabne revelations, Paweł Łoziński's 1992 film *Birthplace*.¹⁴ This documentary charts the return of Jewish author Henryk Grynberg to the Polish village in which he was born, and in which his family was hidden by non-Jewish Poles during the war. Grynberg's aim is partly to discover what happened to his father, who disappeared during this time. It becomes apparent that his father was not murdered by Germans but by a Polish farmer, and buried in a field. His remains are unearthed towards the end of the film. Despite their differences – *Birthplace* is, after all, a documentary, and *Ida* a fictionalised narrative with a wider scope – they share a number of preoccupations.¹⁵

Birthplace is amongst the films that Annette Insdorf has classified as 'documentaries of return', characterised by 'the return of a survivor to a place that no longer knows him or her'.¹⁶ *Ida* draws on some of the characteristics of such documentaries in its presentation of the women's return to the village of *Ida*'s birth in order to investigate, and find material traces of, the past. What is striking about Insdorf's formulation is that it is the 'place' itself that is imputed to have or to lose memory. In a more prosaic context, Dylan Trigg describes in a similar way a return to a once-familiar space, which is now 'indifferent' and 'no longer reciprocates our memories'.¹⁷ One can take these statements in at least two ways; most obviously, they refer to the point at which the inhabitants of a place no longer remember you, or deny remembering you. The returnees may embody a difficult or repressed past that disrupts the temporal order of the present, and the villagers' response is often to deny them a place in memory altogether. Secondly, it is in the framing of cinematic space that 'place' itself comes to appear inhospitable or 'indifferent' to one's memory. In *Ida*, particular ways of framing space coincide with the hostility shown by the village's inhabitants. The framing of the journey into the forest to unearth the remains of the Lebensteins is a good example of this spatial inhospitality. The sequence begins with a long shot of field and sky, appearing more as a layering of grey tones than a physical place. Landscape here veers towards abstraction, refusing to give the spectator a comfortable purchase on the place being shown. The shot is held briefly before the characters enter from screen right as tiny figures, indistinctive and lost. The next shot shows a vertical layering of greys, with little indication of scale until the characters enter and proceed through the trees, which periodically impede our vision of them. In both shots, the space is established as pre-existing the characters' entry into it, framed first as abstract layers, and as narrative space or container for human actions second.

As does *Birthplace*, *Ida* forges a connection between the literal excavation of bones from the earth, and the emergence of previously withheld historical narratives. Such a connection resonates with Laura Marks's archaeological model of cultural memory, used to describe the 'historical searchings' of intercultural films which attempt to reveal the stories overlooked by 'official history'.¹⁸ In Marks's use of a 'geological/archaeological metaphor for these historical searchings', she asks us to keep in mind a mental diagram of sedimented layers, which, in the excavation of actual remains from layers of earth in *Ida* and *Birthplace* becomes literalised.¹⁹ It is not coincidental, then, that when Feliks finally delivers his confession, it is from within the earth itself, crouching in the hole that he has dug. Memory emerges alongside the breaking open of the ground, as though the sediment that has covered the physical remains, and the layers of memory, were being excavated together.

However, this process of excavation is fraught with uncertainty and haunted by what is not revealed. *Ida* stages gaps and elisions through framing and editing at the very moment that the characters appear to find what they seek. A few seconds after we hear Feliks's shovel strike bone there is a disorientating temporal ellipsis. The film cuts from the scene of digging to a mid-shot of Ida and Wanda kneeling. Wanda reaches down below the edges of the frame and brings from off-screen the small, cleaned skull of her son, which she wraps in her handkerchief before walking unsteadily away. By this stage, it seems, all of the remains have been excavated; for the entirety of Feliks's confession, they are lying just out of frame, which we do not realise until Ida picks them up, bringing them into the visual field. The frame remains rigidly static, potentially making us aware of what is taking place at the periphery of the visible, in the blind spots. The framing mirrors the marginality of particular aspects of Polish-Jewish relations, which have been out of the frame of official discourse for decades, though now revealed to be lying just beneath its edges. In *Birthplace*, too, the strike of the shovel against bone ushers in a temporal ellipsis, in which the actual extraction of the bones from the dirt is largely elided. No sooner do we hear the sound of the shovel cracking bone, then the film cuts to show us Grynberg plunging into the pit dug by the villagers and picking up the skull of his father, which has already been partially unearthed. In both films, the moment of discovery warps temporal continuity and regularity. At the moment where everything seems to become evident, we are faced with visual and temporal disruption.

Forms of grief

Ida is permeated by loss, though ways of responding to the losses in the film vary. Ida's way of coping with loss accords somewhat with Freud's classic conception of mourning, as a comprehensible response to loss which eventually dissipates.²⁰ In the face of loss, Ida is productive: she seeks to visit her parents' graves and to summon a priest for a reburial ceremony. Ida's response to the loss of Wanda arguably involves elements of both 'acting out' and 'working through'; LaCapra reminds us that, rather than being strictly opposed activities, the former 'may be a necessary condition of working-through'.²¹ In drinking Wanda's vodka, smoking her cigarettes, wearing her clothes, and having sex, Ida forges a 'mimetic relation to the past' (to use LaCapra's definition of 'acting out') which seeks to incorporate elements of Wanda into herself.²²

While Freud initially opposed mourning to melancholia, as the pathological condition of remaining attached to what is lost, his later writings retreat from this definitive distinction.²³ It is the slipperiness of the concepts of mourning and melancholia in Freud's own writings that set the stage for their 'muddling' in some contemporary theory (what Brinkema terms 'mourninholia').²⁴ Brinkema has noted the frequency with which melancholia, once the domain of negative affectivity, becomes recuperated in theory as a way to establish an active engagement with the past and to bear witness on behalf of the living.²⁵ Negative affectivity is 'put to work' and made to become meaningful in some way, and pain 'is neutralized in the very act of being put to work, for the peculiarly painful is also the peculiarly purposeless'.²⁶ Grief is the term she uses for that pain which 'resists the relational dimension of loss; the form for that suffering of a general economy in which not everything can be made to mean'.²⁷ In this light, one could argue that rather than mourn or engage in a productive melancholia, Wanda *grieves*.

In turning to Brinkema here, it is also worth returning to the discourse on trauma, which is marginalised in her writing. It is thus unclear whether Brinkema imagines grief as a response to trauma as it has been traditionally conceptualised by psychoanalysts. Yet there are obvious points of connection between Brinkema's discourse on grief and trauma theory. Both grief and trauma are associated with psychological injury, yet both can also be read through the formal properties of texts. In his work on 'posttraumatic cinema', for example, Hirsch reads trauma in formal structures such as flashbacks or temporal discontinuity, though he is interested in how (traumatised) cinematic form and psychological trauma mirror each other.²⁸ Brinkema, on the other hand, aims to separate grief, as an affect manifesting itself in form, from the psychological experiences of characters or spectators. However, the primary value of turning to Brinkema here rather than the writing on posttraumatic cinema lies in her detailed explication of the properties of grief which has great resonance with *Ida*'s formal arrangements, and particularly with the questions of framing that I am concerned with.

Etymologically, grief is associated with a certain kind of heaviness: 'Grief is derived from *grever* (afflict, burden, oppress), from the Latin *gravare* (to cause grief, make heavy) – hence, the etymological intimacy of *grief* and *gravity*, both from *gravis* (weighty).'²⁹ The 'strange and heavy agony' of grief, Brinkema argues, bends cinematic form and warps the mise-en-scene.³⁰ This opens up another way of reading *Ida*'s framing: its characters become pulled downwards by the heavy pressure of grief, while the space above them seems to bear down with a material weightiness. Formal and psychological grief coincide most powerfully in Wanda's moments of anguish. When she attempts to elicit a confession from Szymon Skiba, Wanda is framed in close-up while she speculates on the murder of her son: 'how did you do it? With an axe?' Her head steadily droops downwards onto her chest, moving further and further towards the edge of the frame until only half her face is visible. Her body is made heavy with grief, dragged downwards in weighty suffering. It is not only in moments of human suffering that *Ida*'s aesthetic is charged with a sense of grief; the film itself seems afflicted. It is in the cinematic tableau, Brinkema argues, that the structure of grief manifests itself most explicitly. The form of the tableau 'organizes the image around the heaviness of grief', its stasis becoming a refusal to transform pain into a productive state.³¹ Many of *Ida*'s shots have the stilled quality of the tableau, as though movement has been weighted down by sorrow's gravity. The images have a certain rigor, that is, they are rigid and their rigidity is rigorously followed, strictly adhered to; the frames' 'rigor' also puts one in mind of 'rigor mortis' (literally, a 'stiffness of death'). Frequently only micro-movements disrupt the inertia of these shots, for example, a sheet flapping in the wind, or a curl of cigarette smoke in an empty room.

Grief is a matter of light as well as of weight, or rather, light's loss: 'death deprives one of the vision of the other who is lost, and, in a larger sense, deprives one of the illuminating possibilities of light, visibility, and untroubled vision.'³² It is in the writing of Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, in which the author meditates on his mother's recent death, that Brinkema finds the 'fullest picture of grief as something radically different from mourning'.³³ Barthes's grief is, in this text, figured as suffering without transformation or the potential to be made meaningful. In front of the photograph of his mother as a child, the famous Winter Garden photograph (which is not, incidentally, made visible for the reader), he writes 'I suffer, motionless [...] I cannot *transform* my grief [...] my photograph – is without culture: when it is painful, nothing in it can transform my grief into mourning'.³⁴ It is not just the

photograph as an image *of* something that provokes suffering, however. Rather, it is the very structure of the photographic itself that embodies the problematic of grief; in Barthes's text, the suffering of loss is thought of *as* a photographic structure.³⁵ The photograph, writes Barthes, is an emanation of the light that touched a body and now touches 'me like the delayed rays of a star [...] light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium'.³⁶ With the loss of the 'being' comes the loss of the light that may touch one through the photograph; this presence will never again materialise in the photograph, or be touched by the light that will afterwards touch the person who looks upon it. 'With the photograph' then, writes Barthes, 'we enter into *flat Death*.'³⁷

In *Ida*, the photographic becomes one of the privileged modes for the structuring of grief, in three overlapping ways: first, through the presentation of the film itself as not unlike an old photograph, secondly, through the use of photographs as objects within the film, and, thirdly, through a network of images in which photographs are linked with other ways of capturing and framing light, namely windows. In relation to the first category, *Ida*'s 1.37 aspect ratio, black and white tones, and stasis recall photographs from the period. Presenting itself in some ways as a series of photographs, the film also draws attention to the photographic structure of cinema, and thus opens up a link to Barthes's conception of this structure as itself imbued with absence. Photographs as objects within the film also recur in significant ways. When *Ida* learns of her Jewish heritage, we are shown a photograph of Róża cradling the baby *Ida* in her arms. This piece of photographic 'evidence' is immediately affected by the film's troubling of visibility; it lies askew and parts of it are out of focus, matching the scratched and stained wooden table. It almost looks like a double exposure, with the human figures appearing more spectral than material. Just before her death, we see Wanda's collection of photographs as she arranges them on a table, as though they were a puzzle that she was putting together, and attempting to frame them in such a way as to give them 'meaning and stability', to appropriate Lehrer's words.³⁸ This, however, likely proves elusive, considering that re-arranging her photographs is one of the last actions that she performs before committing suicide. In any arrangement, the photographs fail to sublimate her grief, as the Winter Garden photograph failed to do so for Barthes.

As a way of capturing and framing light, the photograph can be linked to the window, which also becomes entangled within formal structures of grief and loss. The window, and its projection of light onto other surfaces, is a recurring visual motif in *Ida*. Frequently, however, we only see either the light cast by the window, and not the window itself, as, for example, in the Mother Superior's office or the women's hotel room. Or, alternatively, we see the window, but as a square of framed light which does not allow for a seeing-through to the outside world; here, the window does not frame the outside world into presence, but is instead filled with light, as in Szymon's hospital room or the window in Wanda's living room. These recurring compositions seem to refuse the conventional notion of the historical film as 'opening a window directly onto the past'.³⁹ Instead, in frequently removing one element of the equation (the window casting light, or the window framing the outside world), *Ida*'s windows become a key part of the presentation of presence and absence, where something (the window or the outside world) is in fact missing from the visual field. Light, rather than signalling 'enlightenment' or meaningful 'illumination', can also be a void, a 'vacant centre, stag[ing] precisely *nothing*.'⁴⁰ This is perhaps most clearly seen in Wanda's suicide, as she leaps from the window into the illuminated nothingness beyond; here, the window becomes an aperture of death.

Róża's stained-glass window is another vital part of this network of framing absence and presence. Early in the film, Wanda tells Ida that her mother used to make stained-glass windows and put them in the barn. When they travel to their old farmstead, Ida discovers the stained-glass window in the cowshed. The window becomes an indexical trace of presence, formed in light, like a photograph. The light through the window briefly illuminates Ida, touching her, as though literalising Barthes's afore-mentioned formulation. The window, made up of fragmented panes of mottled glass snaked through with heavy black lines echoes the arrangement of photographs that Wanda made on the table. These slips of captured light, indexical traces of presence, are also divided by dark lines, in this case, of the table underneath. And they also seem to arrive to us as fractured pieces of some kind of lost whole.

As Wanda notes ('coloured glass next to cow shit', she says, looking at the window), this stained glass, commonly associated with religion and transcendence, is situated amongst what might be seen as an opposing element - animal excrement. David Trotter has argued that mess and waste matter in literature and film is often associated with formlessness and death. Mess destroys illusion and points to death as radically contingent, not that which 'happens as the outcome of an identifiable sequence of cause and effect', but something which 'need not have happened at all'.⁴¹ It is in this regard that we may also see the afore-mentioned blank space framed by sugar on the kitchen table, which Ida encounters following Wanda's suicide. The arrangement of the sugar becomes a kind of indexical trace of Wanda's presence, yet at the same time it is purposeless waste to be discarded (and Ida does so). Trotter writes: 'sugar in a jar is a substance on tap: ready to be made useful [...] sugar dumped on the kitchen counter is just so much grit [...] an excess of matter over meaning.'⁴² Such mess is 'matter out of place' and purposeless, constituting 'an anti-system by which we are made to see, not meaning and value, but their opposite, or limit.'⁴³ Both the excrement in the barn and the sugar on the table are suggestive of the presence of this anti-system. One can also connect this vision of mess and waste, and its potential failure to become meaningful, with grief's resistance to recuperation by meaning. Where mourning might be purposeful, grief, like mess, is unproductive, an 'experience of meaninglessness itself.'⁴⁴

Conclusion: endings

Ida's formal structures are shaped by, and around, irretrievable losses. An aesthetic of grief, in its heaviness, its shadowing of light with darkness, and its static rigor (mortis), contours many of the film's frames. The film's ending, however, upsets any attempt to impose a single interpretative framework across the film's formal operations. After spending the night with Lis, he invites Ida to accompany him on tour, and then, perhaps flippantly, into married life. Instead, in the morning Ida puts on her habit and leaves. In the film's final scene, Ida walks along a country road towards the camera. Far from the static frames we have become used to, the image shakes. We soon hear Busoni's contemplative piano transcription of Bach's 'Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ', a definite contrast to the subtle non-diegetic music that has gone before. Ida continues to walk for another minute before the film cuts to black.

It is reasonable to assume that Ida is returning to the convent, and yet the film does not explicitly show this; Ida's choice, to join the pleasure-seeking generation of the 1960s or to return to the convent, is not *visibly* exercised with finality. This is significant for the film's memory politics, as her options carry particular associations. As Andrzej Leder writes, the former choice is potentially to lose herself amongst

those who have no desire to remember or mourn, whose only plans are to play, and then reproduce.⁴⁵ This is the generation of the ‘small stabilisation’ of Poland in the 1960s, a time of growing consumerism and conformity, which largely shifted away from the guilt and trauma of WWII.⁴⁶ Ida’s other option, the Catholic Church, is also problematic. Churches and convents were involved in sheltering Jewish children like Ida, however, the Polish Catholic Church as an institution has been plagued by accusations of anti-Semitism and inactivity during the Holocaust.⁴⁷ In *Ida*, the Church as an institution is associated with forgetting and non-disclosure, not least in the figure of the parish priest whom Ida encounters, who supposedly cannot remember the Lebensteins and whose very tone expresses disdainful surprise that she could possibly be connected with them.

In stopping mid-action, *Ida*’s ending is somewhat reminiscent of that of Francois Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows*, in which the film’s young protagonist escapes from a reform school, and the final image freezes on his look towards the camera.⁴⁸ For Richard Neupert, *The 400 Blows* is a classic ‘open story’ film, which ends before diegetic events seem to be completed, leaving the story unresolved.⁴⁹ Such ‘inconclusive termination[s]’ are also characteristic of the narrative construction of neorealist films.⁵⁰ For Bazin, in neorealist cinema ‘the empty gaps, the white spaces, the parts of the event that are not given, are themselves of a concrete nature: stones which are missing from the building.’⁵¹ *Ida* is far from being a neorealist film, yet this description has a powerful resonance with the film’s aesthetic and thematic concerns: the gaps and voids in memory, the difficulty in framing (literally and metaphorically) what is ‘not given’, and the removal of things and people from visibility, which leaves decisive gaps, like a piece of bread removed from scattered sugar.

Ida, however, goes further than the classic ‘open story’ film. Neupert argues that although in such films the story remains open, the telling of it, the narrative discourse, is closed through aesthetic cues.⁵² *Ida*, however, does not end amongst the structures of grief where the film has lingered in its duration, which is not to say that these final frames somehow erase the pain that has shaped much of the film. The sudden introduction of the hand-held camera in particular represents such a disconnect from what has come before that it seems instead that something new has begun. *Ida*’s ending puts possibility in motion (quite literally), without fulfilling it, becoming suggestive of things unfinished. The ending intimates a possibility that goes far beyond whatever the future holds for Ida herself. Indeed, Ida’s future prospects, as a novice with no family and only a fleeting glimpse of life outside a convent in communist Poland, seem circumscribed. On the other hand, the possibilities for the emergence in contemporary Poland of other narratives of Polish-Jewish relations, and other ways of telling them, are discernably opening up.

Bibliography

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*. London: Vintage, 2000.

Bill, Stanley, ‘Review of ‘Ida’: Identity and Freedom’, *Notes From Poland*, January 9, 2015, available at: <https://notesfrompoland.wordpress.com/2015/01/09/review-of-ida-identity-and-freedom/>. [accessed May 28 2016]

Brinkema, Eugenie, *The Forms of the Affects*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.

Child, Ben, ‘*Ida* director stands ground against complaints of historical inaccuracy’, *The Guardian*, January 30 2015, available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/jan/30/pawel-pawlikowski-ida-criticism-film>. [accessed 17 July 2016]

Davis, Colin, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, and the Return of the Dead*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

Grabowski, Jan, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013.

Gross, Jan T., *Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland, 1941*. London: Arrow Books, 2003.

Grynberg, Henryk, 'The Aftermath [sic], *Ida*, etcetera', *The American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies*, available at: <http://www.aapjstudies.org/index.php?id=209>.

[accessed 19 July 2016]

Hirsch, Joshua, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004.

Insdorf, Annette, *Indelible Shadows: Films of the Holocaust*, 3rd Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

LaCapra, Dominick, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994.

LaCapra, Dominick, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Leder, Andrzej, 'Nadpalone', *Krytyka Polityczna*, available at:

<http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/film/20150317/leder-o-idzie-nadpalone>
[accessed May 28 2016]

Lehrer, Erica, *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013.

Libionka, Dariusz, 'Polish Church Hierarchy and the Holocaust – an Essay from a Critical Perspective'. *Holocaust: Studies and Materials* (2010): 76-127.

Lorenz, Jan, 'Shades of Closeness: Belonging and becoming in a contemporary Polish-Jewish community', in *Boundaries, Identity and Belonging in Modern Judaism*, edited by Maria Diemling and Larry Ray, 63-75. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.

Marks, Laura U., *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000.

Mazierska, Ewa, *Jerzy Skolimowski: The Cinema of a Nonconformist*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010.

Mroz, Matilda, 'Re-Imagining the Neighbour: Polish-Jewish Relations in Contemporary Polish Visual Culture', in *Holocaust Intersections: Genocide and Visual Culture at the New Millennium*, edited by Axel Bangert, Robert S. C. Gordon, and Libby Saxton, 132-147. London: Legenda, 2013.

Mroz, Matilda, 'Spectral Cinema: Anamorphosis and the Haunted Landscapes of *Aftermath* and *The Devil's Backbone*', in *Haunted Landscapes: Super-Nature and the Environment*, edited by Ruth Heholt and Niamh Downing, tbc. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016.

Neupert, Richard, *The End: Narration and Closure in the Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995.

Palmer, Jack, 'Film Review: *Ida*', *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 9 (2015): 122-124.

Polonsky, Antony, and Joanna B. Michlic, 'Introduction', in *The Neighbours Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, edited by Antony

Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, 1-43. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Ricciardi, Alessia, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Rosenstone, Robert A., 'The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age' in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, edited by Marcia Landy, 50-66. New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Trigg, Dylan, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of The Uncanny*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012.

Trotter, David, *Cinema and Modernism*. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Trotter, David, *The Uses of Phobia: Essays on Literature and Film*. Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Zubrzycki, Genevieve, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Filmography

Paweł Łozinski, *Birthplace/Miejsce Urodzenia* (Poland, 1992)

Władysław Pasikowski, *Aftermath/Pokłosie* (Poland/Russia/Netherlands, 2012)

Paweł Pawlikowski, *Ida* (Poland/Denmark/France/UK 2013)

Lynne Ramsay, *Gasman* (UK, 1998)

Francois Truffaut, *The 400 Blows/Les Quatre Cents Coups* (France, 1959).

Adam Zucker, *The Return* (USA/Poland, 2014)

¹ See the interview with Pawlikowski in Ben Child, 'Ida director stands ground against complaints of historical inaccuracy', *The Guardian*, January 30, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/jan/30/pawel-pawlikowski-ida-criticism-film>.

² See Jack Palmer, 'Film Review: Ida', *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 9 (2015); Stanley Bill, 'Review of 'Ida': Identity and Freedom', *Notes From Poland*, January 9, 2015, <https://notesfrompoland.wordpress.com/2015/01/09/review-of-ida-identity-and-freedom/>.

³ Jan T Gross, *Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland, 1941* (London: Arrow Books, 2003).

⁴ Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, 'Introduction', in *The Neighbours Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, edited by Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 30.

⁵ For other examples of how Polish visual culture has framed Polish-Jewish relations recently, see Matilda Mroz, 'Re-Imagining the Neighbour: Polish-Jewish Relations in Contemporary Polish Visual Culture', in *Holocaust Intersections: Genocide and Visual Culture at the New Millennium*, edited by Axel Bangert, Robert S. C. Gordon, and Libby Saxton (London: Legenda, 2013).

⁶ See for example Erica Lehrer, *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013); Jan Lorenz, 'Shades of Closeness: Belonging and becoming in a contemporary Polish-

Jewish community', in *Boundaries, Identity and Belonging in Modern Judaism*, edited by Maria Diemling and Larry Ray (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Adam Zucker, *The Return* (USA/Poland, 2014).

⁷ Lehrer, 106.

⁸ Lehrer, 106-7.

⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 21.

¹⁰ Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

¹¹ Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 18. See also Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 173-4.

¹² Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 64.

¹³ Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Paweł Łoziński, *Birthplace/Miejsce Urodzenia* (Poland, 1992). Władysław Pasikowski's film *Aftermath/Pokłosie* (Poland/Russia/Netherlands, 2012) was the first feature film to draw heavily on the Jedwabne events. See Matilda Mroz, 'Spectral Cinema: Anamorphosis and the Haunted Landscapes of *Aftermath* and *The Devil's Backbone*', in *Haunted Landscapes Super-Nature and the Environment*, edited by Ruth Heholt and Niamh Downing (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

¹⁵ For Grynberg's own analysis of the films, see Henryk Grynberg, 'The *Aftermath* [sic], *Ida*, etcetera', *The American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies*, <http://www.aapjstudies.org/index.php?id=209>

¹⁶ Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Films of the Holocaust*, 3rd Ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 300.

¹⁷ Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of The Uncanny* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), xxvi.

¹⁸ Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 28.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, and the Return of the Dead* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 132.

²¹ LaCapra, *History and Memory*, 45.

²² Ibid.

²³ Alessia Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003) 3-4, 32-3. See also Brinkema, 60.

²⁴ Brinkema, 66.

²⁵ Ibid., 69.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 71.

²⁸ Hirsch, 19

²⁹ Ibid., 73.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 56.

³² Ibid., 54.

³³ Ibid., 76.

³⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), 90.

-
- ³⁵ Brinkema, 76.
- ³⁶ Barthes, 80-81.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 92.
- ³⁸ Lehrer, 106-7.
- ³⁹ Robert A. Rosenstone, 'The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age' in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, edited by Marcia Landy, (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 58.
- ⁴⁰ Brinkema, 110.
- ⁴¹ David Trotter, *The Uses of Phobia: Essays on Literature and Film* (Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 165-66.
- ⁴² Ibid, 157. Trotter is here writing on Lynne Ramsay's *Gasman* (UK, 1998), in which sugar also makes an appearance.
- ⁴³ David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 51.
- ⁴⁴ Cited by Brinkema, 74.
- ⁴⁵ Andrzej Leder, 'Nadpalone', *Krytyka Polityczna*, available at: <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/film/20150317/leder-o-idzie-nadpalone> [accessed May 28 2016]
- ⁴⁶ Ewa Mazierska, *Jerzy Skolimowski: The Cinema of a Nonconformist* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 46.
- ⁴⁷ See for example Dariusz Libionka, 'Polish Church Hierarchy and the Holocaust – an Essay from a Critical Perspective', *Holocaust: Studies and Materials* (2010); Genevieve Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 58-9.
- ⁴⁸ Francois Truffaut, *The 400 Blows/Les Quatre Cents Coups* (France, 1959).
- ⁴⁹ Richard Neupert, *The End: Narration and Closure in the Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 75.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 76.
- ⁵¹ Cited by Neupert, 76-7.
- ⁵² Ibid., 103-104.