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## THE LANDSCAPE AS A SILENT WITNESS OF A *FRAGILE MEMORY* IN PAWEŁ PAWLIKOWSKI'S 2013 FILM *IDA*

### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Paweł Pawlikowski's 2013 film *Ida*, analysing how the formal and aesthetic aspects question silent witnesses about the difficult past using pictures as a useful testifier. In the context of Poland's national memory, its current political discourse and the Polish-Jewish relations during World War II, *Ida* offers a significant contribution. The process of scrutinising this difficult past becomes a journey, a troublesome event when a remembrance must be constructed and experienced. The film journey offers a possibility to get back to this period of time and encourages us to pose certain questions: how do sites of memory remain with us through cinematographic or photographic representations? How can we define this physical and mental landscape of the journey as being a *fragile memory*? Drawing on Carlo Ginzburg's index paradigm, the author proceeds to reflect upon the traumatic events of the Holocaust in the Polish landscape through two important photographic moments related to cinema.

**Keywords:** (film) photography, Ginzburg, Holocaust, *Ida*, landscape, fragile memory, (post)memory

World War II has profoundly marked the cinematic representations of the twentieth century, and the Holocaust stands at the heart of this process of reconstructing the difficult past. More than other genocidal massacres that occurred during the twentieth century, the Holocaust still haunts the European memory vividly.<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida states in *Specters of Marx: Every period has its ghosts (and we have ours), its own experience, its own medium, and its proper hauntological medium*.<sup>2</sup>

Even though Polish cinema has always been interested in history, as it often had the responsibility of exposing the past to the Polish viewers until 1989, the communist regime marginalized and manipulated the memory of the Holocaust to serve the authorities' political and ideological needs. *A specific representation of the Holocaust [...] became the paradigm for remembering this event in the Polish collective memory, and [...] was expressed and cultivated in a strictly controlled cultural scene, commemorative sites, official speeches, and historical narratives*.<sup>3</sup> The return of democracy in 1989 has enabled Polish writers, filmmakers, and scholars to freely explore topics previously exposed to harsh political censorship and communist interpretation of history. Despite the significance of the theme, the portrayal of the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations in Polish film remains a field that has not been more deeply explored. Matilda Mroz' monograph *Framing the Holocaust in Polish Aftermath Cinema: Posthumous Materiality and Unwanted Knowledge* (2020)<sup>4</sup> and Marek Haltof's *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* (2012) are precious contributions to this significant yet sparse field of study.

In the light of evolving Polish responses to the Holocaust, Polish cinema received direct recognition for the same topic when Paweł Pawlikowski's film *Ida* was awarded the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film in 2015.<sup>5</sup> *Ida* is the first feature film to be made by Paweł Pawlikowski (born in 1957) in Poland, the country that he left for Great Britain during his teenage years. In the 1990s he began working for the BBC on documentary films. Of his documentary period, Pawlikowski says: *Making documentaries allowed me to rummage for authentic characters and situations in the historical landscapes of eastern and central Europe, in the Slavic world where collapsing*

<sup>1</sup> See T. Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts after Communism*, New York, NY 1995.

<sup>2</sup> J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International*, London–New York, NY 1994, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> J.B. Michlic, A. Polonsky, *The Neighbors Respond. The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, Princeton, NJ 2004, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> For other examples of how Polish visual culture has framed Polish-Jewish relations see M. Mroz, "Re-Imagining the Neighbour: Polish-Jewish Relations in Contemporary Polish Visual Culture", in A. Bangert, R.S.C. Gordon, L. Saxton (eds), *Holocaust Intersections: Genocide and Visual Culture at the New Millennium*, London 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Again, in 2016, the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film was attributed to a Hungarian drama directed by László Nemes, *Son of Saul (Saul fia)*, set in the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II, reflecting on the traumatic event of the Holocaust from the point of view of post-generation. Giving the award, two years in a row, to post-traumatic films about the Holocaust, indicates the need to scrutinise the difficult past, as being a *fragile memory*.

*Communism, renascent religion, and nationalism made a very strong context for stories [...].*<sup>6</sup> Pawlikowski's documentaries regard the major historical events: the collapse of the Soviet Union (*Dostoevsky's Travels*, 1991) or the war in the former Yugoslavia (*Serbian Epics*, 1992). A thematic through-line appears from his nonfiction to his feature films and the interest in *strong characters at the mercy of history*.<sup>7</sup>

*Ida* meets all the characteristics of Pawlikowski's film style: it's a study of character and questions about personal and national identities concerning memory issues related to the complex relationships between Jews and Poles after World War II. The personal situation of Pawlikowski, whose paternal grandmother died in Auschwitz, and his mother, who was Polish Catholic, makes reference directly to this period. The film offers a particular encounter with the past through post-memory, a term coined by Marianne Hirsch to describe *the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behavio[u]rs among which they grew up*.<sup>8</sup> By adopting Hirsch's concept, I proceed to reflect upon the traumatic events of the Holocaust in the Polish landscape through two important photographic moments related to cinema.

Paweł Pawlikowski's film is a challenging contribution to contemporary commemoration politics. In this article, narrative and visual devices used in *Ida*<sup>9</sup> will be scrutinised to study how the physical and mental landscapes of the Holocaust is represented. The significance of this film will be analysed within an interdisciplinary approach to reflect on how the sites of memory remain with us through cinematographic or photographic representations. How can we define this experience about the difficult past as a *fragile memory*, underlined by physical and mental landscapes in a journey?

## LANDSCAPE AND MEMORY

In my article, I use the concept of 'landscape' rather broadly to articulate spaces and their representations about a journey made by the main characters. I begin with a focus on Carlo Ginzburg's index paradigm that I apply to the landscape to illustrate how it becomes a silent witness in *Ida*'s journey through the past. Ginzburg's paradigm is still very functional for analysing visual culture as Pietsie Feenstra argues in her insightful monograph published in French *La photo-mémoire des paysages-témoins en Europe. Pays-Bas, Espagne, ex-Yougoslavie* (2020). Feenstra illustrates how visual culture can

<sup>6</sup> J. Winter, "Paweł Pawlikowski: Dreaming All My Life", in: M. Atkinson (ed.), *Exile Cinema: Filmmakers at Work Beyond Hollywood*, Albany, NY 2008, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York, NY 2012, p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of the film as an integral and autonomous work, see K. Mąka-Malatyńska, "Opowiedzieć niewidzialne. Próba analizy filmu *Ida* Pawła Pawlikowskiego", *Narracje o Zagładzie* 2015, no. 1, pp. 225-246.

witness a specific vision of a country relating to the landscape representation. She proposes a concept of *photographic memory* defined through a specific landscape in a film narrative.<sup>10</sup> Underlining the importance of Ginzburg's works and research in visual studies, Feenstra refers to Giusy Pisano, a French scholar of film archaeology. According to Pisano, the historical writing by the 'index paradigm' method applies to the film form made up of discontinuous fragments – traces and clues – to which we give meaning and continuity through the film editing.<sup>11</sup>

In his collection of essays titled *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, Ginzburg emphasizes the importance of traces. In the text, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm" (1979), he compares the method of interpreting works of art to the Stone Age hunter learning to decipher tracks left by his prey. Therefore, the theoretical frame of this article is primarily related to Ginzburg's concept of microhistory about the country's vision of the past, according to which the trace is a clue allowing us to grasp some information about the past. In this context, the trace is defined as a material, physical mark present in the Polish landscape. Feenstra usefully observes that Ginzburg's index paradigm seems to be an operative method for analysing the memory sites as *silent tracks* interpreted through cultural knowledge or by studying archives.<sup>12</sup> Archives are places of memory – *les lieux de mémoire* – places where memory is constructed and contested based on the views of a particular society. *No archive is innocent*.<sup>13</sup> Through archives that contain valuable traces of the presence of a given community in the form of documents and photographs, the past is constantly constructed and negotiated.

From this perspective, I notice two crucial concepts in *Ida*: a *photographic memory*: a collection of photographs used by the filmmaker to create the film and photographs as an important testifier for remembrance in the narration, and a troublesome vision of the landscape to illustrate this *fragile memory* that comes to life during the journey through the memory sites.<sup>14</sup> Etymologically, fragile is associated with a certain kind of delicateness: 'Fragile' is derived from the Latin *fragilis*, from *frangere*, *frag-*, to break.

<sup>10</sup> Feenstra defines the photographic memory of the landscape in cinema, getting back to the beginning of the fifteenth century when the fine arts in Europe, represented the landscape in paintings as a world vision. She argues that fixing a specific vision of the past in film, is a 'memory-screen', a photographic vision of the past. In my article, I define the *photographic memory* by the archive of the filmmaker and the pictures represented in the narration as important traces of the difficult past that allows the filmmaker to reconstruct what could be considered as being somehow invisible.

<sup>11</sup> G. Pisano, "L'écriture indiciaire et la forme film", *Les écritures de l'Histoire*, Conference in Seoul, 2011. Quoted in P. Feenstra, *La photo-mémoire des paysages-témoins en Europe. Pays-Bas, Espagne, ex-Yugoslavie*, Villeneuve-d'Ascq 2020, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> P. Feenstra, *La photo-mémoire...*, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> E. Yale, "The History of Archives. The State of the Discipline", *Book History* 2015, vol. 18, p. 332.

<sup>14</sup> See P. Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, Paris 1984-1992. In English: P. Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, 3 vol., New York, NY 1996-1998. Nora has observed a significant change in the ways of transmission of collective memory. The site is therefore considered as the place where history can be experienced. Nora's ground lying publication has inspired many scholars to reconsider memory sites.

The adjective means ‘easily broken, damaged, or destroyed; frail’.<sup>15</sup> Memorializing the past is filled with contradictions: *loss must be marked, and it cannot be represented*.<sup>16</sup> Visual arts and literature have the capacity to reveal and communicate the past. They try to render what is invisible through visibility as a *fragile memory*, to reconstruct what cannot be seen but only imagined. The film image allows us to talk about things that we know about but do not want to discuss or have no words to describe.

## SYMBOLIC JOURNEY THROUGH A CONTAMINATED LANDSCAPE

*Ida* opens in the silence and coldness of an isolated Roman Catholic convent in the Polish countryside. Anna is an orphaned novice on the verge of vowing. A few days before the ceremony, she meets Wanda, her only relative. She informs Anna that her actual name is Ida Lebenstein, the only child of Haim Lebenstein and Róża Herc, murdered during the Nazi occupation. Ida resolves to find her parents’ graves, but she learns that *they have no graves. Neither they nor any other Jews. No one knows where their bodies are... Maybe in the woods or in the lake*.<sup>17</sup> Undoubtedly, the landscapes of Central and Eastern Europe conceal individual and mass graves. A significant part of them has not been located and commemorated until these days. An allusion to the memory of landscape hiding the violent and terrible history of the place can be associated with Martin Pollack’s concept of ‘contaminated landscapes’ (Kontaminierte Landschaften): *landscapes that were places of mass killings committed covertly and out of plain sight, often under strict secrecy. [...] The graves are hidden, they are camouflaged*.<sup>18</sup> Thereby, the term ‘contaminated’ implies that the landscape is dirty, poisoned, infested and/or tainted by the crimes committed there, and the area is known as the *bloodland*.<sup>19</sup> ‘Contaminated landscapes’ relate to the perception of places in the present whereas Pollack puts it — people here still *live near, or in some cases, literally on graves*.<sup>20</sup> Nature covers the past transform-

<sup>15</sup> “Fragile”, in A.H. Soukhanov (ed.), *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Boston, MA 1992.

<sup>16</sup> J. Butler, “Afterword: After Loss, What Then?”, in D.L. Eng, D. Kazanjian (eds), *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, Berkeley, CA 2002, p. 467.

<sup>17</sup> A quote from the film taken from the original English dialogue list (00:11:56 → 00:12:10).

<sup>18</sup> M. Pollack, *Kontaminierte Landschaften*, St. Pölten 2014, p. 20. Pollack described the landscapes of Poland, Ukraine, Austria, and Slovenia as peaceful settings, where woods and fields cover unreconciled pain and suffering.

<sup>19</sup> See T. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, New York, NY 2010. In recent research works, Europe has been defined as an aggregation of ‘memorylands’ where landscapes are *filled up with products of collective memory work—heritage sites, memorials, museums, plaques, and art installations designed to remind us of histories that might otherwise be lost* (S. Macdonald, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today*, London 2013, p. 1). See also a compelling reflection about ‘Non-Sites of Memory’ with an essay by Roma Sendyka entitled “The Difficult Heritage of Non-Sites of Memory. Contested Places, Contaminated Landscapes”, *Traces* 2017, no. 3, at [http://www.traces.polimi.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/traces\\_mag\\_03\\_WEB-1.pdf](http://www.traces.polimi.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/traces_mag_03_WEB-1.pdf), 9 September 2022.

<sup>20</sup> M. Pollack, *Kontaminierte Landschaften*, p. 27.

ing the landscape while visitors do not see traces of crimes unless they are advised. By bringing in this concept, Pollack additionally focuses on something which has been essential to memory studies, namely forgetting.

In the gloomy village of Piaski, where the Lebensteins lived, Anna/Ida and Wanda face the silence of the inhabitants who refuse to evoke the dark past. At the old Lebenstein's property, a Polish family insists that there is no record of a Jewish family having lived there before. As the film progresses, the house occupant, Feliks Skiba takes the two women into the woods where their family was buried. Graham Fuller rightly points out the closeness between this scene and some of the woods and fields in films *Shoah* (1985) by Claude Lanzmann<sup>21</sup> and *The Aftermath* (*Pokłosie*, 2012) by Władysław Pasikowski.<sup>22</sup>

The woods constitute a metaphor for the film's memorialization (or lack thereof) of the Holocaust as *the natural world incorporates the violence it has beheld and quite literally upheld*.<sup>23</sup> The forest is one of the most prominent symbolic-laden spatial motifs and focuses on several semantic centres. Forests are traditionally dark and labyrinthine. It is in the woods that *one loses one's way or path, which taken allegorically has meant to wander in error or sin*.<sup>24</sup> Etymologically, dark is associated with ignorance. *The woods themselves continue to replenish, in the bright sunshine, the trees persist in reaching upward* – Hirsch argues – *indifferent witnesses to the layered connective histories projected onto them*.<sup>25</sup> In *Ida*, the tension between amnesia and memorialization manifests itself between the indifference of the landscape and the weight of memories. Pollack underlines that the victims were *buried somewhere in the fields, nameless graves were levelled*

<sup>21</sup> On June 17, 2021, one of the most outstanding Polish contemporary artists, Wilhelm Sasnal, opened an exhibition *Taki krajobraz* (*Such a Landscape*) at the POLIN Museum. This exhibition is about various issues related to the history of Poles of Jewish origin among Poles of non-Jewish origin. Numerous paintings and drawings describe a landscape after the Holocaust, like *Shoah* (*Las*) [*Shoah* (*Forest*)] from 2003 based on C. Lanzmann's film. When asked why the Jewish topics – and the Holocaust in particular – are so important to him, Sasnal responds: *It stems from a subconscious sense of loss which is extremely hard to define. Perhaps it also stems from the sense of guilt which has been instilled in me – a Pole brought up in the Christian tradition. To be sure, I did not choose Jewish topics out of sentiment, but rather out of my own personal concern. Now it all seems easier to me, for I have processed those issues, I have named them. Jan Tomasz Gross was right when he said: 'Poles should deal with this for their own sake, not for anybody else's.'* See "Wilhelm Sasnal: Such a Landscape", Polin. Museum of the History of Polish Jews, at <https://polin.pl/en/wilhelm-sasnal>, 9 September 2022. See also the interview "Przekleństwo niepamięci" (The curse of oblivion) with Wilhelm Sasnal and Adam Szymczyk: J. Banasiak, "Przekleństwo niepamięci. Rozmowa z Wilhelmem Sasnałem i Adamem Szymczykiem", *Szum*, 2 July 2021, at <https://magazynszum.pl/przeklenstwo-niepamieci-rozmowa-z-wilhelmem-sasnałem-i-adamem-szymczykiem/>, 9 September 2022.

<sup>22</sup> G. Fuller, "Review: *Ida*", *Film Comment*, May-June 2014, at <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/review-ida-pawel-pawlikowski/>, 11 August 2021.

<sup>23</sup> R.C. Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature*, Baltimore, MD 2004, p. 227. See also M. Mroz, "Framing Loss and Figuring Grief in Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida*", *Screening the Past* 2016, vol. 41, pp. 1-13.

<sup>24</sup> M. Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, Cambridge 2007, p. 79.

<sup>25</sup> M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*..., p. 18.

to the ground and made alike the surroundings so no one would find them. So, they would melt into the landscape.<sup>26</sup> The contaminated landscapes keep the remains for a very long time. However, they are hidden, and unless we know about the graves, the abandoned traumascape<sup>27</sup> will not bring its memory to light.

The images of snow that we see at the beginning of *Ida* gradually disappear along with stages of the journey. These images take on a special meaning. Melted snow and frostbitten earth allow literal and metaphoric excavators to dig through the past. Walter Benjamin fittingly describes the archaeological nature of memories buried in the landscape: *He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. [...] He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination of what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth; [...] Fruitless searching is as much a part of this as succeeding, and consequently, remembrance must not proceed in the manner of a narrative or still less that of a report, but must, in the strictest epic and rhapsodic manner, assay its spade in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper layers.*<sup>28</sup> The archaeological description of Benjamin is in line with Simon Schama's model of cultural memory. The landscape is a mirror of our memories and allows memories to live: *Before it can ever be the repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.*<sup>29</sup>

Pawlikowski's scenery illustrates well how landscape can be a work of the mind made by different strata of memory. The search for the difficult heritage<sup>30</sup> of abandoned sites of trauma is associated with a sense of loss, pain, and grief. An interesting proposal can be found in the works of Andreas Huyssen describing some places that share the qualities of abandoned trauma sites as 'voids' since the word accentuates the loss connected to those places.<sup>31</sup> *Why am I not here?*<sup>32</sup> asks Anna/Ida, surprised that she is not in her parents' grave. Because she was tiny and able to pass for a Christian, Skiba sent her to a Catholic orphanage. But Wanda's son Tadzio was *dark and circumcised*,<sup>33</sup> that is why he murdered him and Anna/Ida's parents. In this unexpected moment of truth, Wanda, overwhelmed by sorrow and despair, presses the little skull of her son against her breast. A sudden change in the axis of perspective takes place from a high angle shot as the camera penetrates inside the hole. Alongside Skiba's confession, a memory emerges

<sup>26</sup> M. Pollack, *Kontaminierte Landschaften*, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> See M. Tumarkin, *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy*, Carlton 2005.

<sup>28</sup> W. Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, New York, NY 1986, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, New York, NY 1995, pp. 6-7.

<sup>30</sup> See S. Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond*, London-New York, NY 2009.

<sup>31</sup> See A. Huyssen, "The Voids of Berlin", *Critical Inquiry* 1997, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 57-81; A. Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford, CA 2003.

<sup>32</sup> A quote from the film taken from the original English dialogue list (00:51:47 → 00:51:49).

<sup>33</sup> A quote from the film taken from the original English dialogue list (00:52:13 → 00:52:17).

from the ground. The excavation scene is almost silent, but the sounds of a shovel, groans, lumps of earth falling, and footsteps emphasize its emotional nature. For these survivors-turned-archaeologists, there is a connection between the excavation of bones and the repressed or denied memories buried in the landscape. In *Ida*, the Polish Holocaust memory haunts the characters, and Hirsch points out the importance of photography in haunting the natural landscapes of the present: *the ghosts have become part of our landscape, reconfiguring the domestic as well as the public spaces of the postgeneration*.<sup>34</sup>

## COLLECTING PHOTOGRAPHIC VISIONS

A collection of photographs titled “Ida: Sketches” was taken during pre-production by the Polish cinematographer Ryszard Lenczewski.<sup>35</sup> It opens with a black-and-white photograph that seems to capture the essence of Pawlikowski’s film: in a wide shot (in the centre), a tree and its top outside of the picture frame; then in the background, the field and the forest are shrouded in fog. The picture strikes with emptiness and stillness. In a Holocaust context, landscape photographs take on different meanings: *what may have seemed an innocent constellation of trees can quickly turn into a signifier of lost witnessing, an agent of amnesia covering crimes, or a sinister cluster of branches obfuscating evidence of genocide*.<sup>36</sup> In other photographs – a quasi-ghostly town and grey buildings inhabited mainly by the working-class people testify to poverty and to the fact that the country has not yet recovered from the war and its crimes. The aesthetics of *Ida* resembles what André Bazin wrote in the context of 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*.<sup>37</sup>

The history and memory are embedded in the geographical landscape of the town – a silent trace referring to Ginzburg, who underlines the trace as an indication that something, someday, existed. The filmmaker returns to this period as he set the film in the Polish landscape of the 1960s because it reminded him of his childhood and the photographs stored in the family album. [...] *It is a world that no longer exists, quasi black-and-white landscape, simple, uncluttered*.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the landscape constitutes traces and clues of a *photographic memory*. The film *Ida* brings to life important moments of the past while referring to some pictures: a photograph is an element initiating a journey into the dark past. When Anna/Ida visits her aunt’s apartment, the indifferent Wanda quickly leaves for work. On her way back home, she notices a photograph of a bride in

<sup>34</sup> M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory...*, p. 18. See also: A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, München 1999 – about the Geisterorte or ‘phantom-sites’.

<sup>35</sup> See Ryszard Lenczewski’s “Ida: Sketches for Cinematography” at <https://www.lensculture.com/projects/13428-ida-sketches-for-cinematography>, 23 September 2022.

<sup>36</sup> B.A. Kaplan, *Landscapes of Holocaust Postmemory*, New York, NY 2011, p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> A. Bazin, *What Is Cinema*, vol. 2, Los Angeles 1971, p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> A. Serdiukow, “Každy ma dwie dusze”, *Kino* 2013, no. 10, pp. 48-49.



the shop window. A sudden flood of memories makes Wanda decide to help Anna/Ida find her parents' grave.

Photographs are just as structured and mediated as any other type of representation. A photograph, being a metonymic figure of speech of witness, James E. Young argues, convinces the viewer of its testimonial and genuine authority in ways that are inaccessible to the narrative. *Narrative and photographs* [...] – Young writes – *seem to represent a combination of pure object and commentary on the object, each seeming to complete the other by reinforcing a sense of contrasting functions*.<sup>39</sup> This contrasting function is revealing in *Ida*: the photography is an object and a subject. Another important moment in this narration related to photography takes place when we notice that Anna/Ida comes across the historical backdrop of her family for the first time through Wanda's photographs. They additionally appear as a meaningful film prop: their hands hold photographs, as Hirsch explains so well, *announcing the many hands, and the many different protective acts of holding memory*.<sup>40</sup> A photograph is an attempt to maintain the present, to capture a slice of the passing of time. Before committing suicide, Wanda takes a last look at the family photographs as a sign of remembering her past. *Family photographs may affect to show us our past, but what we do with them – how we use them – is really about today, not yesterday*.<sup>41</sup> It is critical with regards to the destiny of the Lebenstein family as the photographs remain the only traces of their existence. For that reason, post-memory is *a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation*.<sup>42</sup>

## NAVIGATING THE TEMPORAL LANDSCAPE OF TRAUMA

The film images underline a specific reading of the past: the *fragile memory* is marked by the way *Ida* focuses the audience's attention on a closer relationship between two very different women. The character of Wanda is very complex. According to the filmmaker, *Wanda lived at the worst possible time; she tried a lot of things, things that are difficult to reconcile; she made a lot of mistakes; she was a victim; she was also an executioner; she lost her faith, she lived many lives* [...]. Although Wanda is an expressive character, she imposes herself onscreen when Anna/Ida strikes with her lack of liveliness and withdrawal. With her face often motionless, she seems inaccessible to the viewer. Pawlikowski assumed from the beginning that *Ida would be a cut-off person, observing life. [...] It is difficult to show faith without wading into stupid clichés. The only way is to withdraw. Ida has a strong inner conviction. She does not participate in life, she does not*

<sup>39</sup> J.E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, Bloomington, IN 1990, pp. 57-58.

<sup>40</sup> M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory...*, p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> A. Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, London 2002, p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> M. Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Cambridge, MA 1997, p. 22.

*pretend anything, she does not communicate with gestures, but you can see in her eyes that a lot is going on in her head.*<sup>43</sup>

The generational gap between the two protagonists seems insuperable, as does the gap between those who lived through the horrors of war and the new generation. Thus, the generation perspective is a relevant tread with dealing with difficult historical events and traumatic memories. The transfer of the remains indicates a symbolic change of the landscape from the site of amnesia into the memorial landscape where Jewish presence *can only exist as disembodied knowledge*.<sup>44</sup> The burial scene in a forsaken Jewish cemetery marks a crucial moment for the transgenerational trauma. The interaction between Anna/Ida and her aunt can be read through the prism of post-memory as *a structure of inter-and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge [...]*.<sup>45</sup> The empty frames and undefined space around them cannot be filled in (literally and metaphorically), at least for Wanda, the representative of the war generation. After confronting her own tortured relationship to the Holocaust, Wanda leaps from the window, embracing the illuminated void, to the sound of *Symphony No. 41 in C major, KV. 551*, known as *Jupiter* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Magdalena Podsiadło points out that *after the re-burial of the murdered relatives, Wanda refuses to work through the trauma, does not close the crypt, but entrusts herself to the dybbuk and joins the world of the dead*.<sup>46</sup> Anna/Ida must rediscover the meaning of her vocation. The camera captures her wrapped in a curtain, like a butterfly struggling to get out of the cocoon. She tries engaging with the secular life sensually, like a challenge launched by Wanda. In a montage, we see Anna/Ida putting on makeup, wearing her aunt's dress, high-heeled shoes, smoking a cigarette, and getting drunk. However, the ambiguity of a present affected by the past does not vanish. Jerry White's comment on the ending of the film stuns by its almost wishful incorrectness: *The final image of the young, liberated former nun seems to suggest a dialectically ordained synthesis of two women: Anna/Ida has, in essence, cast off the chains of both Church and State, no longer constrained by either the aesthetic demands of Catholicism or the cold autocracy of Iron Curtain Poland*.<sup>47</sup> Anyone who has seen the film would find the ending much more ambiguous, or not ambiguous at all. After sleeping with the musician who proposes marriage, the allegedly 'liberated' Anna/Ida gets up in the morning and puts on her nun's habit. In the powerful closing sequence, she is back on the road. The end of the journey marks a change in the mode of travel. Anna/Ida walks down the road, in the opposite direction to the vehicles. It is reasonable to expect her to return to the convent, even if the film image does not clearly show this.

<sup>43</sup> O. Salwa, "Trzeba poczuć swój film", *Magazyn Filmowy SFP* 2013, no. 28, pp. 62-63.

<sup>44</sup> P. Lassner, "The Quest for Holocaust Memory in Polish Films, 2012-2016", *Holocaust Studies. A Journal of Culture and History* 2021, vol. 27, no. 2, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory...*, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> M. Podsiadło, "Filmy nawiedzone, czyli kobiety władzy i demony. Obcość nie z tej ziemi", *Kultura i Historia* 2018, no. 33, p. 165.

<sup>47</sup> J. White, "Ida", *Cinema Scope* 2014, no. 57, pp. 44-45.

## PAWLIKOWSKI'S MEMORY ARCHIVE: BETWEEN RESTRAINT AND ERASURE

In the forewords to Annette Insdorf's book *Indelible Shadows. Film and the Holocaust*, Elie Wiesel insists that *certain films resonate with us [...] and are works of art. [...] They don't purport to show or explain everything, the how and why of the Nazi era. They reveal to us, like a secret imprint, human beings undergoing the curse of the gods, and that's all. Their restraint, their humility, [...] their self-effacement, contribute to their strength of conviction.*<sup>48</sup>

A film can create an image of the past. In *Ida*, all the elements of scenography establish the atmosphere of the 1960s from the memories of the filmmaker, i.e., a small chapel on the side of the road, seedy bars, dance parties, or even music. The choice of the aesthetic and formal structure of the film serves two elements of the narrative in *Ida*: first, a journey into the darkness of Holocaust knowledge with gaps in memory, secondly, an image that takes the viewer into the 1960s through a 1.37 aspect ratio, certain plot elements, scenery, and music. The film image, although ascetic, has been styled into photographs. In *Ida*, the photographic becomes one of the modes for the framing of loss and grief. The photograph as a means of recording the past inspired the filmmaker to use the static framing of the camera. Nonetheless, James E. Young argues that these images, which deserve an exhibition, cannot function outside the narrative line. They take on meanings in conjunction with the situation, the characters, and the context.

Pawlikowski charts the topography of facial landscapes with long close-ups – the expressive face of Wanda and the static, almost opaque face of Anna/Ida – to capture their emotions. To mark the contrast, he favours wide shots, which reinforce the feeling of loss and the burden of history laying above the characters, and this is enhanced visually by being low in the frame. They are often at the edge of the frame, in a corner, or with faces partly out of the frame. Sometimes the characters disappear from the view, the camera lens does not follow them, does not try to keep them in the centre of the frame. This way of framing reminds us of what, in the case of photography, was so delightfully found by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* that there is consistently what is within the photograph and what must be excluded from the frame.<sup>49</sup> It is in the writing of Barthes that Brett Ashley Kaplan notices the circumscribed character of the photograph to bear witness.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> E. Wiesel, "Foreword", in A. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows. Film and the Holocaust*, Cambridge 2003, p. XII.

<sup>49</sup> See R. Barthes, *La chambre claire : Notes sur la photographie*, Paris 1980. In English R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, London 2000.

<sup>50</sup> B.A. Kaplan, *Landscapes of Holocaust...*, p. 2.

## CONCLUSION

Pawlikowski draws a picture of the Polish post-traumatic landscape as a silent witness of a *fragile memory* by means of different narrative and visual devices presenting the important photographic moments and landscapes that became a physical and mental portrayal of the difficult past. Photographs become an attempt to reconstruct and understand something from the past with which subsequent generations have had no direct contact. Memory sites remain with us through cinematographic and photographic representations: *the fragile memory*, as a breakable, vulnerable image of this period, can be represented by the way the landscape is portrayed in film. *Fragile memory* is a journey to this difficult past where silence was orchestrated, and the landscape became a site of memory. A film can create an experience of how memory works, and fragility can be experienced by landscape and photography that underline the complexity of all contradictions about the past. Pawlikowski, using those various modes of remembering, created a memory film. In respect to time, as well as – if we think about the nameless graves hidden in the landscape – in respect to space, various strata of memory are interwoven into one another. The cultural and collective memory here comprises the visible and the invisible, as the notion of contaminated landscapes makes us particularly aware. In *Ida*, different layers of the past and present collide, opening up opportunities for communicating and understanding the traumatic past.

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