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Shannon Blake Skelton, sbskelton@ksu.edu

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### Book Review

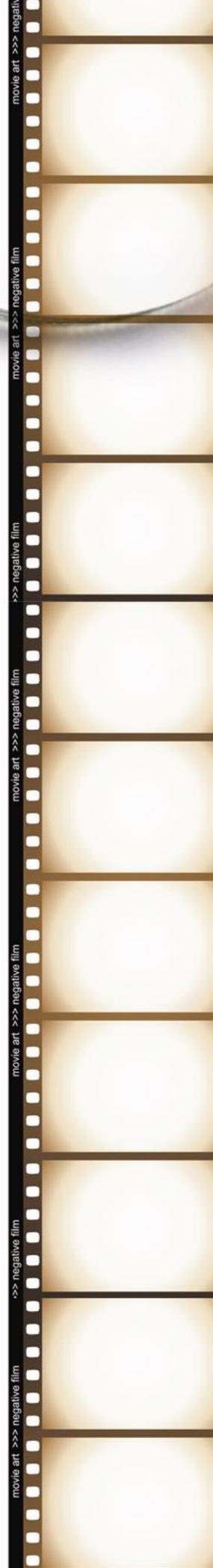
Richard Martin, *The architecture of David Lynch*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. 234 pp.



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# The architecture of David Lynch

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## Abstract:

This book review considers Richard Martin's 2014 *The Architecture of David Lynch*. The reviewer commends the author on the work's intelligence and insightful considerations of Lynch's use of space, place and architecture in his films. The book analyzes Lynch's depictions of towns and cities, domicile spaces, roads and highways, performative spaces, and rooms. The final chapter recontextualizes Lynch's *Inland Empire* within theories of space, place and architecture. With an impressive bibliography and 62 color plates of film stills, reproductions of paintings, and photographs of filming locations, the book is an important contribution to Lynch scholarship and engages film scholars to consider the dynamics of space, place and architecture in cinema.

**Keywords:** Cinema, David Lynch, Architecture, Space, Design

From the industrially ravaged neighborhood of *Eraserhead* and Joseph Merrick's architectural models in *The Elephant Man* to the deceptively benign small town of *Blue Velvet*'s Lumberton, the mills of *Twin Peaks* and the sinister, liminal spaces of Los Angeles in *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, David Lynch's films work as unique explorations of place, space and architecture. Lynch's visionary body of work has been the subject of a multitude of articles, analyses and monographs, yet Lynch's explorations of space and architecture has – until now – not been granted a book-length consideration. Richard Martin's impressive volume serves not only a significant contribution to Film Studies and Lynch scholarship, but also works as a provocation, compelling film scholars to reconsider notions of space and architecture in cinema.

Building upon the sizeable quantity of scholarship centered upon Lynch and his work, especially the writings of Slavoj Žižek, Todd McGowan and Justus Nieland, Martin's volume

emerges as an indispensable consideration of Lynch, his cinema and his use of space and place. The author argues that Lynch's architecture and manipulation of space is key to the filmmaker's creation of "discrete cinematic worlds . . . highly pressurized environments that operate with their own internal logic" (5). Utilizing a transdisciplinary approach, *The Architecture of David Lynch* "aims to develop further an understanding of the spaces Lynch has created by assessing his work alongside a diverse range of urban and architectural thinkers, as well as synthesizing insights from film studies, modern and contemporary art, and literature" (5) and places Lynch within the continuum of various architectural developments and spatial design explorations over the last forty years.

The text itself is not merely a documentation of the architecture and scenic design in Lynch's films, but rather an exploration of the relationship between place, space, architecture within the films of Lynch and what Lynch's films can reveal to the viewer about the nature and history of architecture. Martin asks, "First, what can be learned about Lynch's films by examining the architecture we see within them? Second, what can be learned about architecture, especially the spatial development of post-war America, by examining Lynch's films?" (2). Lynch has shot in a multitude of locales, including studios, vast deserts, deserted small towns, subterranean Los Angeles, the snowy streets of Lodz, the French Quarter of New Orleans, and the misty woods of the Pacific Northwest. Because of the sheer volume of environments – and the structures within those environments – Lynch's films also serve as a unique chronicle of Post-World War II space and architecture. The book "assesses in Lynch not only in the context of spatial developments in America, but within a wider transatlantic history of urban and architectural design" (4) while considering Lynch's work "alongside a diverse range of urban and architectural thinkers" (4). That said, Lynch's vision of space and architecture is profound and inseparable from his subject and

form, for Lynch's "worlds, constantly at risk of decay or interruption" (5) are most effectively imaged through space and place. Not surprisingly, Lynch himself is highly knowledgeable of architecture, expressing an affinity for "Bauhaus . . . Pierre Chareau . . . Ludwig Mies van der Rohe . . . the Wright family, Rudolph Michael Schindler and Richard Neutra" (3), yet rejects "little mini-malls and post-modern stuff – they're killing your soul" (3)

Divided into a "Prologue", "Introduction" and five chapters, the text's accessible language, yet rigorous intellectual engagement, serves as an ideal entry point into a study of a filmmaker whose works often confound and confuse viewers. The amusing "Prologue" locates the author himself in Lodz, meditating on the site of Frank Gehry's plans for a massive cinema, in which the model features still image projections from Lynch's *Inland Empire*, a film partially set in Lodz. Then, Martin finds himself in Paris attending an exhibition of Lynch's paintings, sculptures and photographs, questioning if the space utilized in the works are an extension of Lynch's architectural visions. Finally, Martin is adrift in Los Angeles, stalking the locations of various Lynch films, only to catch a glimpse of the tousled-hair auteur himself outside of the Beverly Johnson House, Lynch's own home and a location utilized in his films. By establishing such a congenial, self-effacing tone in his interrogation of Lynch's often absurd, yet nightmarish, world, Martin invites the reader into the "space" in which Lynch constructs his cinematic architecture. Within the "Introduction", Martin's "Cinematic Architecture: The Locus of a Secret" locates the intersections between architecture and cinema, revealing theoretical links between the forms. Beyond Lynch, Martin argues that "film's exceptional ability to depict three-dimensional space" (7) makes the medium particularly adept at exploring architecture, as noted in the revolutionary writings of Vertov and Nouvel.

Chapter 1, entitled “Town and City,” examines Lynch’s responses to industrial urbanism in *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*, as well as Lynch’s seemingly quaint towns in *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*. The chapter also slithers through sinister and shadowy, yet sun-bleached, queasiness of *Mulholland Drive*’s Los Angeles. The second chapter, termed “Home” interrogates the interior architecture of Lynch’s cinematic domiciles, while the third chapter chronicles the highway and byway spaces and structures of the Lynch road films *Wild at Heart* and *The Straight Story*. The final two chapters reveal Martin at his most intellectually adept. Chapter 4, entitled “Stage”, examines the role of performance and viewing spaces in Lynch’s films, while the final chapter serves as a unique analysis of Lynch’s underseen and underappreciated digital video *Inland Empire*. Indeed, Martin’s chapter on *Inland Empire* exists as one of the most impressive film analyses published on the film.

In “Town and City”, Martin examines Lynch’s urban landscapes and small town settings, arguing that Lynch is “acutely conscious, if often critical, of American urbanism” (15) and through his cinema, often rooted in the designs and culture of the 1950s, manipulates the “collective anxieties” associated with the seeming differences between the small town and the major metropolis. Martin’s reading of the “abominable” city as depicted in *Eraserhead* and the *Elephant Man* serves to contrast with the seemingly quaint Lumberton and *Twin Peaks*. A final entry in the chapter dissects Lynch’s current city of residence: Los Angeles. Lynch’s Los Angeles, as depicted in *Mulholland Drive*, consists of serpentine roads, stark mansions and shadowy apartment buildings, with the potential while the nauseating potential for evil lurks under the sun-drenched surface of Hollywood-fueled dreams of celebrity.

“Home” examines the architectural spaces such as stairways and rooms, with particular attention devoted to the haunting dynamics of surveillance and intrusion as depicted in *Lost*

Highway. The section includes examinations and references to the Eameses and Corbusier, drawing unique connections between the interiors and homes of *Lost Highway* and the effects of designers and architects have upon perceptions of space and place.

With “Road”, Martin considers geography, examining the open plains of *The Straight Story* and the vast highways and deserts of *Wild at Heart*. “Stage” opens up the performative spaces revealed within Lynch’s films, such as the love displays of Joseph Merrick in the lecture theatre in *The Elephant Man*, the mysterious “Red Room” of *Twin Peaks*, the “Slow Club” of *Blue Velvet* and the antiquated Hollywood theatres in *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*.

The final chapter “Room” exists as one of the most incisive treatises yet published on Lynch’s *Inland Empire*, valorizing and recontextualizing Lynch’s film as key to understanding the dynamics of architecture and cinema. Arguing that the film “is David Lynch’s most radical work . . . one of the most challenging American films to have appeared in a generation” (163), Martin notes that it is “the Lynch film with the most to teach us about cinematic architecture” (164). The film, according to Martin, exhibits “a form of total rupture – a shattering of all ‘dramatic unity’ ” (165) by way of alternating “between various unexplained spaces, denying the spectator any geographical confidence” (164). The film further pursues simultaneity and dualism through the juxtapositions of the cinematic and spatial legacies of Lodz and Los Angeles. For Martin, the film serves as the ultimate cinematic vision of Lynch’s architectural imagery, and beyond, works as an *uber-text* within the director’s *oeuvre*. As Martin notes, “it as if all Lynch’s films are somehow housed within *Inland Empire*.” (181). Martin concludes the work, noting that “the worlds Lynch has built and filmed force us to confront the strange forces involved in urban change, the social relations architecture constitutes, the uneasy feelings of being at home, the dynamics of spectatorship, and the presence of the past in the spaces of the present” (185).

The volume also includes 62 color plates, including film stills, location photographs and reproductions of referenced art. The impressive and sizeable bibliography will serve students of film and late twentieth-century architecture for decades to come. Though there are more areas of Lynch's architectural visions to pursue that are not featured in the volume, such as a consideration of Lynch's compromised *Dune*, as well as investigations of Lynch's short works and filmed stage performances such as *Industrial Symphony No. 1*, Martin's text effectively joins the canonical works of Lynch scholarship, while simultaneously forcing all film scholars to re-evaluate the impact, effect and importance of space, place and architecture in film.