

## Neoliberal Authorship: Auteur Theory and European Art Cinema in 2021 — the Example of Paweł Pawlikowski

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As the credits start to roll at the end of *Cold War* (2018), the first shot bears the simple dedication ‘for my parents’ and the next one reads ‘story, direction, image Paweł Pawlikowski.’ Both are authorial inscriptions through which Pawlikowski announces himself to be the creative source from which, in line with *auteur* theory, the meanings and significance of the film ultimately derive. The credit ‘story, direction, image’ is unusual in that Pawlikowski clearly emphasizes the degree of creative control over all aspects of the film: not just the direction and the story (he co-wrote the script) but also the image, which we customarily attribute to the cinematographer. We also know, from the film’s publicity and marketing which emphasized this fact, that *Cold War* is loosely inspired by the director’s own parents’ tumultuous relationship (McDonald and Sanders, 2017). In *The Woman in the Fifth/La Femme du Vème* (2011), based on the novel by Douglas Kennedy, Pawlikowski had appropriated authorship by writing the script himself (‘screenplay by Paweł Pawlikowski’) and by portraying an infirm writer — the artist — a figure through whom, Lucy Fischer (2013) argues, filmmakers frequently raise questions about the paradoxes of authorship.<sup>1</sup> It is through these dual channels — the creative figure who stands outside the text and the one who stands within it as corporeal presence — that Pawlikowski inscribes authorship in his oeuvre. He thereby asserts that his films’ distinctive qualities and their importance, as *auteur* theory would have it, ‘may be attributed to a single creative source who is responsible for bringing together its disparate elements into a coherent thematic and stylistic vision’ (Watson, 2012: 143).

Authorial inscriptions are not coincidental in Paweł Pawlikowski’s oeuvre, and interview statements such as — ‘the thing that can salvage documentary (...) is Form. More important

still is the personal vision of the director' (Macdonald, 1996: 391) — show that Pawlikowski is deeply indebted to the conceptual framework of authorship that permeates European cinema. In particular, the model of authorship that Pawlikowski follows, which foregrounds the author and where film is an artform with a higher purpose, is influenced both by the French New Wave, in its insistence on form, and by the Eastern European tradition, where the author is engaged in questions of historical and national identity. One goal of this Chapter is to introduce Paweł Pawlikowski's oeuvre and its thematic and stylistic characteristics, including self-reflexive authorial inscriptions, that link him to the tradition of European art cinema. Much has been written about Pawlikowski's individual fiction films, such as *Last Resort* (2001) or *Ida* (2013), but his documentaries are virtually unknown, and a synthesizing view of this entire career is long overdue.

But the main, and much wider goal of this Chapter is to examine the state of European art cinema in the context of late neoliberalism, using Pawlikowski's unique working method, which I have dubbed a 'sculpting method' of filming, as a key example. Since the imprint of an identifiable artist has always been, and still remains, the main pull of art cinema — effected by 'the particular name above the subtitle' (Betz, 2009: 45) — the European film industry strives, still, to enable (and to sell) artistic creativity despite encountering difficulties in accommodating artists whose working methods often require levels of investment that threaten profitability. Using Bill Ryan's assertion that the art(ist)-capital(ist) conflict is inherent to creative industries (1992: 48), I argue that neoliberalism's appropriation of the notion of the Romantic author effects an imaginary resolution to those real art-capital conflicts and as such has real-life implications for the self-understanding of (European) film producers and the way they organize the process of film production. In doing so, and even though 'the Romantic author is always a fiction' (Bennett, 2005: 71), 'neoliberal authorship' aligns *auteur* discourses of art cinema with the interests of a neoliberal profit-oriented film industry to convert artistic

value into financial profit. Pawlikowski's unashamed, but at the same time self-reflexive, embrace of the art-cinema mode with its presiding romanticized artist at the top makes his films, therefore, an ideal test case for the *auteur* theory in these neoliberal times, despite the constant pronouncements of the death of the *auteur* as a concept.

Pawlikowski is an erudite cinephile. He spent his Oxford years writing film reviews for a film magazine *Still*, watching up to eight films a day, going to European film festivals and interviewing Wim Wenders and Rainer Werner Fassbinder in the hope of becoming a film critic, all before becoming himself a cinéaste, prompted by attending an Oxford Filmmakers Workshop (Tobin, 2005: 114; Pawlikowski, 2017). In 2005, after the success of *Last Resort* and *My Summer of Love* (2004), Richard Porton wrote that Pawlikowski 'is one of the most distinctive voices in recent British cinema — a director who refuses to churn out films that conform to predictable trends and generic prescriptions' (2005: 37). After his first Polish film *Ida* was awarded Poland's only ever Oscar for Best Film in 2015, and with his second and last-to-date Polish film *Cold War*, Pawlikowski has since emerged also as one of the most important Polish directors. National claims on Pawlikowski should not come as a surprise, as they reflect the transnational journeys of the director who came to Great Britain in the 1970s, spent close to forty years here (living for a time also in Germany, Italy and France), and in 2015 settled in Poland, and who has often called his unexpected emigration at the age of fourteen 'the most important trauma of his life' (Pawlikowski and Błażejowska, 2015: 16; Pawlikowski, 2017).<sup>2</sup> The motif of a journey (between East and West) and 'of return home, a desire to find out about **one's origins,**' established in his documentaries, became the most persistent of Pawlikowski's authorial signatures (Ostrowska 2007: 155).

Pawlikowski's films thus belong to two national traditions — British and Polish — and to the tradition of European art film, which has always uniquely represented transnational authorship through national films. Despite the fact that both nations would like to claim the

director as theirs, his films defy one-dimensional classifications, displaying instead an eclecticism of aesthetic and film-authorship traditions that reflects the director's varied life experiences. An ascription to one of them would be reductive, and a more productive approach is to trace a number of intersecting forces that have shaped Pawlikowski's oeuvre: British and Polish aesthetic traditions (including the influence of Polish émigré directors), the Eastern European concept of the engaged *auteur*, transnational undercurrents, and the influences of European movements (mainly the Czech and French New Waves) (Rydzewska, 2009a and 2009b). With this in mind and given that his films travel well across borders, the pronounced national markers are indicative of Pawlikowski's belonging to European art cinema, which, according to Mark Betz, has been both a formal-aesthetic category and a national-institutional one defined by 'a distinct set of formal properties (...) linked to modernist aesthetics' and national origin designed to distinguish it from Hollywood (2009: 10). Betz contends that European art film is dead because it was explicitly a body of films that cohered around a period of time of the 1960s. But I argue that Paweł Pawlikowski self-reflexively continues the tradition of European art film that temporarily morphs into global-transnational authorship through being influenced by its history and by its formal and thematic characteristics. Pawlikowski's formal devices of elliptical narratives (and temporal and spatial discontinuities), ambiguity, open endings and overt self-reflexive authorial inscriptions link his oeuvre to modernist aesthetics, while marks of their dual national belonging and their techniques of high art, that oppose commercial imperatives, differentiate them from Hollywood cinema.

### **Neoliberal Authorship: European Art Cinema and Pawlikowski's 'Sculpting Stories'**

In 2001, fresh from the success of *Last Resort*, Pawlikowski famously passed up the chance to direct Gwyneth Paltrow in *Sylvia* (Christine Jeffs, 2003), a biopic of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes's tumultuous relationship (Pulver, 2004). As he explains:

It's a great story but the script did not give justice to it. I wanted to find this film, to rethink a lot of scenes and introduce changes (...) Otherwise I would not have added anything to the film (...) Hollywood producers don't like changes in the script (...) It's an industry and factory. (Wiktor, 2005: 62)<sup>3</sup>

The film's portrayal of the emotional travails of Plath and Hughes' love story, which eventually ended with Plath's death by suicide, would have been a perfect match for Pawlikowski, who frequently thematizes *amour fou*: from *The Grave Case of Charlie Chaplin* (1994), *TwoCKers* (1997), *The Stringer* (1997) and *Last Resort* through to *My Summer of Love*, *The Woman in the Fifth*, and of course *Cold War*, which itself ends with an attempted suicide. In the quotation above, Pawlikowski alludes to the idea of personal filmmaking as artistic expression that distinguishes itself from the moneymaking world of Hollywood where rigid industrial practices and commercial considerations restrict a director's autonomy. By emphasizing the capital/Hollywood versus art/European cinema opposition, Pawlikowski inscribes himself within the business model of European cinema as defined by Steve Neale: 'the former is the realm of impersonal profit-seeking and entertainment (...) the latter is the realm of creativity, freedom and meaning' (2002: 119). If discourses of authenticity and personal filmmaking surface in Pawlikowski's interviews through his utilization of elements of his own biography, another discourse pervading his filmmaking philosophy is that of artistic vision uncompromised by commercial concerns and specifically related to the control over the production process. For 'art which has "sold out" (or) gone "commercial" (...) is regarded as inauthentic,' and so is the artist producing it (Ryan, 1992: 53). In European cinema it results in what David Andrews calls art cinema's most persistent myth — the idea that art films are high art *because* they oppose commerce (2013: 3). Art film directors have thematized the art-capital

contradictions in films which explore the process of making films so often that, it can be argued, they have become an important textual marker of an art film.

Since neoliberalism makes every human activity subservient to the ultimate goal of accruing more profit, the neoliberal economy creates a particularly stringent rift between **capital and art** and hence an even more pronounced need to manage this contradiction. Ryan posits that, under capitalism, ‘the contradictions of the art-capital relation’ — the incompatibility between ‘*the economic irrationality of the creative process*’ (1992: 48; emphasis in text) and the capitalist imperative of accumulation — comprise ‘the fundamental conditions constituting the culture industry and give it its internal logic’ (39). In particular, Ryan argues, in the course of its own creation, art generates a contradiction within the production process because the way the artist works — where the gestation can be lengthy and unpredictable — makes them less amenable as ‘abstract labour-power’: the artist simply cannot be managed in the same way as other categories of workers (34). However, even though the artistic process requires levels of investment which constantly threaten to undermine profitability, the artist represents a necessary investment, as it is only as a result of the imprint of the artist that the work of art achieves value in capitalist terms (49). For European films, it is the name of the artist, a ‘brand’ name that coincides with a personal vision and a national label — the ‘name above the subtitle’ (Betz, 2009: 45) — that confers this value. Under the expansion of neoliberal industries and markets for niche products, the name of the director allows films to enter the lucrative festival circuit — the means of distribution and promotion for European art film in the competitive age of global entertainment as well as the place ‘where such ‘brands’ are made’ (de Valck, 2007: 112). And it is the status of those films as art — imbued as they are through the work of the artist with the aura of authenticity and uniqueness specifically uncompromised by commercial concerns (Benjamin, 1992: 214) — that the neoliberal economy wants to convert into monetary value.

Aware of its own manifest art-capital contradiction — the necessity to manage the way the artist works and the low prestige of its own commercial pursuit — neoliberalism highjacks the concept of the Romantic author to effect an imaginary resolution to those real art-capital contradictions. Neoliberalism's definition of 'heroic entrepreneur' who charts 'new commercial territory with bold strokes' (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016: 57) taps into auteurist discourse of originality and personal vision, epitomized by creative industry's most illustrious visionary entrepreneurs — Steve Jobs, Apple's late (suffering) genius, Virgin's Richard Branson or Microsoft's founder, Bill Gates. The most neoliberal creative industries aligned to *auteur* theory even go so far as to construct their entire workforce as creative-auteurs — self-motivated, self-actualizing individuals — who, as such, require special management techniques designed to boost creativity, often through granting them maximum autonomy.<sup>4</sup> In European cinema, producers, as part of the global creative force, are subject to the neoliberal ideal of the entrepreneur-author, not through the consistency of themes or topics of the films they produce, but rather through their creative enabling of art films — the function which sees them as self-actualizing, expressive individuals and distances them from the commercial world in which they unfold. This self-understanding of European producers has, of course, a long history as they have always seen their role as 'not simply to raise finance but (as) primarily creative' (Jäckel, 2003: 46). By insisting that their motivation differs from the sole motivation behind the capitalist enterprise — profit — European producers, like *auteur* directors, find their work meaningful because they self-actualise by facilitating high art, and not commercial product. Enabling art (films), rather than influencing the films' thematic and stylistic consistencies, is what lets European producers imagine themselves as *auteurs* in their own right. It is a paradox that an art film, which cannot be divorced from the name of the director, will, nonetheless, enter the lucrative festival circuit and fulfil neoliberalism's main goal of selling it. The notion of neoliberal-authorship, on the one hand, appropriates the concept of the

Romantic auteur that distances its entrepreneur-workers from the commercial world, yet at the same time it facilitates the artists' work and successfully sells the product.

Pawlikowski exerts an unusually firm grip over the choice of his projects, and it is his continued work with the same producers, Tanya Seghatchian (*My Summer of Love*; *Cold War*) and Ewa Puszczyńska (*Ida*; *Cold War*), who enable his 'sculpting filming method,' that lets him wield uncompromising control over the production of his films. It is through this collaboration that the inscription of the concept of neoliberal *auteur* is most prominently visible in the concrete creativity-boosting techniques that Pawlikowski's producers employ: namely, funding projects without a script, allowing 'the sculpting method' during the shoot, and granting a week-long break in the filming schedule. Puszczyńska closely relates the way she works with Pawlikowski to the discourse of the Romantic artist, the inherent contradictions of the art-capital relation and her role in enabling the director (by relaxing that relation) when she says, in the context of the production of *Ida*, that 'a good producer needs to understand the director they're working with; directors can vary greatly and in the case of Paweł he needs time, trust and space' (Raveney, 2015). Yet, when giving advice to aspiring directors at an industry workshop, she appeals to the idea of the Romantic author, only to bring it back to the art-capital contradiction: 'thinking about yourself in terms of the creator, who above all must be a good craftsman and only then an artist, is essential' because 'the film is not only a work of art, but also a product to sell which has its own market value' (Puszczyńska, 2016).

Pawlikowski only chooses projects that bear personal significance, works on small budgets, mostly writes his own scripts, uses the same actors, and builds a close circle of collaborators who contribute to his minimally developed scripts, which are unusually short by industrial standards (twenty pages in contrast to the usual sixty to seventy) (Gruca-Rozbicka, 2005: 24). Despite this, it is debatable how collaborative the authorship is, since Pawlikowski puts in months of painstaking preparation before the shooting begins and makes the closing



decisions concerning the final look of the film entirely on his own: ‘I like to build films from the bottom up. For me writing, casting, re-writing, working with actors, photography and editing are all parts of the same process. I am involved at all stages’ (Mitchell, 2005: 12).<sup>5</sup> Throughout Pawlikowski’s career his autonomy has been helped through funds from institutions governed by a ‘public service mission’ and a tradition of fostering creative autonomy. His documentaries and fiction films have been coproduced through a mixture of ‘soft’ funding — the BBC and UK national and regional agencies until 2004 — and later, funds from European agencies, Polish and other national film institutes and regional governmental bodies.<sup>6</sup> Pawlikowski is not the only European director who has worked without a fully developed script or has been given considerable freedom by their producers — his New Wave predecessors Jean-Luc Godard and Agnès Varda, whose own working method has also been described as ‘sculptural,’ are good cases in point — but it is important to note how the contradictions of art-capital are amplified in the film industry in the neoliberal economy and how European producers negotiate them, benefiting at the same time from the opportunities they create.<sup>7</sup> In describing the production context of *Ida*, Puszczynska confirms her belief in facilitating the talent that results in authenticity of vision uncompromised by commercial concerns when she says that they were working against all the rules and that they were true to themselves: ‘As a producer I should not be saying that, but we were not thinking about the audience; we were thinking about creation of an art piece’ (Puszczynska and Wanting Hassing, 2015).<sup>8</sup> The use of ‘we’ here points to the producer’s self-perception as a creative individual who self-actualizes by enabling art films which she perceives as her own oeuvre: ‘(f)or me as a producer going around Toronto (TFF), hearing people talking about *my* film is an unforgettable experience, (t)here is nothing more rewarding than that’ (Puszczynska and Wanting Hassing, 2015; emphasis added).<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that Puszczynska emphasizes that financial concerns are secondary, their very mention is a reminder that the film industry

requires the level of investment in the artist that constantly threatens to undermine the profit, but that is necessary because without Pawlikowski, there would not be ‘A Paweł Pawlikowski film.’

The ‘sculpting method’ warrants particular attention here as the context for an authorial vision that derives from specific working conditions: for if Pawlikowski has a particular talent that manifests as the imprint of an identifiable artist — ‘A Paweł Pawlikowski’s film’ — then this is based on discrete aspects of his working method. Contrary to what some critics contend (Porton, 2005: 40; Wood, 2007: 185; Winter, 2008: 63), Pawlikowski’s sculpting method is not improvisatory, and, I want to argue, it is a particular mistake to compare it to the working method of such directors as Mike Leigh. If an improvisatory method finds authenticity through impromptu acting, Pawlikowski’s sculpting method begins with the visual language of the film, hence the shortness of the script, and finds authenticity through an authorial vision — the signature formal consistency of his modernist narratives (including his documentary films). When describing his method, which he has been honing since his time at the BBC, Pawlikowski emphasizes the importance of the camera when he talks about ‘chiselling’ the scenes, that is, adjusting the lighting, the camera position, the actors’ movements and dialogue, until ‘it feels right through the viewfinder’ (DP/30: *Ida* Co-writer & Director Paweł Pawlikowski). It is a filmic type of work where medium-specific features — image and sound — work in synergy and Pawlikowski expresses scrupulous dislike for scenes which either ‘explain to the audience or whose only function is to take the narrative from A to B’ (Pawlikowski, 2014). As he says: ‘It’s a bit like sculpting: you find the image — there’s always a perfect camera angle — and then you arrange the bodies in space and prompt the actors and if it doesn’t come alive you try again’ (Thompson, 2004: 38). The sculpting method invokes Alexandre Astruc’s idea of camera-stylo, which established the primacy of visual language for film by equating the camera with a writer’s pen, and implicitly appeals to the notion of the Romantic author and personal

vision. What is most important is that the sculpting method's reliance on the image results at the formal level in Pawlikowski's signature elliptical narratives, with their disjointed spacial and temporal links, confirming that unique methods of working result in a unique product. The loose, tenuous cause-effect linkage of events, which foregrounds the author and fosters ambiguity, is what inscribes Pawlikowski in the art cinema mode of cinematic discourse as defined by Bordwell (2002).

The production history of *My Summer of Love* gives insight into how Pawlikowski does not compromise his artistic vision despite commercial pressures. Emma Hayter, the BBC executive producer on *My Summer of Love*, recalls how Pawlikowski refused for three years (after *Last Resort*) to take on any project (because he did not fall in love with them) despite being under contract with the BBC (Cross and Hayter, 2005). Furthermore, Pawlikowski, who wrote the script, changed the original novel so much that author Helen Cross said it ended up in a transfer of authorship: 'Watching the film was like meeting someone you used to know intimately, who is now altered' (Cross, 2015).<sup>10</sup> Before filming began, Pawlikowski was also offered regional funding to shoot in a different part of the country, which he did not accept because he wanted to shoot in Yorkshire (Considine, 2005). Pawlikowski states that artistic considerations always come first: 'It's about the story you really want to tell (...) Money is not an excuse for anything, you can always find a way to make the film you want' (Mitchell, 2005: 12). According to Hayter, the filming was to last eight weeks, and as usual Pawlikowski asked for a two-week break after six weeks. After a week of reviewing the material, which involved the location shooting of expensive heritage features of its mise-en-scène, Pawlikowski said that he did not like what he had shot (Cross and Hayter, 2005).<sup>11</sup> When Hayter asked him why he had shot it in that way, he answered 'I had to find out if I liked it.' During the screening of the working version of the film, both the producer, Tanya Seghatchian, and executive producer, David M. Thompson, felt that the film had holes (the characteristic elliptical narrative), and, to

solve the problem, asked for a voiceover, by Mona (Natalie Press). According to Hayter, Pawlikowski did not want this, so allegedly he did a bad job in order to avoid adding the voiceover (Cross and Hayter, 2005). In a similar vein, the producers' suggestions to end the film on a more uplifting note by sending the characters to Paris met with Pawlikowski's resistance on the basis that it would not add anything to the story, and so the film concludes with another recurring formal characteristic of his work: an open ending. Pawlikowski's creative control over the choice of the project, the filming process and the final cut of the film resulted in the film the director wanted to make. The tactics paid off with a flurry of festival awards, critical plaudits and commercial success, including a high-profile bidding war for US distribution at the Toronto Film Festival (Pulver, 2004).

### **Selling Art, Selling Artists? Self-Reflexivity and the Artist in Exile**

'A notion that the art-film director has a creative freedom denied to her/his Hollywood counterpart' that hovers over art film as a discourse, Bordwell argues, is an important factor contributing to foregrounding 'the *author* as a structure in the film's system' (2002: 97, Bordwell's emphasis). In Pawlikowski's oeuvre, the insistence on not compromising his personal vision in the face of financial concerns at the production level finds its equivalent in textual references to explorations of the vicissitudes of being an artist, issues of artistic integrity and intertextual references to art films contemplating the conditions of their own creation. As he says: 'One always makes a film about oneself' (Lankosz, 2013). Pawlikowski thematized writers' ethical aesthetic choices in many of his early documentaries, but *Tales From Prague: Kids from FAMU* (1990) refers to the cinema in a self-reflexive way. It recounts the history of the legendary Prague film academy FAMU through interviews with its most illustrious graduates: Jiří Menzel, Milan Kundera, Jan Němec, Věra Chytilová and Miloš Forman. Pawlikowski not only documents one of the most interesting moments in independently-

minded European art cinema, and one that has influenced his own career — the Czech New Wave — he also explores two topics close to his heart: cinephilia and migration (Kundera, Nemec, and Forman left Communist Czechoslovakia to live in exile) and the price one pays for hard choices as a human being and artist.

A recurring theme of his films is an exploration of the creative process. *The Stringer*, apart from constituting another exploration of identity on the cusp of adulthood (*Twoickers*, *My Summer of Love*, *Ida*), is the story of an accidental journalist whose romantic love, father-issues and parents' divorce intertwine with the political events he films in Russia. *The Woman in the Fifth*, which portrays a down-and-out American novelist (Tom Ricks played by Ethan Hawke) who comes to Paris to reunite with his estranged wife and daughter, is a study of the artist in personal and professional crisis. Pawlikowski's screenplay departs from Douglas Kennedy's novel to become an exploration of the crisis the director was going through after the untimely death of his wife, which halted his shooting of *The Restraint of the Beast* (based on novel by Magnus Mills) and caused a five-year break in his career. Pawlikowski himself calls the film: 'A solipsistic trip into madness (...) I think I had a midlife crisis' (Seymour, 2014). If looking for elements of a director's biography onscreen is contentious, *The Woman in the Fifth* portrays one of the most overused representations of the screen author — an omnipresent infirm writer — through whom, Lucy Fischer argues, filmmakers frequently raise questions about the paradoxes of authorship (2013). The portrayal of a writer suffering from writer's block is not only 'a recurrent cliché in visions of the artist' that fits well the Romantic notion of the author but might as well be the quintessence of professional writers' obsession with the syndrome and the suffering involved in the creative process (Flaherty quoted in Fischer, 2013: 140). In several scenes of the film, we see Tom trying unsuccessfully to write a letter to his daughter, visiting a bookstore (where he finds a copy of his only novel) and musing about his artistic success (with an undercurrent of anxiety about failure). As he says in one scene: 'I feel like the real me

is somewhere else. Accepting a Literary Award. And me here is like a sad double.’ At one point, he meets Margit (Kirstin Scott-Thomas), who is another clichéd figure — the patient’s ‘helpmeet’ — a maternal figure who assists the childlike artist (Fischer, 2013: 130). When Tom visits Margit for the very first time, she says, ‘You may have needed a disaster to get you started. All those writers that we love had a price to pay. You have a voice. I believe in you,’ while Handel’s opera ‘*Sosarme, re di Media*’ is playing in the background. The scene takes on a different significance when we realize that Margit is a figment of Tom’s imagination. The whole film then becomes Tom’s subjective projection of reality, as real films are of directors’ imaginations, while Margit’s advice to Tom (a corporeal alter ego for Pawlikowski) becomes the director’s advice to himself. It is not without significance that this scene self-quotes Pawlikowski’s own documentary about a tortured Russian writer Yerofeyev, *From Moscow to Pietushki* (1990), where, in one of the most expressive scenes of the film, Pawlikowski similarly uses Handel’s ‘*Sosarme*.’<sup>12</sup> *The Woman in the Fifth* is Pawlikowski’s self-conscious meditation on the creative process, the fear of professional failure and the difficulty of reconciling personal and professional life that continues the European art film tradition of *The Red Shoes* (Powell and Pressburger, 1948), *Le Locataire/The Tenant* (Polanski, 1976) or *Providence* (Resnais, 1977). As Pawlikowski says: ‘The conflict between being creative — and therefore having an ego (...) and being in love (...) or trying to be a father means wanting incompatible things’ (Pawlikowski, 2013).<sup>13</sup>

However, it is in *Cold War* that Pawlikowski’s inscription of a personal vision is most visible: in references to the biography of his own parents, in the thematic focus on the East-West journey, in the textual references to the European art films that comment on their own creation, and in the interrogation of art-capital contradictions. *Cold War* combines formal elements such as episodic modernist narratives, experimentation with genre conventions and the breaking of classical conventions together with thematic preoccupations common to

Pawlikowski's entire oeuvre, namely, impossible love, questions of individual and collective identities, migration, and national(ism) and historical contingencies, especially individuals caught in the vortex of history.<sup>14</sup> Even more subtly, and at the same time more profoundly, *Cold War* bears the marks of Pawlikowski's Eastern European connection through the dialogue with the discourse of Polish artists in exile. The film tells the story of two artists who emigrate from Poland, singer Zula (Joanna Kulig) and musician Wiktor (Tomasz Kot), and of the eternal difficulty of love — a personal cold war set against the political Cold War. The film portrays Pawlikowski's two recurring themes — travel across Europe and *amour fou* — while the setting, a musical ensemble, appropriates the genre of 'the backstage musical,' that is, films which construct their plot 'around the creation of a show' (Altman, 1987: 200). In doing so, *Cold War* moves its interest from the show to the *mechanics* of creating the show, thus becoming a film about an artistic creation, and, similarly to *The Woman in the Fifth*, the difficulty of reconciling personal and professional life. The idea of making a film about making a film becomes literalized when Wiktor is shown recording a film score, conducting at the podium, with his back to the camera — a body-double for Pawlikowski orchestrating his film — while the film is playing on the screen as a reference. The scored film is *Lust of the Vampire/I vampiri* (Riccardo Freda, 1957), a B-type, low-budget production, which emphasizes the fact that Wiktor takes a job beneath his talent, thus accentuating East-West unequal economic divisions and tapping into criticism of capitalism as prostituting the artist in the marketplace with direct references to Jean-Luc Godard's 1963 *Le Mépris/Contempt*.<sup>15</sup> *Cold War* stages the inherent art-capital contradiction with the same triangle — the artist, the producer and the (future) wife — in which the creating of the artistic product mirrors the disintegration of the romantic relationship. If, in the East, Wiktor struggles to uphold the integrity of his art against the ideological pressures of Communism, as did the directors in *Kids from FAMU*, when they emigrate to the West, Zula (like Camille in *Contempt*) starts to feel

contempt for her husband, whom she believes is compromising his artistic integrity for materialistic reasons, even commodifying her by pushing her into the arms of their producer. With intertextual references to European art films that have interrogated the process of making art/films — from Fellini's *8 1/2* (1963) through Truffaut's *Day for Night/La Nuit américaine* (1973) — *Cold War* inscribes itself into the history of European art films which have reflected upon their own creation, thus carving its own space in the canon.

If, according to Rick Altman (1987: 205), the musical is structured around a number of oppositions that need to be reconciled, the primary one being the romantic relationship, then it is the secondary binary of East-West which reveals Pawlikowski's authorial inscription through a discourse of the Cold-War Polish émigré artist in the West. Wiktor is aligned with emigration to the West and the perceived commercial and creative prostitution of the artist, while Zula represents the East through her resentment of emigration and contempt for the crude commercialism of the West. Under Communism, this East-West opposition was, in Poland, linked to a critical discourse of national and cinematic betrayal surrounding those directors who emigrated to the West and whom Communist propaganda labelled as 'sell-outs,' such as Roman Polański (*The Tenant* explores issues of the artist in exile) or Jerzy Skolimowski, whose *Success is the Best Revenge* (1984) offers an apt intertextual reference to *Cold War* as a film about staging a play by an exiled director.<sup>16</sup> *Ida* and *Cold War* have been described as Pawlikowski's 'love letters to Poland,' and, along with *The Woman in the Fifth*, they address the pain of the artist in exile and the dilemma of 'reverse migration' that inverts the usual trajectory of Eastern European artists where transnational authorship was synonymous with a movement from East to West. Due to Communist propaganda, Polish émigré directors were rarely mentioned once they defected from Poland, and the predicament of Wiktor's return to Poland in *Cold War* may project Pawlikowski's own past feelings of guilt and the fears of not belonging, resulting from his own migration. In a shorthand through films that comment on



their own creation, the dislocated writer of *The Woman in the Fifth* and the exiled artist-musician of *Cold War* are therefore not only self-reflexively in dialogue with the tradition of European art film but also with the Polish national discourse in their exploration of Pawlikowski's personal experience of emigration and the questions of authorship of a Polish émigré artist and sacrifices involved in making art in exile. It is this national belonging that makes Pawlikowski's films truly European.

### **Conclusion**

Warning, as early as 1957, against the self-indulgent excesses of auteurism, André Bazin insisted that the only way not to negate 'the film to the benefit of praise of its *auteur*' is by answering the question: '*Auteur*, yes, but what *of*?' (2001: 258, Bazin's emphasis). Over the thirty years of his career, 'a Paweł Pawlikowski film' has increasingly been understood to denote: a cinematic high-art product, authenticity through biographical and self-reflexive authorial inscriptions, and a personal vision uncompromised by commercial concerns. Complemented by formal experimentations (by means of elliptical narratives, open endings, genre appropriations), a focus on the interface of national cinema(s) and transnational authorship, the influences of various European new waves, and the long-standing (European) art film versus (Hollywood) capital division, these qualities also suggest that his films self-consciously continue the tradition of European art cinema. Pawlikowski's determination to maintain autonomy within the industrial process and a steely resolve never to compromise his artistic integrity, often veiled by his mild manners, are evident in his interviews and in the marketing of his films, and contribute to thematic consistency of his oeuvre. His films feature individuals caught in the vortex of history — through the trope of European journeys and migration, questions of individual and collective identities, and nation(s)/nationalism; and in the vortex of their own emotions — *amour fou*.

Pawlikowski's creative freedom in relation to the production of his films has been aided by industrial practices and subsidies from institutions which share a tradition of nurturing creative autonomy — the BBC and European cinema. Under the expansion of neoliberal economic politics since the 1980s, Pawlikowski's career has moved from the BBC in the 1980s — the time of the beginning of the deregulation and conglomeration of the creative industries which impacted upon public service broadcasting — to the increasingly sedimented and diversified market where niche audiences for authored products have become more important. Despite an apparent contradiction between European art cinema and the neoliberal economy, expressive of the 'art-capital' conflict, they converge on discourses of authorship in general and the Romantic author in particular. Apart from borrowing techniques of boosting creativity from the neoliberal creative tech industries, the European producer is subject to discourses of the Romantic author coming from the neoliberal 'heroic entrepreneur,' which leads to their self-perception as expressive individuals with a personal vision, the realization of which depends on enabling the artist-director. While it is true that enabling the hard-to-accommodate artist with 'the particular name above the subtitle' is the only way the product will carry that identifiable artist's imprint that the neoliberal economy can convert into profit, the neoliberal appropriation of the concept of the Romantic author helps to smooth this rough commercial edge. So Pawlikowski is right when he declares that his was 'the only recognizable name in the film, so sacking me was not an option,' when he asked for additional budget to finish *Ida* (2014). Whilst Barthes' author might be dead, the art film *auteur* prevails; certainly, to answer Bazin's question, it does so in the form of Paweł Pawlikowski sculpting his stories into 'a Paweł Pawlikowski film.'

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In the course of his career Pawlikowski has changed his name from the anglicized 'Paul', with which he signed his documentaries, to 'Pawel' in his early fiction films, to the full Polish transcription 'Pawel' in his Polish films.

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<sup>2</sup> Pawlikowski's mother did not tell him that they were never coming back to Poland before they went to Great Britain for fear that the Communist authorities would not let them go (Pawlikowski, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> All translations from the Polish language are my own.

<sup>4</sup> Google facilitates its entrepreneur-auteur workforce through their 'creative suites' — the gym, the Xbox room, the dog room; Virgin through unlimited holidays; and Apple through allowing as much time as necessary to get the best product. And, of course, Netflix, which has expanded into art film production and support of *auteurs*, has its 'no rules rules.'

<sup>5</sup> Rob Stone, in his book *The Cinema of Richard Linklater: Walk, Don't Run* (2018), similarly struggles with the idea of collaborative mode of work of Linklater against the director's overarching control over his films, including following through on projects over eighteen years.

<sup>6</sup> Pawlikowski talks of authorial freedoms and 'cosy' collaboration with the BBC's Bookmark under the liberal patronage of the commissioning editor Nigel Williams, which came to an end as a result of changes in the BBC structure and the move to audience- and ratings-orientated programming in the late 1990s (Pawlikowski, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> The art-capital contradictions, which govern European producers' work, have been brilliantly portrayed in a television series *Call My Agent!* (2015-2020). Significantly in its original French title, it refers to capital *Dix pour cent* (10 Percent) but it is a love letter to cinema as art.

<sup>8</sup> Part of the reason Puszczynska did not have to worry about recouping the investment is that the budget for *Ida* was only 1.4 million Euros and the largest part of it comprised the so-called 'soft money,' that is, money which does not have to be recouped because it comes from subsidies (The Polish Film Institute, Euroimages, The Danish Film Institute, and The City of Łódź).

<sup>9</sup> I would like to thank Professor Ib Bodjenberg and Dr Huw Jones for sending to me the recording of the roundtable discussion with *Ida*'s producers (Puszczynska and Wanting Hassing, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> I would like to thank Professor Rob Stone, Director of B-Film: Birmingham Centre for Film Studies, Birmingham University, for inviting me to discuss *My Summer of Love* with author Helen Cross and Professor Roger Shannon (Cross 2015).

<sup>11</sup> I would like to thank Professor Roger Shannon for sending to me a video recording of the session he organised with author Helen Cross and producer Emma Hayter (Cross and Hayter, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Pawlikowski often self-quotes: *My Summer of Love* character of Phil comes from the evangelical Christians from *Lucifer over Lancashire* (1987) and the engineless moped comes from *Twoockers* (1997); the scene of singing of Stalin Cantata in *Cold War* comes from *Palace Life* (1988).

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Brooke suggests in *Sight and Sound* that Pawlikowski's decision to quit filmmaking directly fed into *The Woman in Fifth*. Pawlikowski said: 'It's been a difficult choice, but my kids are more important to me than films.' Brooke comments: This is 'what *The Woman in the Fifth* is ultimately about' (2012: 8).

<sup>14</sup> Pawlikowski's documentaries often feature issues of nationalism: *In the Blood* (1987), *Palace Life* (1988); *Vaclav Havel: A Czech Drama* (1989); *Extraordinary Adventures: The Life of Vladimir Voinovich* (1989); *Serbian Epics* (1992) or *Tripping with Zhirinovskiy* (1995) as do his feature films, *Last Resort* and *Ida*.

<sup>15</sup> Roman Polanski's *The Tenant*, Jerzy Skolimowski's *Moonlighting* (1982) and Krzysztof Kieślowski's *White* (1993) have all dramatized Eastern Europe's fears of perceived exclusion and/or economic deprivation that *Cold War* references.

<sup>16</sup> The issue of emigration from Poland under Communism is a complex one: one on the one hand, Communist propaganda vilified those leaving as defectors and, on the other hand, the Polish Romantic tradition, where national ties are sacred, perceived emigration as the abandonment of the nation in need.