

Imagining *Ida* (2014)

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Panel 17 – ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

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Abstract

The feature film, *Ida*, set in Poland in 1962, tells the story of a young Catholic novice who goes on a road trip into the Polish countryside and uncovers a dark family secret. Written and directed by Pawel Pawlikowski, it won the 2015 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, the first Polish film to do so.

The writing of *Ida* blurs the boundaries between fiction and documentary style screenwriting, reality and illusion. Pawlikowski who never went to film school says, “[I] never learned the rules, and started out by making documentaries, which I usually shot and moulded as I went along. I began with an idea, a character, a situation; then threw all sorts of things into the mix - scenes, images; some found, others invented. Then I shook it all up - complicated, simplified - until I found the film. These films were neither documentaries nor fictions; they were strange hybrids that felt like the best and the simplest way I could express a complicated truth. How I got away with it is a mystery” (Pawlikowski, 2014).

This paper considers Pawlikowski’s creative process in the development of *Ida* and his later award-winning film, *Cold War* (2018), which like *Ida* is meditative, contemplative, elliptical and poetic. Based on interviews with Pawlikowski, the paper considers the boundary crossings between what is expected of a script and what actually emerges in Pawlikowski’s work, as he develops the filmic story from fact to fiction, from idea to reality. It investigates how Pawlikowski uses “some transcendent idea, emotion or urge”, the inspirations he draws from Italian Neo-Realism and the French New Wave, his Polish heritage and his parents’ dysfunctional relationship, in the creative process of script development as characters, plot, dialogue, filmic space, visual style and metaphor emerge to realise the “screen idea” (Macdonald, 2013).

Keywords – creative process, script development, *Ida*, *Cold War*, Pawel Pawlikowski

Dr **Margaret McVeigh** (Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia) is Head, Screenwriting & Contextual Studies, Griffith Film School, Griffith University and a member of the SRN Executive. She holds a Masters of Screenwriting by Creative Practice and a PhD in Film and New Media Narrative. Margaret has extensive national and international industry experience in Public Relations and Post-Production. She has worked as Commissioning Editor for Wiley publishers and as Writer for the Australian National Broadcaster’s ABC *Splash* and is co-editor of *Transcultural Screenwriting: Telling Stories for a Global World* (Cambridge Scholars, 2017). Margaret has published and presented at conferences in Asia, Europe, the USA, South America and Australia on the creative process and the writing and making of transnational films. Her recent chapter, “Work in Progress: the Writing of *Shortchanged*” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Screen Production* (2019), considers her script development and the creative process in the writing of a feature film.

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