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An Old Tale: The Marriage of Łódź and Los Angeles in David Lynch's *Inland Empire*

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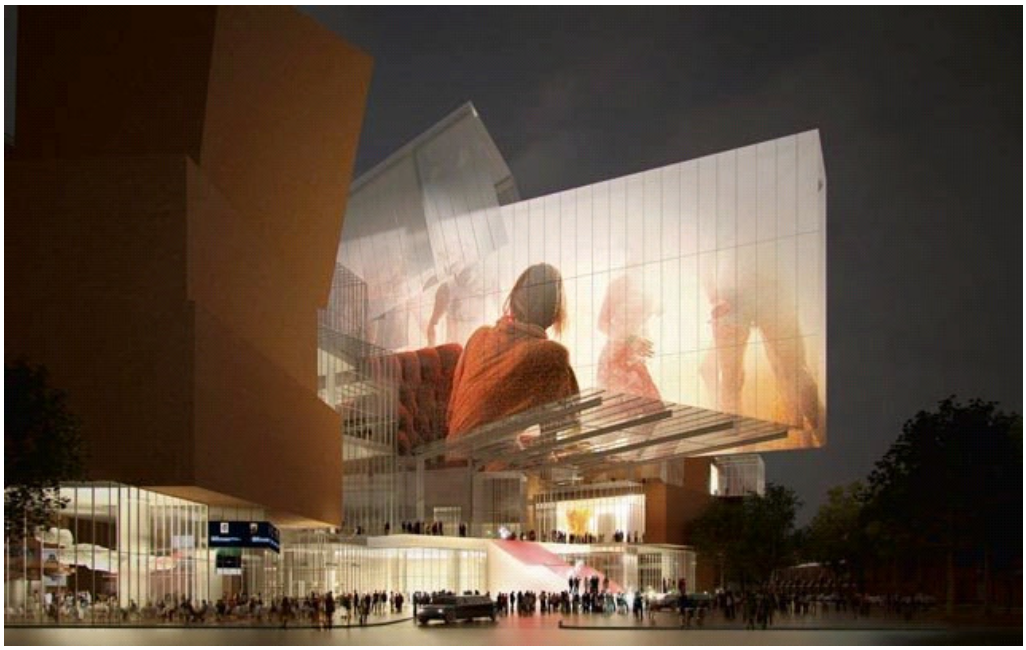

Figure 1: Frank Gehry's proposed cultural centre in Łódź

In December 2009, Frank Gehry unveiled the latest designs for a new cultural centre in the Polish city of Łódź (Figure 1). Set alongside a rusting power station, Gehry's congregation of abstract, interlocking forms is, in many ways, wholly typical of contemporary architectural currents. Here, we have a post-industrial landscape seeking renewal through the jarring shapes of an iconic architect. Yet, one feature of these indicative images demands additional attention: the projection, onto the building's façade, of scenes from David Lynch's 2006 film *Inland Empire*. With their anxious corridors and uncanny rooms, their sinister small towns and looping highways, Lynch's films contain some of the most distinctive spaces in modern cinema. Furthermore, Lynch shot parts of *Inland Empire* in Łódź and has continued to act as a vocal advocate for the city, promoting its industrial heritage and engaging in

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its regeneration plans. Thus, Gehry's architectural deployment of Lynch's cinematic images seems a perfect partnership: two prime manipulators of spatial tension united in a single project.

On closer examination, though, we might be puzzled by the unusual geographical motions at play here. Indeed, when news emerged of Gehry and Lynch's involvement in Łódź, the *New York Times* felt compelled to ask, in rather patronising terms, "What could they possibly see in the so-called Manchester of Poland?"[1] After all, both these men are famed for their work in Los Angeles, where the sprawling suburbs, winding freeways and epic beaches once led Jean Baudrillard to conclude: "Europe has disappeared."[2] Los Angeles has defined itself in opposition to the crowded industrial metropolis. Łódź, with its cobbled streets and cotton mills, represents the very antithesis of California's centrifugal landscape. The capital of the Polish textile industry, the site of a prominent Jewish ghetto in World War II and a staunch socialist stronghold – how could Łódź's past possibly speak to the history of Los Angeles? Do they share any spatial or cinematic language?

These puzzles lie at the heart of *Inland Empire*. Lynch's most radical film to date tells a strange transatlantic tale, yet one that resonates with familiar sensations. At its centre is the unexpected marriage of Łódź and Los Angeles. The most symbolic product of American sprawl meets its spatial predecessor: the centripetal European industrial city, the urban model that, from Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright, has provoked such suspicion in the United States.[3] For Lynch, Southern California, habitually regarded as immense, open and untainted, remains haunted by ghostly ancestry. It is to such tricky terrain that this article will attend, to demonstrate that the unlikely pairing of Łódź and Los Angeles actually represents "an old tale."

David Lynch's interest in Łódź, Poland's third-largest city, began on a visit to its cinematography festival in 2000. In late 2003, he returned to take over 1,400 photographs, focusing on Łódź's decaying industrial fabric, as well as capturing various doorways, staircases and courtyards located throughout the city.[4] Assessing these initial trips, Slavoj Žižek made the telling point that Lynch feels "very much at home" not in "the Romantic Poland" of Chopin or the Solidarity movement, but in the "ecologically ruined Poland of industrial wasteland." According to Žižek, this confirms "Lynch's extraordinary sensitivity" as such rotting zones of the "*Second* World" constitute "history, threatened with erasure between the posthistorical First

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World and prehistorical Third World."[5] Certainly, Lynch's preliminary mapping of Łódź confirms his continued fascination with the interaction between mechanical and organic processes, a preoccupation which can be detected from *Eraserhead* (1977) onwards. It is Łódź's decay that caught Lynch's attention, especially the magnificent deterioration of its heroic factories, where historical tribulations are inscribed on mottled beams and in peeling paint. Four decades after leaving Philadelphia for the "Sun Belt" of California, Lynch found a familiar home within Europe's own "Rust Belt".

The principal product of this emerging interest in Poland is arguably the most challenging American film to have appeared in a generation: *Inland Empire*. Although its thematic and structural antecedents can be seen in Lynch's previous work, particularly *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), there seems an unequivocal chasm between those films, which maintain a level of narrative convention, and the montage of sounds, images and spaces we encounter in *Inland Empire*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Lynch's latest release alienated many critics. David Edelstein complained, "*Inland Empire* is way, way beyond my powers of ratiocination," while Carina Chocano confessed: "I found myself pining for *The Elephant Man*."[6] Even a sympathetic reviewer like Michael Atkinson emphasised *Inland Empire*'s singularity, claiming that "roping it into any category with other movies seems a dubious labour."[7] *Inland Empire*, then, sits in a room of its own.

Rather, however, than defining it as a purely aberrant addition to the Lynch canon, we might be better served in considering *Inland Empire* as the culmination of past obsessions, as well as a decisive transformation of them. If, as Edward Soja famously suggested, "it all comes together in Los Angeles," then *Inland Empire* – a title which encompasses a region in the Pacific Northwest where Lynch grew up and an area in Southern California, as well as implying the heartlands of Central Europe – is where it all comes together for David Lynch.[8] This is a film about Old and New Worlds, symbolic territories that clash, merge and overlap.

Lynch's films are usually set within one clear location, such as London (*The Elephant Man* [1980]), Lumberton (*Blue Velvet* [1986]) or Los Angeles (*Mulholland Drive*). Even his road movies *Wild at Heart* (1990) and *The Straight Story* (1999) progress along a specific channel - the American highway. *Inland Empire* is different: it switches between various unexplained spaces, denying the spectator any geographical confidence. Cinematic space, Stephen Heath reminds us, is heavily

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

dependent on the establishing shot. Conventionally, directors strive to provide "an overall view, literally the 'master-shot' that will allow the scene to be dominated in the course of its reconstitution narratively as dramatic unity."[9] *Inland Empire* denies us the establishing shots critical to the creation of secure space. The only "overall view" we are given in the film is a brief shot of the Hollywood sign which pans down to Paramount Studios. Otherwise, Lynch's handheld camera remains claustrophobically close to the action. The scale and layout of our surroundings remain murky; we must rely on changes in lighting, language or furnishings for any sense of navigation. What is more, while Lynch's later films turn on an incident of narrative rupture, such as Fred Madison morphing into Pete Dayton in *Lost Highway* or Betty Elms awakening as Diane Selwyn in *Mulholland Drive*, there is no single transformative moment in *Inland Empire*. We might see Lynch's latest film as exhibiting a form of total rupture – a shattering of all "dramatic unity" – but this does not correspond with the emotional coherence it maintains. As Daniel Frampton states, "we understand what the film is about, even if we don't think we do."[10] So, what is *Inland Empire* about?

In search of an answer, we should turn to an incident early in the film. The Hollywood actress Nikki Grace, who is married to a possessive Polish man, is visited by a spooky woman with a distinct Central European accent. Her strange pronouncements, which seem to shape the rest of the film, also provide a framework for the forthcoming argument.

Firstly, she introduces herself to Nikki as "your new neighbour" – a category that always prompts suspicion in Lynch's films, given its fraught symbolic border. "I think that it is important to know one's neighbours," she adds, pointedly. Of course, our definition of neighbourly status is based as much on social or historical factors, as geographical proximity. For Freud, the Christian injunction to love one's neighbour inevitably created "extreme intolerance […] towards those left outside."[11] Who, or what, then, might be considered as "neighbours" in *Inland Empire*?

Secondly, the visitor asks Nikki about her latest film role. "Is it about marriage?" she asks. "Your husband, he's involved?" Marriage is perhaps the most palpable theme in *Inland Empire*, a film brimming with deceit and wrath, jealousy and lust, clandestine meetings and unplanned pregnancies. Fidelity is certainly at stake here; but fidelity to whom, or rather, to what? For *Inland Empire* is a story as concerned with geographical relations as personal affairs, with spatial as well as

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sexual couplings. Indeed, as we will see, its many transatlantic pairings pivot on the "marriage" of Łódź and Los Angeles. Nikki becomes increasingly disorientated by the European intrusion into her Californian idyll, particularly as her lavish Hollywood lifestyle is brutally called into question by unidentified claims from the past. When her "new neighbour" begins to talk of "an unpaid bill," we must move beyond fiscal matters to consider the spatial and cultural debts that involve Europe and the United States.

Lastly, Nikki's excruciating encounter comes to a close with the visitor recounting "an old tale" and its "variation" – stories which not only send reverberations through *Inland Empire*, but which are also highly suggestive in terms of Lynch's career as a whole:

> A little boy went out to play. When he opened his door, he saw the world. As he passed through the doorway, he caused a reflection. Evil was born. Evil was born, and followed the boy. […] A little girl went out to play. Lost in the marketplace, as if half-born. Then, not through the marketplace – you see that, don't you? – but through the alley behind the marketplace. This is the way to the palace. But it isn't something you remember.

The notion of "an old tale" could be applied to many of *Inland Empire*'s threads: the adultery, prostitution and domestic abuse that occurs throughout the film; the recycling of myths and scripts that underpins the narrative; and the connections between Europe and America, especially the spatial and cinematic traces littering Southern California, that Lynch emphasises. Something else, however, is to be found in these strange stories of little boys and little girls; additional insights lurk within "the alley behind the marketplace." For now, we should proceed with these evocative terms in mind – new neighbours, old tales, unpaid bills and unseen alleys – as they offer vital co-ordinates to *Inland Empire*'s multi-layered geography.

To discover an "unpaid bill" within the marriage of Łódź and Los Angeles, we should examine in detail the powerful locations Lynch utilises. Firstly, let us consider Nikki Grace's domestic surroundings (Figure 2). Her baroque Hollywood mansion is full of mirrors and columns, ornate furnishings and *trompe l'oeil* effects. This lavish display of wealth and status, maintained by an array of staff, is set within an exclusive, leafy

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

district. It is a setting that partially recalls Norma Desmond's ghostly home in *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950), which Lynch claims "is in my top five movies, for sure."[12] Even more striking is its resemblance to a location that immediately precedes it in *Inland Empire*. Just before we encounter Nikki's home, we see two Polish men converse in another luxurious room (Figure 3). Here, we are again dazzled by shimmering surfaces, opulent panelling, thick drapes and rococo flourishes. The two interiors are so similar they might easily be assumed to lie within the same house. Yet, this room is not part of a fashionable Californian development, but – in reality – sits within the Herbst Mansion in Łódź (Figure 4). Completed in 1877, this grand villa, set alongside an enormous cotton factory and streets of workers' housing, is part of the vast empire created by Karl Scheibler, one of Europe's most ambitious nineteenth-century industrialists.

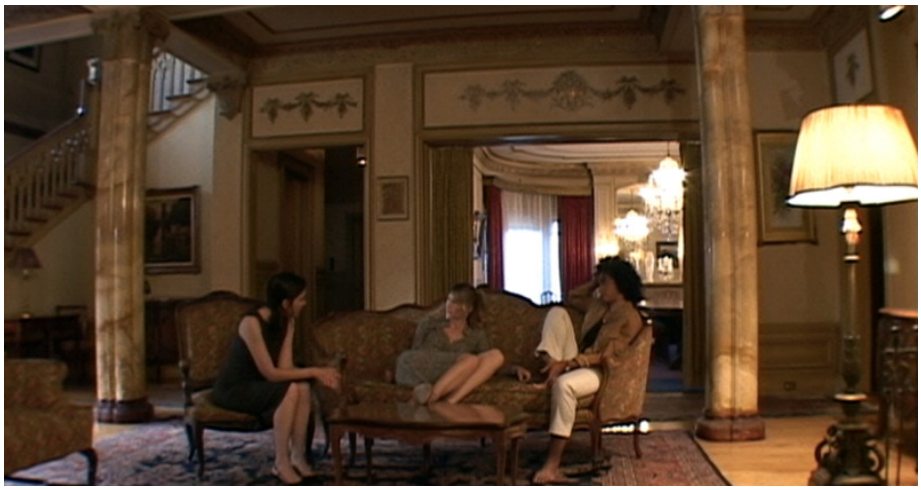

Figure 2: *Inland Empire*: Nikki Grace's Hollywood mansion

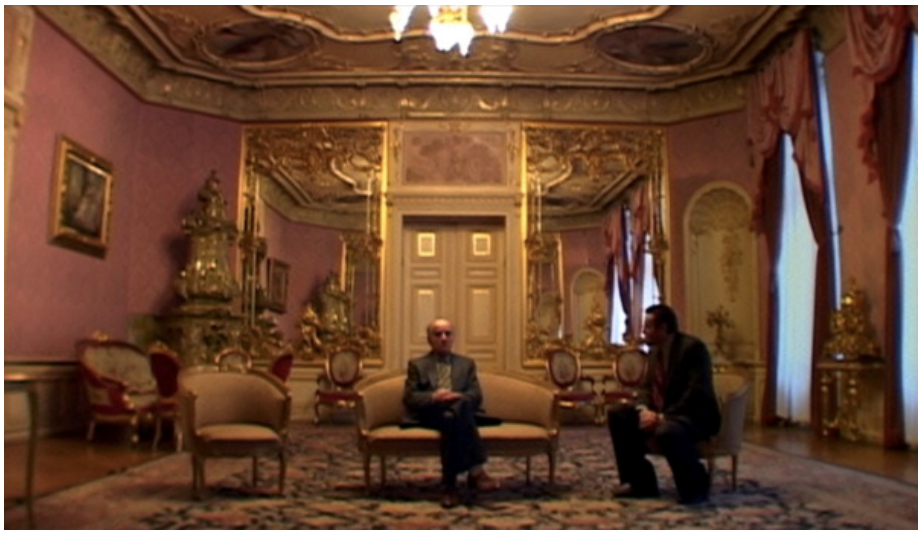

Figure 3: *Inland Empire*: Two Polish men in the Herbst Mansion in Łódź

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

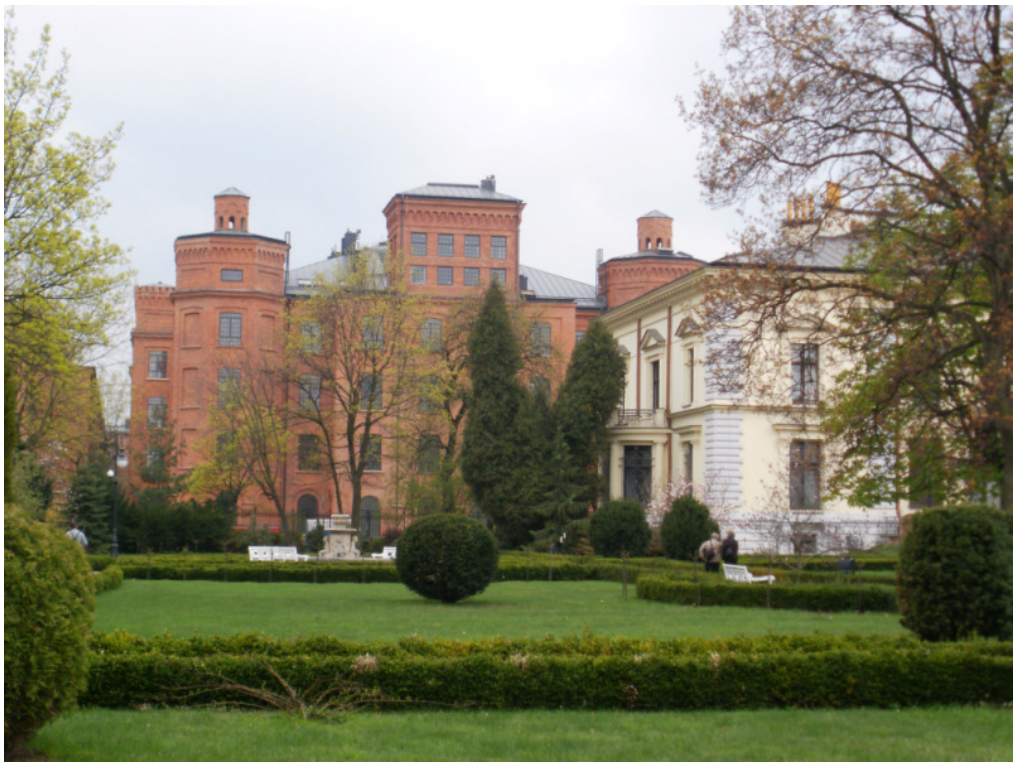

Figure 4: The Herbst Mansion (right) in Łódź

In *Inland Empire*, disparate places begin to speak to each other; unexpected bonds are formed. Nikki's "new neighbour" may outline "the way to the palace," but the film presents us with two concurrent versions: a Hollywood mansion and a tycoon's villa. In both instances, the spaces pursue a form of luxury very much in debt to European aristocratic traditions. During their rapid periods of growth, made possible by the absence of land or labour restrictions, Łódź and Los Angeles generated an assortment of architectural styles, often crudely distorted from their origins. Nineteenth-century Łódź hosted a rich congregation of cultures (including Poles, Germans, Russians and a substantial Jewish community), the kind of heterogeneous intertwining of nationalities and customs that would later emerge in Los Angeles. Both these cities have acted as regional meeting-points, where rampant commerce provokes a patchwork of identities and montage is a perennial urban feature. Andrzej Wajda's *The Promised Land* (1975) offers an incredible vision of the industrial frenzy at the end of the nineteenth century when Łódź was one of the fastest growing cities in the world. In Wajda's film, one Łódź businessman leads a colleague around his palatial home. "This is our Spanish room," he declares. His daughter disagrees: "Papa's

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

wrong – it's our Mauritian room." Later, she adds, "Every proper palace has a Chinese or Japanese room." This is exactly the kind of stylistic assemblage that prompts severe criticism of Los Angeles – the "truly monstrous" range of domestic designs famously satirised by Nathanael West.[13] Throughout his career, Lynch has been compelled by such deviant products, whether they are generated by factories (such as the monstrous features of John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*) or the film industry (consider the anger and jealousy depicted in *Mulholland Drive*). The golden palaces of Łódź and Los Angeles represent the compensatory extravagances of assembly-line urbanism. Indeed, Łódź's textile industry also provides an appropriate metaphor for the fabric of *Inland Empire*, where numerous cultural and historical threads are woven together to form a continuous cloth.

Let us turn to a second example of how Lynch marries these two cities. Much later in *Inland Empire*, Nikki finds herself wandering among the down-and-out population of Hollywood Boulevard (Figure 5). It seems the only pedestrians in car-dominated Los Angeles are those "lost in the marketplace" – that is, prostitutes and the homeless. Suddenly, in the middle of the scene, the action cuts to a snowy evening in Łódź (Figure 6). A parallel line-up of women emerges, consisting of the same actresses we saw in America, but now dressed in the wintry fashions of the 1920s. Once again, the Polish scenes in the film act as a ghostly double to the accompanying Hollywood story. American actions are placed alongside European doppelgängers, as if the New World is re-enacting scenes that have previously occurred in the older continent.[14] Indeed, this Polish version of Hollywood's red-light district is conspicuously archaic, with horse-drawn carriages and outmoded cars riding through the streets. Perhaps, this stark temporal shift is deemed appropriate for the oldest profession in the world. Other episodes in Łódź contain candles and séances, intimating that the city represents another era, as well as a parallel space to Los Angeles. In Lynch's eyes, Łódź is stuck in its industrial heyday, unable to respond to contemporary concerns – a piece of vinyl still spinning in a digital age. Seemingly, the old Polish folk tale said to be haunting Nikki's new film is playing out before us.[15]

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

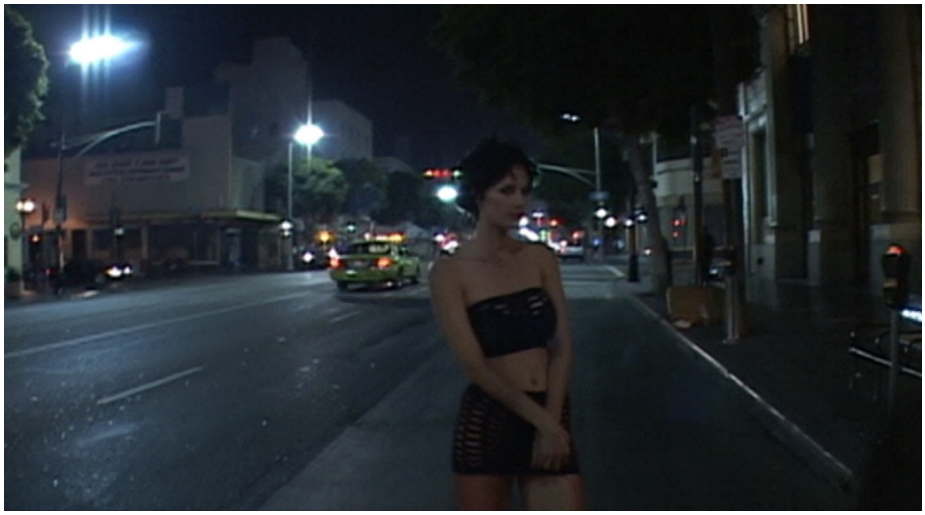

Figure 5: *Inland Empire*: Prostitutes on Hollywood Boulevard

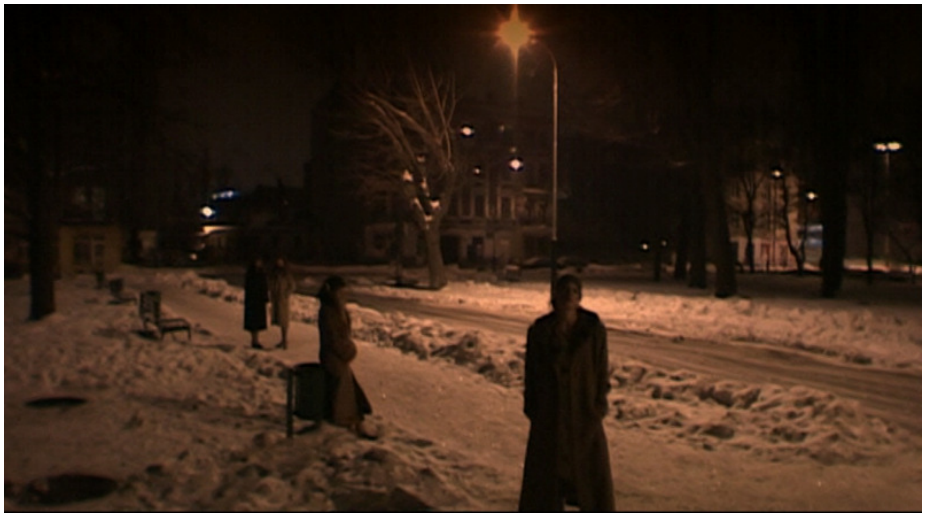

Figure 6: *Inland Empire*: Prostitutes on Plac Zwycięstwa in Łódź

The history of cinema is certainly pertinent to these scenes of prostitution. After World War II, Łódź became home to one of the most prestigious film schools in Europe, which includes Wajda, Krzysztof Kieślowski and Roman Polanski amongst its alumni. It also grew into a major site of cinematic production, earning the inevitable nickname HollyŁódź. As John Orr points out, the city forms part of Central European cinema's own inland empire, along with Berlin, Vienna and Budapest, a "topographic nexus that has existed alongside Hollywood in the years of classical cinema and beyond."[16] Yet, the city's industrial decline has also engendered cinematic affect. The architect Daniel Libeskind, who was born in Łódź, claims his hometown now appears "to be made of cardboard, a decaying set for a movie that wrapped long ago."[17]

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

This, of course, is the kind of unreal quality often attributed to Los Angeles. In *Inland Empire*, Lynch pairs Hollywood Boulevard with Plac Zwycięstwa in Łódź. In reality, these Polish women line up adjacent to the city's current Museum of Cinematography, as if searching for celluloid immortality (Figure 7). In fact, this alley, which lies opposite an old market-ground, also leads to a palace, for the museum is located inside another former home of Karl Scheibler. The interiors of this neo-renaissance structure, first erected in 1855, are now filled with old film equipment, but were previously utilised as a set for Wajda's *The Promised Land*. Such abundant associations are a perennial feature of *Inland Empire*'s locations, further confirming its director's "extraordinary sensitivity." Elsewhere in the city, HollyŁódź even has its own walk of fame, commemorating the likes of Wajda, Kieślowski and Polanksi along Ulica Piotrkowska (the longest promenade in Poland). These golden stars, slightly distorted, as if to indicate a more angular approach to cinema, replicate those famous icons on Hollywood Boulevard (Figure 8).

Lynch alludes to this dual cinematic heritage by having Nikki Grace eventually collapse upon one of Hollywood Boulevard's star plaques (Figure 9). This once-grand avenue supplanted Broadway as the home of Los Angeles cinema when it began to host the industry's most glamorous premieres in the 1930s. Now, however, as *Inland Empire* emphasises, the street is as decayed as Łódź's factories, but corrosion again arouses Lynch's curiosity. Nikki crosses the famous intersection of Hollywood and Vine, another corner, like the junction next to Winkie's diner that features in *Mulholland Drive*, where budding actresses would congregate in anticipation of stardom. Yet, a route to the palace remained impossible for most pretenders. For Lynch, such urban sites, in both Łódź and Los Angeles, constitute the alleys behind the marketplace, the murky spaces beyond the cinematic frame where dreams become nightmares.

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

Figure 7: Plac Zwycięstwa in Łódź, with the Museum of Cinematography (and former home of Karl Scheibler) on the right

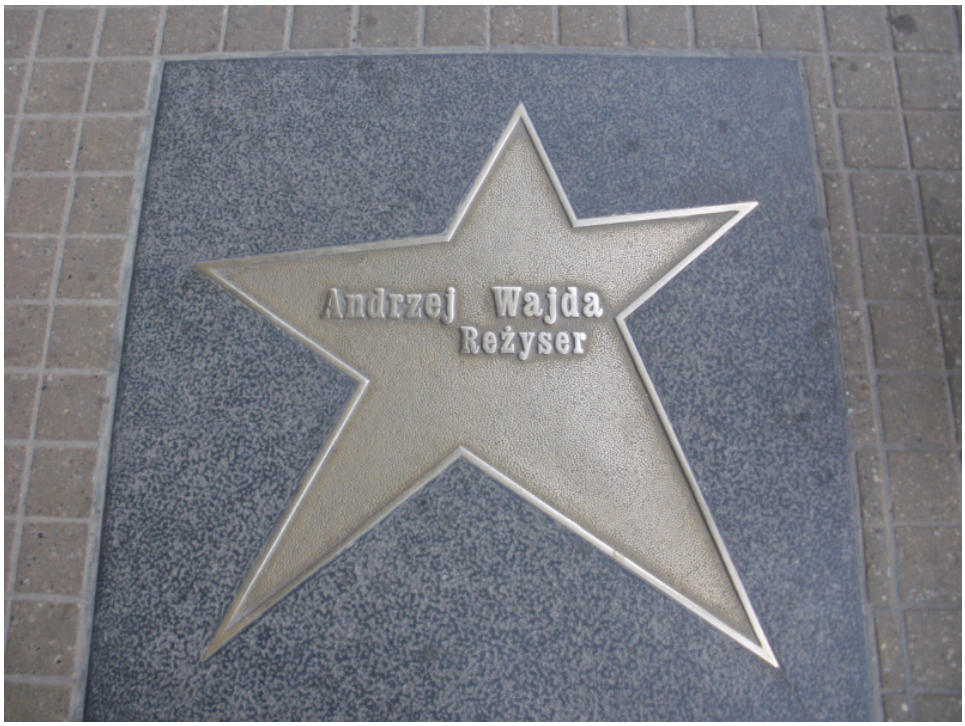

Figure 8: Łódź's cinematic walk of fame on Ulica Piotrkowska

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

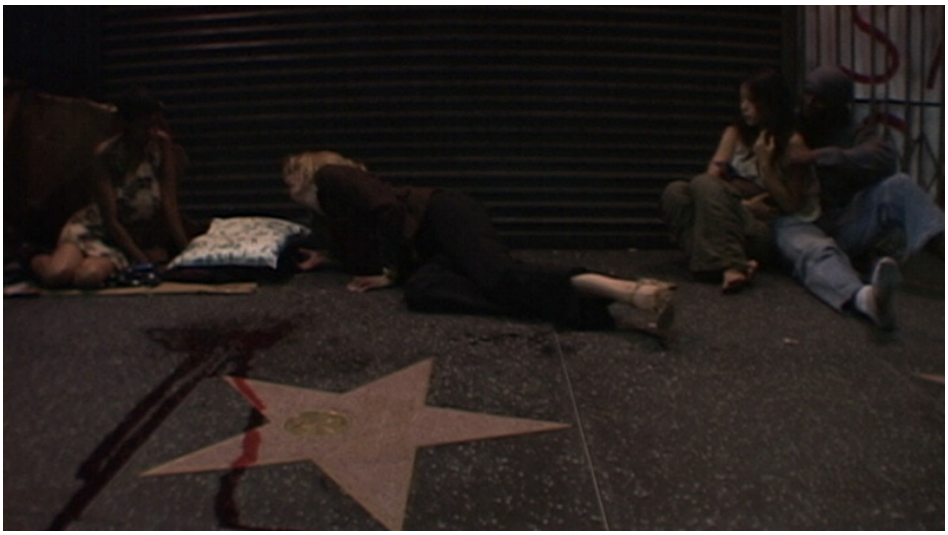

Figure 9: *Inland Empire*: Nikki collapses on Hollywood Boulevard

After being stabbed by a rival, Nikki eventually "dies" on Hollywood Boulevard opposite the Pantages Theatre, home to the Academy Award ceremonies of the 1950s. In an uncanny move, the camera retracts, revealing this "death" to be yet another performance: what we are actually witnessing is a film-shoot within Paramount Studios. A similar manoeuvre is employed earlier in *Inland Empire*, when Nikki opens the door to a wooden studio construction – previously shown as merely a façade – only to enter a physical home elsewhere in California. All these environments, in Łódź or Los Angeles, in the studio or the suburbs, seem to exist simultaneously.

Inland Empire thus creates a series of uncertain regions between the supposedly ethereal world of film and the traditional materiality of the built environment, undermining regular conceptions of both cinema and architecture. Libeskind's memoir offers a poetic defence of architecture's solidity, its role as "the eternal witness testifying mutely that the past we imagine is not illusionary. I really did walk this street long ago, really did knock on that door."[18] Jeremy Till has recently outlined the extent to which control, order and coherence have been at the centre of architecture's self-conception, from Vitruvius to Le Corbusier.[19] Such reassurances are exploded by Nikki's bewildered travels through California and Poland, in which her most common request is "look at me, and tell me if you've known me before." Here, the physical presence of the buildings around her is shown to be worthless – there is no guarantee such structures are not the temporary creations

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

of a cinematic world. In *Inland Empire*, architecture is less of an "eternal witness" and more like an unreliable narrator. The logical restrictions of place and continent seem effortlessly traversable. Nikki, therefore, cannot calculate whether she really did "walk this street" or "knock on that door."

If *Inland Empire* forces us to confront the consequences of losing the reassuring solidity architecture is supposed to provide, then Lynch simultaneously emphasises the highly physical qualities involved in the production of cinematic images. The architecture of cinema – lights, cameras, sets, theatres, projection rooms – as well as the sheer materiality of the film reel, are the building blocks of Lynch's fiction. What was begun in *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*, films in which industrial practices are shown to have unintended effects on the city and its inhabitants, is carried to its logical conclusion in *Inland Empire*. Rather, however, than workshops erasing individuals or factories generating deformities, it is the psycho-spatial conflicts produced by the film industry that unite Los Angeles and Łódź.

The creepy sequence on Hollywood Boulevard maintains a powerful sense of physical loss. Indeed, *Inland Empire*'s digital images embody a distinct mourning for film and for the urban spaces that accompanied cinema's triumph. Nikki's scripted death, on such a symbolic street, is as traumatic as the staged events at Club Silencio in *Mulholland Drive*, shot inside an abandoned downtown cinema: something more profound than individual suffering is clearly at work here. Just as Łódź's crumbling factories caught his eye, the fertile ruins of the film industry act as inspiration for Lynch's latest work. For Stephen Barber, the "mass-cultural experience of film and of cinema-going accumulated such pervasiveness within human gesture and perception […] that its eventual dissolution necessarily possessed a correspondingly deep, sensorial and corporeal crash."[20] Nikki's own "corporeal crash" occurs on a dilapidated strip of urban history to be captured first on 35mm film (for 'On High in Blue Tomorrows', the film she is making) and then by Lynch's digital camera (for *Inland Empire*). From this makeshift Hollywood Boulevard housed within Paramount Studios, Nikki wanders into an empty cinema (the Orpheum Theatre on Los Angeles' Broadway, in actual fact), via one of Lynch's famous red curtains. There, she encounters her past, present and future movements on the screen, in a vivid representation of temporal simultaneity. These sites of neglect and desertion reverberate with the collected memories of cinematic urbanism, yet the looping

celluloid city has been replaced by the logic of a new medium. As Tom McCarthy recognises, the inter-connected rooms, streets, sets and screens of *Inland Empire* constitute a "digital" architecture constructed around "information storage, relay and configuration."[21]

Within its own innovative structure, *Inland Empire* remains haunted by the ghostly arrangements of past technologies. From radios and gramophones to CCTV monitors, *Inland Empire* is inhabited by competing media. We might even locate a plausible explanation for the film's narrative complexities via a Polish television screen. Near the beginning and the end of *Inland Empire*, we see a young woman inside a plush hotel room watching a variety of images on television, including sequences from the rest of the film. These scenes were shot inside Łódź's Hotel Grand, originally a factory before its conversion in 1887. On the street below the hotel lie the plaques honouring Poland's cinematic stars, while the suite Lynch utilised commemorates Arthur Rubinstein, the famous Łódź pianist who fled to Beverley Hills during World War II. This evocative setting provides an intriguing stage for scenes which, some critics claim, hold the key to *Inland Empire*. For example, Todd McGowan believes the various worlds we encounter "all emanate from the Lost Girl who appears at the beginning of the film" and Joshua Gonsalves agrees: "The crying whore is imagining a variety of scenarios that will allow her to attain resolution."[22] By this reading, the Rubinstein suite at the Hotel Grand acts as one of Lynch's central chambers or control rooms, a venue from which filmic action is manipulated.[23] Łódź, with its industrial apparatus and cinematic history, is certainly a suggestive spot for the operation of Hollywood drama. However, in *Inland Empire*, where space and time function under a logic of simultaneity, where identities fuse and the boundaries between the real and the filmic merge, such a didactic interpretation of the film's various subjectivities seems reductive. The approach of McGowan and Gonsalves is better suited to *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, where a governing force (Fred Madison and Diane Selwyn, respectively) guides the distorted narratives.

One last example from *Inland Empire* demonstrates how a wider set of geographical registers, from within and beyond the cinematic screen, drives the marriage of Łódź and Los Angeles. The Polish "Lost Girl", as abused by men as her American counterpart Nikki Grace, recites the words: "Cast out this wicked dream that has seized my heart" (Figure 10). This is a line once uttered by Gloria Swanson in the film *Queen Kelly* (directed by the Austrian-born, Hollywood-based Erich von

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

Stroheim in 1929). The same line also appears on-screen in *Sunset Boulevard*, as Norma Desmond (played by Swanson again) relives her past glories, aided by a faithful butler (played by Erich von Stroheim) (Figure 11). Furthermore, before making his mark in Hollywood, *Sunset Boulevard*'s director, Billy Wilder, was born in an area of Austria-Hungry that is now part of Poland.

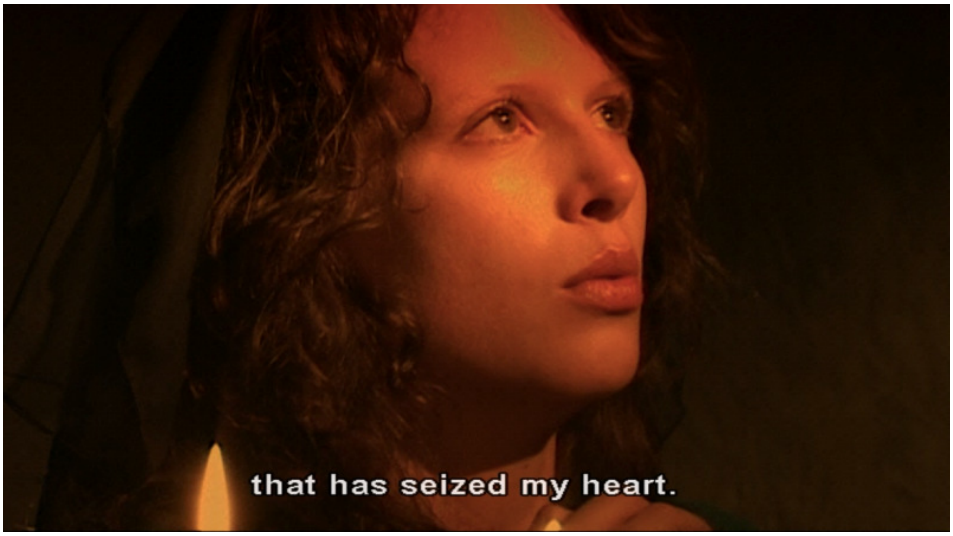

Figure 10: *Inland Empire*: The Polish "Lost Girl" recites her spell

Figure 11: *Sunset Boulevard*: Norma Desmond watches Gloria Swanson in *Queen Kelly*

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

Many implications arise from the unravelling of this complex sequence. Firstly, it contradicts the notion that *Inland Empire* operates beyond comprehension or conceivable inspiration. For instance, Atkinson's claim that the film displays "no visible marks" of either "influence" or "homage" is rendered void.[24] In fact, the film is constructed around the physical traces of cinematic history. More importantly, with the literal imposition of such a fertile quotation, Lynch draws upon its multifaceted genealogy. He suggests an inter-continental, inter-generational network of actresses, all seized by the "wicked dream" of cinematic stardom. The scene also stresses that the histories of Central Europe and Southern California are deeply intertwined, that the two regions are, in some sense, married.

For Lynch, Los Angeles – famed for its easy-going attitude, the absence of social restrictions and a plenitude of fresh land – remains haunted by the moods, spaces and spirits of its ancestors. Lynch himself is particularly indebted to the incredible range of talent that moved from Europe to America in the 1920s and 1930s, the era in which many of the Polish scenes in *Inland Empire* appear to take place. Directors such as Wilder, Otto Preminger and Douglas Sirk, as well as architects such as Richard Neutra and Mies van der Rohe, have all exerted a significant influence on his life and on his films.[25] The emigration of so many crucial cultural figures is one of the defining geographical movements of the twentieth century. According to the historian Richard Pells, for Europe it represented "a haemorrhage of talent and intellect from which the Continent never recovered."[26] Perhaps, then, we might see *Inland Empire* as Lynch's oblique acknowledgement that his own career and the rise of the Classical Hollywood cinema that inspired him, as well as the development of the Californian architectural modernism he so admires, all constitute an "unpaid bill" to European creditors. Moreover, the fact that many of these significant individuals emigrated in response to Nazism lends additional resonance to Lynch's use of Łódź – the site of such enormous suffering during the Second World War, when it was renamed Litzmannstadt. Indeed, the sisters of Kafka (whom Lynch, we might recall, once described as "the one artist I feel could be my brother") were amongst the hundreds of thousands who died in the Łódź ghetto.[27] Roger Luckhurst rightly points out that Lynch "is interested less in specific, historical *losses* than in general, structural *absences* – that is, the foundational trauma of what it means to be a subject rather than any locatable historical condition."[28] Nevertheless, the unsettling atmosphere that underpins the Polish elements of *Inland Empire* certainly implies a

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great historical trauma – an "old tale" that refuses to fade away.

Adam Thirlwell has recently concluded: "Think about it. Everyone, always, is living in central Europe." The countless tragedies and endless translations tied to the region not only provoke this universal status, a form of global simultaneity that *Inland Empire* promotes; for Thirlwell, they also refresh creative energies so that "old ideas of form and content are replaced by messier concepts – junk, or kitsch, or defeat."[29] Likewise, Lynch's latest film involves the radical re-working of symbolic material into a raw, chaotic, emotionally compelling whole. For Lynch, Europe functions as a privileged site of mourning and memory, the location of recurring anxieties and suspicion, with particular connotations for the film industry. After all, European cinema has traditionally feared the dominance of Hollywood; Hollywood, in turn, has frequently depicted Europe as a source of sophisticated malevolence (see, for example, the character of Mr Reindeer in Lynch's own *Wild at Heart*). Nevertheless, *Inland Empire* positions the marriage of Łódź and Los Angeles as an "old tale" with more universal overtones. The film begins with the announcement of "the longest running radio play in history" and ends with the apocalyptic fervour of Nina Simone's "Sinnerman", where the judgments of good and evil simultaneously occur "all on that day."[30] What wider import, then, lies in this transatlantic pairing? What broader patterns might be represented by a tale, or a series of tales, involving Poland and America, marriage and infidelity, actresses and prostitutes?

Based on the life of the famous Polish actress Helena Modrzejewska, who emigrated to the United States in 1876, Susan Sontag's *In America* (2000) provides an additional perspective on these questions. Early in the novel, Sontag's narrator claims, "There are so many stories to tell, it's hard to say why it's one rather than another, it must be because with this story you feel you can tell many stories, that there will be a necessity in it."[31] Both she and Lynch clearly feel that the connections between Poland and California are emblematic; that, with this inter-continental story, "you can tell many stories." The stories they do tell are remarkably similar. Like *Inland Empire*, *In America* begins on a "wintry" night in a Polish hotel with a mysterious overheard conversation: "it was something vehement about a woman and a man."[32] The fluid nature of hotel life, the temporary relations, potential transgressions and everyday adultery that take place within its walls, offers the perfect platform to launch tales of travel and transformation. Like Nikki Grace, Sontag's heroine (Maryna Zalewska) is a renowned actress – indeed, "*a national symbol*" – with a husband and a

ISSN: 1753-5794 (online)

young lover.[33] In *Inland Empire*, one of the film's key threads concerns the uncertainties surrounding paternity; Maryna, we note, also has a child from a previous husband, who is wrongly thought to be dead. In both texts, marital difficulties and complicated notions of parenthood allude to the generational shifts and identity struggles that migration involves.

For the Polish clan surrounding Maryna Zalewska, America is very much the promised land. It is the restorative continent which "is supposed to repair the European scale of injury" or a place that can "simply make one forget what one wanted, to substitute other desires."[34] Notably, Maryna herself visits the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, parading the technological achievements of the New World, before heading west. "Doesn't it seem very American," her lover asks, "that America has its America, its better destination where everyone dreams of going?"[35] This, then, is why Lynch and Sontag choose to pair California, rather than New York or Chicago (both of which have substantially larger Polish populations) with a European counterpart: the iconic power of the transatlantic journey is greater the further west it develops; the 'Sun Belt' is that much brighter than the 'Rust Belt'. However, just as *Inland Empire* reveals unexpected similarities in the urbanisms of Łódź and Los Angeles, *In America* makes much of the spatial differences Maryna's passage entails – the shift from Poland, constructed around "familiar" and "saturated" "circles," to a landscape "ever more spacious and thinly marked, streamed and spiked in all directions."[36]

Of course, California also defines the notion of acting that is so vital to Lynch and Sontag's texts. That these tales of migration should centre on actresses provides further weight to their explorations of identity and the changes in name and nature required for personal, as well as professional, metamorphosis. Yet, while Nikki finds the image of herself on-screen to be a deeply upsetting experience, Sontag's protagonist sounds like Norma Desmond: "I would give ten years of my life to sit just once in the audience and see myself act, that I might learn what to avoid."[37] This difference epitomises Lynch's more radical approach to subjectivity. As McGowan argues, *Inland Empire* is about the impossible desire to encounter oneself, which is necessarily traumatic.[38] Maryna, by contrast, endures only superficial troubles in her quest for transatlantic stardom. Moreover, whilst *Inland Empire* and *In America* share many themes, they are formally quite distinct. Apart from some self-conscious musings in the opening chapter, Sontag's novel unfolds along a conventional narrative

structure. Lynch, as we have seen, adopts a more uncompromising and "messier" strategy in switching between Łódź and Los Angeles.[39]

At the end of *Inland Empire*, there is a tumultuous collision of people and places. The final moments of the film – in which the Polish "Lost Girl" races around, in a single journey, a series of corridors, sets and rooms seen throughout the film – suggests that, from a European hotel to the Californian suburbs, all these locations are simultaneously housed within the same structure: the marriage of Łódź and Los Angeles is complete. The film culminates in perhaps the most joyous scene in Lynch's cinema, when his female characters congregate in a celebratory union that is in direct contrast to the violence, confusion and terror that has preceded it. Like a Renaissance drama, the conflicting emotions and intricate action of the past 170 minutes are brought to a close with a final ceremony. The scene has a distinct spatial dimension, too. After exposing us to so many settings, Lynch ends the film in the marble ballroom in Nikki's Hollywood mansion; the prostitutes and the actresses have finally found their way to the palace.

Presently, Łódź is concerned with re-inventing itself as a post-industrial assemblage of conference centres and hotels, shopping malls and aqua-parks, universities and media outlets – an urban model pioneered by Los Angeles and the kind of re-branding exercise designed to catch the attention of the *New York Times*. Its (failed) bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2016 assured investors that "international brands have found conditions positively conducive to development."[40] Frank Gehry, himself the son of a Polish Jew who emigrated to North America, and Lynch are among those "international brands" involved in the city, with the director planning his own film studio inside a refurbished power station adjacent to Gehry's cultural centre (Figure 12). That these projects, part of the wider development of the central EC1 area of Łódź, are currently stalled amidst severe funding problems suggests that conditions are not quite so "conducive to development." Lynch, of course, is not known for aiding smooth changes in identity; another "unpaid bill" haunts Łódź.

In fact, the reasons why Lynch seems drawn to Łódź – its raw industrial forms, ghostly atmosphere and cinematic heritage – are now increasingly packaged into bland tourist simulacra, epitomised by the Manufakura complex. Having examined *Inland Empire*, Gehry's appropriation of Lynch's film might seem like a supplementary vow to the city's unexpected marriage with Los Angeles. Lynch's

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cinematic palimpsest, where spaces, characters and images overlap to create a thick texture on a flat screen, is translated into an urban context. Certainly, the range of meanings that can be drawn from Lynch's film provides a welcome change from the insipid ambitions of most public imagery. We might also conclude that the building and the movie share a similar architecture – Gehry's jarring forms matching the disjointed narrative of *Inland Empire*, although Lynch's film is too strange to be quite so neatly assimilated into a regeneration project.

Ultimately, such glossy and sanitised urban terrain is ill-suited to an association with Lynch. Instead, we might say that his career has consistently occupied "the alley behind the marketplace." Lynch's work nestles uneasily in that murky space between Hollywood and the independent sector, where renowned actors (such as Laura Dern and Jeremy Irons) participate in a self-distributed feature with an avant-garde structure. Remember, this is the director who, with *Twin Peaks* (1990-91), beamed images of incest into 35 million American homes.[41] Rather than becoming "lost in the marketplace," Lynch has sought out those uncertain regions neighbouring the studio system, where an askew perspective on American life can be found. This, for him, has been the way to the palace. It is something more filmmakers might care to remember.[42]

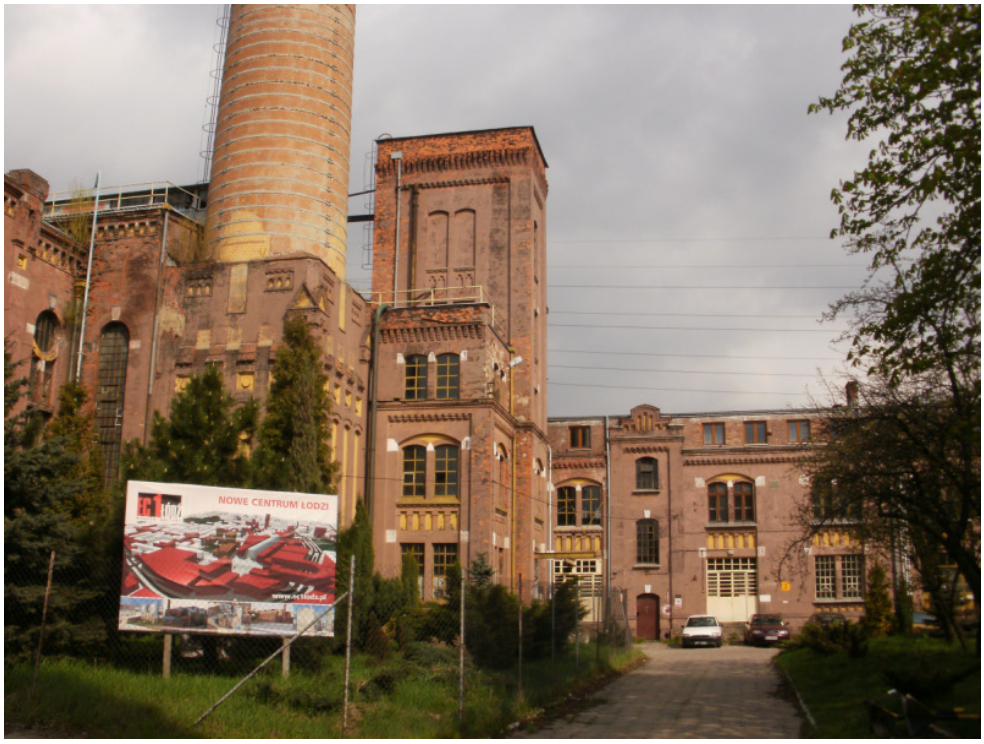

Figure 12: The site of Lynch's planned film studio in Łódź.

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Notes

[1] Monica Khemsurov, "Eastern Promises," *New York Times*, 26 September 2010.

[2] Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), 81.

[3] See Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual Versus the City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[4] Details of this trip and of Lynch's photographs can be seen in the documentary *Lynch (One)* (2007), directed under the pseudonym "blackANDwhite."

[5] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 159.

[6] David Edelstein, "They Cut Glass. And Hands," *New York Magazine*, 3 December 2006; Carina Chocano, "*Inland Empire*," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 2006.

[7] Michael Atkinson, "*Inland Empire*," *Sight and Sound* 17.4 (April 2007), 68.

[8] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1994), 190–248.

[9] Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 41.

[10] Daniel Frampton, "Sublime Confusion," *The Philosophers' Magazine* 47 (October 2009).

[11] Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2002), 51.

[12] Chris Rodley (ed.), *Lynch on Lynch* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 71.

[13] Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 60.

[14] The practical problems of recreating spaces across two different continents are demonstrated in the *Lynch (One)* documentary. During filming in Poland, we hear Lynch demanding that "every single fucking prop" be checked and put into place. "And it better match," he adds. His final comment emphasises that *Inland Empire*'s long-distance relationship is a serious strain on him: "Eight thousand fucking miles!"

[15] This folk tale, we learn, was previously the subject of an unsuccessful adaptation entitled "47" The exact meaning of this number, which later appears on the door housing the "Rabbits" sitcom, is never explained in *Inland Empire*. However, given Lynch's penchant for the literal imposition of his heroes' work, we might find a clue to its import in Francis Bacon's painting *The End of the Line* (1953). This features a spooky hut, akin to the shack in the Polish woods we see in *Inland Empire* (where the phrase "Inland Empire" is mentioned for the first and only time in the film). Bacon's structure is tucked behind railway lines and a signal bearing the number 47. Martin Harrison claims the significance of

this number "remains elusive," but relates the building in the painting to a photograph, found in Bacon's belongings, of Thomas Edison's Black Maria. Edison's structure was, of course, America's first film studio, operational from 1893 onwards. Such speculation traces a rather convoluted path through various texts, but it remains evocative to imagine, at the very heart of *Inland Empire*, the architectural origins of American cinema, re-conceived by a European artist. See Martin Harrison, *In Camera: Francis Bacon: Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 132.

[16] John Orr, "A Cinema of Parallel Worlds: Lynch, Kieślowski and *Inland Empire*," *Film International* 7.1 (February 2009), 29.

[17] Daniel Libeskind, *Breaking Ground: Adventures in Life and Architecture* (London: John Murray, 2004), 285.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 28.

[20] Stephen Barber, *Abandoned Images: Film and Film's End* (London: Reaktion, 2010), 76.

[21] Tom McCarthy, "His Dark Materials," *New Statesman*, 11 January 2010, 48.

[22] Todd McGowan, "The Materiality of Fantasy: The Encounter with Something in *Inland Empire*," in François-Xavier Gleyzon (ed.), *David Lynch In Theory* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2010), 18; Joshua D. Gonsalves, "'I'm a Whore': 'On the Other Side' of *Inland Empire*," in Gleyzon (ed.), *David Lynch In Theory*, 128.

[23] Other Lynchian control rooms include the strange booth inhabited by Mr Roque in *Mulholland Drive* and the sequence at the beginning of *Eraserhead* in which a deformed man cranks levers within an abandoned factory.

[24] Atkinson, "*Inland Empire*," 68.

[25] Lynch discusses his admiration for Neutra and Mies van der Rohe, as well as other architects, in Kathrin Spohr, "The World Reveals Itself," *Form* 158 (February 1997).

[26] Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 26.

[27] Rodley (ed.), *Lynch on Lynch*, 56.

[28] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), 198.

[29] Adam Thirlwell, "Czech Mates," *New Statesman*, 17 May 2010, 43.

[30] Interestingly, this version of "Sinnerman" is also used at the end of *Nuovomondo* (Emanuele Crialese, 2006), another tale of European migration to America. Given this repeated association, we might deem the mass movement from the Old to the New World an original sin that necessitates eternal judgment. Credit should go to John Horne for the initial comparison of these two films.

[31] Susan Sontag, *In America* (London: Penguin, 2009), 27.

[32] Ibid., 3.

[33] Ibid., 10.

[34] Ibid., 209.

[35] Ibid., 120.

[36] Ibid., 313.

[37] Ibid., 305.

[38] McGowan, "The Materiality of Fantasy," 16.

[39] That Sontag's novel was the subject of a plagiarism scandal adds one final irony: in the eyes of one historian, at least, *In America* was apparently too much of "an old tale." See Doreen Carvajal, "So Whose Words Are They? Susan Sontag Creates a Stir," *New York Times*, 27 May 2000.

[40] Archived promotional materials for Lodz's bid can be seen at: http://www.lodz2016.com/ [accessed May 2011].

[41] David Hughes, *The Complete Lynch* (London: Virgin, 2003), 118.

[42] This article is indebted to the driving skills and intimate urban knowledge of Karen Kice in Los Angeles and Piotr Strzelecki in Łódź.

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