

## I. *Bones of Bricks and Mortar*

“One generation abandons the enterprises of  
another liked stranded vessels.”

—Henry Thoreau

On my second Thursday evening in Łódź, 2012, I visited the office of Krytyka Polityczna to view a Slawomir Grünberg documentary film titled *Perecowicze*, or “Alumni of Peretz School.” Peretz School was set up in 1946 for mostly, although not entirely, Jewish children living in the Helenów area, who had been relocated with their parents to Łódź from other parts of Poland and Europe. Łódź emerged from the war banged up but relatively whole, and housing was available there. All kinds of people and all kinds of institutions—including government offices and the University of Warsaw—were moved to this city, until cities like Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, and Gdańsk could get back on their feet.

The Old Ones, of course, saw their presence in Łódź as temporary, found no reason to call the city home, and were more than happy to clear the hell out at the earliest opportunity. In a way, they replicate city history: “None of us intends to stay here forever,” Moritz Welt tells his partner Max Baum in chapter one of *The Promised Land*, Reymont’s novel set in turn-of-the-century Łódź. Youngsters, however, have no real sense of history before their time, or of the accidents which have brought them together; they tend to regard their situation as permanent. The Peretz kids knew the Old Ones were bitter and distracted, and they knew that Helenów was a sinkhole, but Łódź was their entire life experience. Peretz School functioned for them as a community, even more than school does for most of us when we are young. They had not the slightest inkling that their community was even more ad hoc than the school worlds most of us knew when we were young.

For let’s face it—the world of our youth is always fleeting, and schools the world over, especially in rural areas, have been renovated into apartments like a couple of elementary schools in Southwest Minnesota, remodeled into a museum like Hanley Falls High School, converted into a Resort & Business Center like the School for the Blind in Gary, South Dakota, or closed and left empty like Arco School. Some have been demolished . . . like Central School in Springfield, Pennsylvania, a classy old stone building where my mother taught second grade for twenty years. Students everywhere grow up, graduate, leave the home place for college or jobs, and discover twenty years later, when they start getting sentimental about the old school, that it’s gone.

But students at Peretz School expected otherwise.

Their difficulties began in 1956, when Eastern European borders opened a crack, and 30,000 of Łódź’s 50,000 Jews left the country for Israel, Canada, the U. S., and elsewhere. Some Russian replacements arrived, but Israel’s 1967 invasion of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, which was supported by the West Bloc and opposed by all East Bloc countries including Poland, precipitated a predictably hostile (and ugly) reaction among Polish politicians and populace which convinced what remained of the Łódź Jewish community to take advantage of Prime Minister Gomułka’s offer of easy exit visas, and get out of Poland ASAP.

The school closed. Furnishings were “reassigned” to other schools. Buildings were renovated or demolished. “Nothing remains,” says an alumna; “it’s a shame.”

Scattered as they are, graduates of Peretz, some of whom did rather well in their new places, remain connected to each other and to some of their old teachers. They hold periodic reunions in Poland and elsewhere. The film *Perecowicze* tracks both the history and the reunions, becoming both a lament for community lost and a celebration of community sustained.

Figuring that post-film discussion would be entirely in Polish (the film itself had English subtitles), I left Piotrkowska 101 while the credits ran and walked slowly back to my room in the Rektorat of Lodz International Studies Academy, meditating on what I'd just seen. What struck me most was not the surface celebration of youth and school, or the subtext of special victimhood seeking compensation, or even the more complex questions of what determines community and how temporary community often proves to be, but the way Director Grünberg had juxtaposed scenes of Łódź, almost as dilapidated now as then, with the upscale homes and restaurants of Peretz graduates in New York and Israel. Consciously or unconsciously, he showed Łódź as relatively human and humane, comfortable despite or perhaps because of the decay and the difficult times, then and now. The modest apartments of retired teachers in Łódź shamed the glitzy sites of alumni gatherings. And Grünberg filled the film with scenes of wrecked Łódź outside of the school itself, shots that look like the photos I took twenty years ago for *Poland in Transition*, and find myself taking again for this book.

What is it, I wondered, that so attracts us to this shabby, ramshackle city?

The answer to that question, I decided, is the haunting and vaguely human story told by empty and decaying capacity: spaces which were built for use, which were once used, which are now no longer used, falling apart, deteriorated beyond reclamation. It does not matter whether these spaces are abandoned factories in Łódź or Detroit, collapsing barns and farmhouses in Southwest Minnesota, small town train stations or schools, even country churches or gas stations. I am haunted by capacity sanctified by human life and labor, now abandoned. Ironically, I don't seem to draw much distinction between "good" capacity—buildings with style and class, operations that made efficient use of resources and were in harmony with the social and natural environments—and capacity that was an architectural or environmental abomination when built and throughout its functional life: a Wal-Mart warehouse, a coal-powered generating plant, a cement bloc of Soviet-era flats in the fifties "modern" style. Or even, as in the case of Łódź, remnants of an old system which, to hear Reymont tell it, was aggressively and enthusiastically corrupt, exploitative, inhuman, and polluted almost beyond habitation—the quintessence of the industrial capitalism. "Shoddy gives the biggest profits," says one of his characters, so owners often built shoddy. But why save shoddy? Something good, you want to preserve forever; something bad, you should want to erase as quickly as possible. I should celebrate its demise.

Nevertheless, anything old haunts me, in both Łódź and my southwestern Minnesota homeland. I suppose that if I live long enough to see Mall of America, the Southwest State Student Center, and Galeria Łódźka abandoned and on the verge of collapse, I will get all teary-eyed about those buildings and the history they contain. I joined thousands of Americans in lamenting the demolition of Dixie Square Mall in Harvey, Illinois, site of the famous "this place has everything" scene in *The Blues Brothers*, despite the fact it was just a tacky mall.

Perhaps that is because I see my aging self, the Southwest State Rural Studies Program to which I devoted much professional energy, even the SMSU library itself, as abandoned capacity. Perhaps that is because I have an exaggerated reverence for a lost history, vision, or youth. Perhaps, feeling old and out of time myself, I subconsciously *want* everything and everybody else to be old and abandoned too. Maybe my Italian heritage is asserting itself: in *The Leopard*, Di Lampedusa writes, "In Sicily it doesn't matter whether things are done well or done badly; the thing which we Sicilians never forgive is simply that of 'doing' at all." Maybe I subconsciously want all things to be as "not doing" as I am these days. As I approach my seventies, looking at the city of Łódź or at the towns of southwestern Minnesota is like looking in the mirror.

And it's not just me and Grünberg and the *Perecowicze*. The photos of old Łódź that *Gazeta Wyborcza* posted along with my June 30, 2012, interview generated quite a reaction among sentimental Poles: "Thanks for giving me back my country." *Landscape of Ghosts*, Bill Holm's meditations on abandoned southwestern Minnesota capacity with photos by Bob Firth, won a book award. Then there was that Minnesota PBS documentary on abandoned farm houses, *The Death of a Dream*. The Minnesota Historical

Society has published a whole series of books on old barns, schools, cabins, and churches. These books sell because readers understand that sooner or later in this postmodern world they too will confront the bones of bricks and mortar as they rush frantically from place to place to place trying to keep pace with international corporations which sell this country to buy that country, consolidate 320-acre family farms into 2,000-acre agribusiness operations with livestock “facilities” of 10,000 “animal units” capacity, move production from Poland and the U. S. to Japan, to Korea, to China to who knows where next, leaving behind a bulldozed landscape and the ruins of operations which flourished for a few decades, coasted on momentum for a few more, and then dropped over the edge.

Well, okay. Everything has a built-in obsolescence. Still, we’d like to think we’re good for more than the fifteen minutes of fame Warhol promised each of us, more even than the twenty years granted to Peretz School. We’d better be: as I write, the retirement age in both the U. S. and Poland is being raised because life expectancy has increased. Three-score years and ten we get, and we’ll probably need to work until we hit that milestone, if not longer.

In this postmodern world, most places do not last seventy years—they are discarded faster than people. In another documentary film on Łódź titled *Our Street*, a woman looks out her apartment window, across Ogrodowa Street, at the old Poznański factory, recently reborn as the Manufaktura shopping mall. “I worked there, when it was Poltex Factory,” she recalls. “I came home exhausted every day, but a worker is a worker. Now there is no work. My station was in that building over there. I wish I could have just one more day at my station. Just one more day. That is my life’s wish. . . .”

What happens when the worker outlives the work? She retrains herself for a new job (which she does not always find), or she accepts herself as a ruin. Her son, himself un-employed for twelve years now, tells viewers, “I’m a ruin myself, just like that factory” . . . or like the remnants of family farms now absorbed into corporate operations: twisted corn cribs, slumping barns, free-standing silos, and hollow farm houses tucked deep in groves of dying elm trees.

At least these former factory workers are in the neighborhood, for better or worse, to witness the changes and see what remains of their old places. In southwestern Minnesota, most of the old simply disappears. The train tracks are torn up and the land planted in corn (in town the old right-of-way becomes a bicycle path). The house, paint peeling, tucked behind a shelter grove, is left to rot. If it has deteriorated beyond use, it is burned, and sometimes the grove of trees as well, then planted over. In town the old home becomes a parking lot or park.

These days, most of us have no sooner joined one community than we’re moving to another, as the economic and social basis which underlies our lives dissolves almost as soon as it gels. Peretz School may be an extreme case, but when you think of it, 1946-1968 is a run of twenty years—not as long as some of the factories in Łódź, but longer than most people I know live in one home. Looking back at my life, I find not one building which I called home for more than fifteen years. Both my son and daughter go from place to place, house to house, every five or ten years. Friends in the U. S. State Department are relocated every two or three years; since I met them in Mongolia in 2003, Scott Weinhold, his wife Jamie, and his kids have moved to Australia, then Japan, and now to China. Jamie writes that they’re spending the summer of 2012 in the United States, as “the boys are not too familiar with their home turf.” Since I first knew them as students two decades ago, Agnieszka and Maciek Szymańscy have bounced all over the world. They’re not moving because they lost a mortgage, either: Maciek, a corporate executive, lives the po-mo American dream, having worked for at least three very different firms—Renault, Sephora, and now a conglomerate which controls, among other enterprises, Empik—relocating in the process from Łódź to Warsaw to Versailles to Singapore and back to Warsaw. His children speak Polish, English, French, and Chinese. They are truly international. But where is their home? Where is their school? How long before Maciek is obsolete at Empik? And where then?

I begin to see an abandoned factory in Łódź—like a buckled barn, empty school or church, ghostly farm house, old fence that now keeps nothing in or out, abandoned railroad track disappearing under a city street—less as a memorial to the vanity of human wishes than a *memento mori*. It shows me a future that there is no escaping. There is no repealing Darwin, although in doing our best to make the unfit survive, we create a lot of useless capacity.

Henry David Thoreau, my guru throughout adolescence and beyond, preaches one sermon after another against human greed. I learned from him as a teenager that we only get ourselves in trouble desiring “necessities” that are not really necessary. “Simplify, simplify,” he told me. Instead of three meals a day, eat one; instead of a hundred dishes, five. “Reduce other things in proportion.” Avoid the clutter of unnecessary furniture, luxury, expense; commit to a stern economy and a Spartan life. I heard his warnings that the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation, that “trade curses everything it handles,” that we do not ride on the railroad, it rides on us, and I resolved—*then*—not to pile up excess capacities I could not afford and did not need. My greatest skill, like Thoreau’s, would be to want but little—to live small. After all, superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only.

Rereading *Walden* in the fall of 2011 for the thirtieth time, and having changed my own lifestyle more than a little as I aged, I was struck by the provisional nature of Thoreau’s own existence (he built himself a pretty spiffy cabin at Walden Pond and then lived there all of two years, two months, and two days) and his respect and even affection for certain . . . oh, not luxuries, but things. Especially old barns and houses. We do not think of H. D. T., who preached perpetual rebirth and distrusted anybody over thirty, as an apologist for any Old (other than the written word), but he frequently expresses a sentimental fondness for things weathered and worn, and a respect for the history they contain. “Do not trouble yourself much to get new things,” he writes; “Turn to the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change.” Relics of the past become anchors for our lives. Later Thoreau asks rhetorically, “What are the classics but the noblest recorded thoughts of man?” In the second chapter of that classic analysis of pre-industrial America, he describes a farm which at one point he actually considered buying. It is the kind of place that I would find attractive:

The real attractions of the Hollowell farm to me were its complete retirement, being about two miles from the village, half a mile from the nearest neighbor, and separated from the highway by a broad field; its bounding on the river, which the owner said protected it by its fogs from frosts in the spring, though that was nothing to me; the gray color and ruinous state of the house and barn, and the dilapidated fences, which put such an interval between me and the last occupant; the hollow and lichen-covered apple trees, gnawed by rabbits, showing what kind of neighbors I should have; but above all, the recollection I had of it from my earliest voyages up the river.

Elsewhere in *Walden*, Thoreau makes a remark which may explain his affection for relics of the past, a remark which is precisely the way I excuse my own refusal to throw anything away: as long as an artifact remains, its place/time is not lost. “All these times and places and occasions are now and here,” Thoreau writes, even if the city hall has become a bar, or the bank a coffee shop. Even in an abandoned warehouse, ghosts of the past whisper from the woodwork. Is that what I’m sensing both in Poland and in Minnesota?

This notion looks good on paper, but as we discover in life and in reading *Walden*, the past has often disappeared. It is *not* now and here, it’s just plain lost. In his chapter “The Ponds,” after remembering the lofty pines and oak woods which marked Walden when he first paddled a boat there, Thoreau laments, “Now the trunks of trees on the bottom, and the old log canoe, and the dark surrounding woods, are gone, and the villagers, who scarcely know where it lies, instead of going to the pond to bathe or drink, are thinking to bring its water, which should be as sacred as the Ganges at least, to the village in

a pipe, to wash their dishes with!" He spends an entire chapter remembering "Former Inhabitants" and their dwelling places, numerous enough to constitute a small town—with a tavern even! "Now," he notes ruefully, "only a dent in the earth marks the site of these dwellings, with buried cellar stones, and strawberries, raspberries, thimbleberries, hazel-bushes, and sumaches growing in the sunny sward there. . . ."

In short, for all his talk of daily renewal and periodic busks and bonfires, even the younger Henry David Thoreau found remnants of lost history as haunting as I do . . . as haunting as do modern-day visitors to the shores of Walden, where Thoreau's original cabin has been reconstructed after disappearing long ago.

One has to wonder what a sixty-, or even a fifty-year-old Thoreau would have made of the post-Civil War America fully committed to an expansionist industrial capitalism which washed Hollowell's farm and Brister's Hill from the Concord map. Would Thoreau have become even more elegiac? Would he, famous for his close reading of a confined geography, have looked up from the particulars of his place in rural Concord to the big picture? How would he have described America—before and after the Civil War? Would the close examiner of a maple leaf have found in Walden the shape of human history?

I could use his help here as I try to get my head around two things, really: the big-picture process of constructing and abandoning building capacity, and the specific details of and moments in that process. The details are minute, especially when tracked over the long arc of time—incomprehensibly infinite throughout a world filled with cozy communities and individual human brains, each as capacious as my own. If I look too close, outlines dissolve into abstract textures, like threads in a tapestry, cobblestones in a street, leaves on a tree, pixels on a memory card. If I stand too far back, the places fuse into equally abstract continents, the continents into planets, planets into specks of dust blowing through space. Perhaps I will never see the larger picture, because I am merely human, and lack the necessary sixth sense, or the eye of God.

Just imagining the minutiae exceeds my mental capacity. Horton the elephant finds a whole Whoville on a speck of dust. How many cities full of how many buildings might he find down there on that clover of his? And every clover in Horton's field might be as alive as the one he seeks. This street is cobblestones set in sand; every stone, an aggregate of several minerals, is a continent, as are the sands between the stones.

In addition to the great universe of large building spaces (schools, factories, shops, homes, churches), there are whole galaxies of other universes. Every book on my shelf, every book in the library, every book in the used bookstore is a world. Every box and pickle jar in the city landfill is as much "abandoned capacity" as an abandoned barn. Every recycling bin filled with aluminum cans and plastic bags is a whole city of abandoned capacity. A graveyard of dead automobiles tells the same story as the abandoned factory on Milionowa Street, as an empty Mongolian soum center full of abandoned Soviet-era flats and dead factories. There is no substantial difference between a vacant farmhouse and a rusting auto. The leaves I burn in the fall were energy factories for the elm tree. All that is begotten, born, and dies bears exploration, explanation.

I shed no tears over empty beer cans or plastic Wal-Mart bags. Library books, sure, and even newspapers, but mostly I'm talking about spaces which speak of human history wasted because of natural or even planned obsolescence, or—perhaps—due to wildly optimistic growth projections, or even—these days—to governments spending money and human effort on white elephant projects designed simply to "grow" the local economy, or grab the money for us here before it goes somewhere over there. Government-directed "development" is what created Łódź in the middle 1800s, when a bunch of big shots decided "to build some factories right here in this country village," and in a way it's what happened on the prairie when politicians said, "Let's clean them Indians out, pass this here Homestead Act, and fill the land full of settlers . . . does 160 acres per claim sound about right?"

What is the big-picture paradigm here of construction, use, and abandonment of capacity? What fuels this engine?

In the industrial and post-modern world, it seems to me that the paradigm is facilitated if not caused by an abstraction called money. Money disconnects us from place and makes abandonment of place easier. Few of us raise potatoes and cows, weave sweaters and blankets, carve wooden spoons and shovels, or forge our own wagon wheels. And unless we are Henry Thoreau, Fred Manfred, or Jerzy Tomaszczyk we do not build our own homes. We do something that generates money and then buy potatoes, sweaters, and homes produced by someone else. In other words, consumption is no longer directly tied to production. One result of that disconnect, we all realize, is that people who consume may not produce, or people who consume much may produce very little, or people who sow chaff may consume wheat. And for everyone who consumes more than he produces, someone else must produce more than he consumes. George Soros, Niall Ferguson reports in his book *The Ascent of Money*, made \$2.9 billion in one year while nearly a billion people around the world struggled to get by on just \$1 a day. Money is the root of all evil less because it inspires greed than because by disconnecting consumption from production, it not only disconnects people from place, but allows this kind of theft, a form of imperialism. Banking (8% of the GDP according to Ferguson) facilitates theft. My L.I.S.A. salary was paid in Polish currency into a Citibank account in Poland. I could withdraw Polish currency free of charge, but if I withdrew in dollars, the rate of exchange offered by the bank was 2.5% below the current exchange—that was the bank's fee for currency conversion. I could also withdraw from my Polish account in the States, in dollars, but then the Polish currency was converted to Euros (2.5% charge), which were then converted to dollars (another 2.5% charge). My salary was a grant from the European Union, probably in Euros, which presumably lost another 2.5% when converted to Polish currency—and thus the New York banking "industry" (I love the way everything is an "industry" these days!) made off with 7.5% of the dough, just for clicking a few keys on a computer keyboard. The bankers consumed, having produced very, very little.

"There's lots of money made here in Łódź," a character in Reymont's novel *The Promised Land* observes. "But how made—by what means?" another inquires, suggesting theft and deception.

"That's all one," is the answer; "The way a ruble is made does not detract one kopek from its worth." Here in a nutshell is the ethics of money, from Reymont's Łódź to Romney's Bain Capital, which was designed from the start to create money, not jobs, and which made money by closing plants, firing people, and filing bankruptcies.

So how do we make money? Not always by production of necessary commodities, that's for sure. Over supper in Riga back in 1997, a visiting lecturer in economics enumerated the possibilities. They are actually very few, he explained; perhaps a dozen and a half. Boiled down, they're pretty simple. You can plant raspberry bushes in your back yard, raise raspberries, and sell them for one dollar a pint. You can skip the planting; just walk out into the fields, collect a pint of free berries, and sell it for a dollar in town. You can let somebody else do the gathering, buy the berries in the country where they are plentiful for fifty cents, haul them to the city where they are scarce, and sell them for a dollar. Or buy apples—buy in the fall when they are plentiful for a dollar a bushel, store them until spring when they are scarce, and sell them for two dollars a bushel.

Or bake the apples into pies, and sell the pies for a dollar each. Or buy a whole pie for one dollar, cut it in eight pieces, and sell each piece for twenty-five cents to people who want just a little dessert. You can buy a pie for one dollar, advertise it as the healthiest, most delicious, classiest pie ever made and the new cure for liver cancer, and sell it for twice what you paid for it. You could make pie plates and sell them to bakers for a dollar each. You could invent a new pie plate or a better recipe for apple pie. You could build the factory in which pies are made, or make the bricks to make the factory or shopping mall. You could get a job working in the brick factory or bakery or restaurant. You could *finance* the factory or restaurant, loan the owner ten dollars this month and collect one dollar "interest" each month until he

repays the loan. You could paint a picture of the pie, write a cookbook, lecture about culinary theory . . . or finance, or raising raspberries. You could insure the security of those who perform all these useful functions. You could show off your beautiful face in a pie ad—or forget the advertisement, just display your handsome face, your beautiful body, your basketball skills, your boobs, and collect a dollar. Or, I suppose, you can just go out and steal the pie. Or the berries. Or the dollar. And that’s about it.

Did he mention that you could make money by founding a company that speculates in the stock of other companies which create money in one of the ways listed above? How about a Ponzi Scheme, Bernie? As we have already noted, many methods of generating the money which enables consumption produce nothing of any real substance.

The question before the house, however, is how money—more properly, the way we make money—effects the creation and abandonment of physical capacity.

It seems to me that these days buildings are erected first to serve production and later to meet social needs. Even pioneer farmers built the barn first, the house second. So the factories and warehouses required by industrial production and wholesale marketing get built first. But the community of workers they attract require houses, shops, schools, churches—social capacity. Or perhaps I should say that the community of workers offers opportunities to those who will make money by satisfying their real or imagined social needs. Typically some business guru envisions a “facility” at some distance from existing support communities not just shops; (it could be housing, schools, fire departments, even airports and gas stations) where land is cheap and taxes are low. Sometimes governments even offer tax and other incentives for this “development”—to Bell Telephone in Łódź, to Northwest Airlines on the Minnesota Iron Range. Inevitably workers at this facility seek housing closer to their place of employment; the growing community requires schools, churches, shopping malls, and bars . . . the whole works. The support capacity moves toward the production center, abandoning old homes, schools, churches, bars. At some point, traffic into and out of those new social centers becomes insane, property prices skyrocket along with the taxes necessary to support the schools, police, water treatment plants. Then the tax incentives expire, and the operation departs—Bell Telephone from Łódź, or the Northwest Airlines maintenance facilities from Minnesota. The bright boys in business are always looking beyond the horizon—ahead or even behind—for their next big production center, with support capacity to follow. So we run always behind, building new capacity to keep up with the shifting demography even as we are abandoning old capacity because it’s no longer needed.

In a recent wrinkle in this paradigm, some visionaries tell us we need to build support capacity—recreation centers, roads, airports, shopping malls—to *attract* production facilities and the population they will presumably bring. “If you build it, they will come,” these folks argue, even though “they” do not come to the old, exiting capacity. “Well no, of course not,” the bright boys tell us; “it’s gotta be new.”

So we exhaust ourselves building buildings where they are needed and where they are not needed. “That’s a lot of bricks and mortar,” the new Minnesota State Colleges and Universities chancellor purportedly remarked after his first visit to Southwest Minnesota State University, out there on the edge of the prairie, where the population has been declining for decades, where more and more classes are offered online, where the on-campus enrollments had dropped each semester for half a decade or more . . . where the previous chancellor and president had, by their own admission, invested over \$100,000,000 in new dorms, new football fields, new “event centers” and new recreation-athletic facilities. I hear the ghost of Henry Thoreau moaning in his grave.

Whether it is building to serve a growing community or building to attract a new community, an industrial *market* economy, especially a *global* market economy, destabilizes both the local capacity and the local community, because it severs consumption from production. It is the market which converts whatever people in a given locality produce (tractors, trucks, flashlights, dishes, banking services) into what those people consume (food, clothes, gasoline, health care). When the market relocates production, which it inevitably will, local production will cease, the money will disappear, the community will

disassemble, and capacity will empty. Granted in a more mobile society, old industrial capacity may be renovated to serve some other need, and the housing and educational capacity you created as an adjunct to the departed production may be utilized by commuters engaged in production elsewhere, but sooner or later the workers will move closer to their jobs. That's why you built housing and support capacity near the factories in the first place. Granted also that the Internet acts as an advanced form of mobility for some workers, and thus saves some abandoned service capacity, but Internet jobs are the most abstract of all forms of production, the most quickly and easily outsourced. I don't think Internet jobs will save the local community; I think they will destroy the whole nation.

If your money did not come from production (and much money these days does not), you might be able to sustain your artificial Manhattan community until money fails, the Market tanks, and you find yourself jumping out of a window. If your means of making money was raising or gathering berries, or baking apple pies, you might be in better shape than if the production was banking services, because you have the basis for self-producing at least some food necessities, but even in the small towns and farms, it's going to take a long time to even begin to reconnect consumption and production.

Not long after seeing *Perecowicze*, I found myself watching another documentary film, *After the Factory* (Philip Lauri, 2012). The film alternates between Detroit and Łódź, examining the problem of what to do with abandoned industrial capacity. "It's the same urban decay," says a girl who was born in Poland and lives in Detroit. Among the more elegiac scenes is a tour of the "unoccupied" factory around the corner from the Lodz International Studies Academy, a factory on Ulice Milionowa, which once reportedly employed 14,000 people (more people than you'll find in Marshall, Minnesota, on a weekend when the businesses are closed and the college is not in session) and contributed significantly to the pollution problem in Łódź. I didn't know the exact details of the factory's collapse, but the emptiness was familiar, as was Piotr Palmer's explanation: "It was just planned, and the central government said we want to have factories in Łódź. Next thing you know, reality check—industrial production has been moved to China where it's cheaper."

What do you do with the old capacity? In Southwest Minnesota, you turn the old hotel into a restaurant, the old train station into a museum, the barn into an antique market. In Łódź, to tick off just a few enterprises which have sprung up in old factories, you turn abandoned capacity into a shopping mall, a museum, a restaurant, a hotel, a newspaper office, a high school, a college, an office complex, or a library. In both Minnesota and Łódź people often bulldoze and build anew, sometimes with recycled bricks and mortar. (In June, 2012, I passed what had apparently been a storage field for fragments of old walls just in time to see a "Brukar Brick Crusher—advance crushing technology" busy converting bricks and mortar into reusable gravel). Plant a garden, make a park suggested citizens of Detroit in *After the Factory*.

In that film I heard several large-scale schemes for rescuing the city of Łódź, schemes familiar to me from previous stays here, but also because I've heard them in Southwest Minnesota. We can make things: fashion, furniture, music, film, art (in Southwest Minnesota, ethanol and ice cream). We can turn Łódź (Marshall) into an educational center, bringing students in from the surrounding countryside. We can develop "small, place-making business centers that improve the quality of life." We can let Łódź be "a creative center for Warsaw." We can develop online technologies that will serve people all over the country, all over the European Union. We can grow the tourism industry with beer joints and party palaces.

And another one which even in my absence was being whispered around Southwest Minnesota: we can paint the walls of those old buildings with murals, thereby assisting tourism. "The murals in Łódź have a positive effect on people who travel here. They are not intended to beautify or improve the looks of the area, but they subtly underscore the character of the area, creating something new out of what already existed." I'm a little ambivalent now, but give the new paintings a few years, and they will have the weathered history of old painted advertisements, and I may value them.

Of the proposals in the film, the one that rang truest was the advice of Grace Lee Boggs, an American writer and activist from Detroit, author of *The Next American Revolution*, and clearly a spokeswoman for environmentalism: “The end of the industrial age is not the end of the world, but it’s an opportunity to recognize how much the industrial age has dehumanized us—how it has turned earth into land, work into labor, how it has made us safe to create destructive weapons . . . but to get well paid for it.” What is needed is a whole new way of thinking, as removed from corporate capitalism as corporate capitalism was removed from the pastoral idyll it obliterated. *After the Factory* gave Boggs the last word: “We have to go back to another way, and going back to another way is actually going forward.” There is consolation in that advice.

I hear that voice in a low whisper in both Łódź and Southwest Minnesota. Little things in Southwest Minnesota like the organization to Clean Up the River Environment (CURE), like state Scientific and Natural Preservation Areas, like organic gardens and the Pless pick-your-own-strawberries-and-raspberries operation near Redwood Falls. Like weekend farmers’ markets, and the local farmer who delivers home-grown fruits and vegetables to our friends Trent and Jill for a monthly payment of \$20. I hear that voice in little things in Łódź like Kino Charlie (Chaplin), the small shops in areas distant from the big malls, those billboards advertising the new Volkswagen as “Oryginalny.” I hear the call of the familiar past in that new clothing design shop called “Pan tu nie Stał,” which waxes sentimental about the sixties and seventies: “We love vintage designs,” says owner Justyna Burzyńska, “retro designs during our bad political times in Poland.” Two years ago, I am told, the Institute of National Remembrance had a sell-out hit with a Soviet-era board game “The Queue”: between two and five players compete to be the first to buy ten items on their shopping lists—the gimmick being that players must queue without knowing which stores have or will receive products in question. In the blizzard of global capitalism, even the Soviet times have their charm.

Other remembrances take Poles back even further: things like the cozy Blue Almonds Victorian-style tea rooms, and the “Karczma” restaurants which seem to be everywhere these days, with their “Menu Polskie,” nineteenth century country style tables and chairs, wooden farm and house-hold implements on the walls and rafters, and a couple of old paintings hanging beside the TV set tuned to Euro-Sports. (My favorite was Karczma u Chochoła across the street on Piotrkowska from my flat, where I dined so often the waitress knew before I ordered what I wanted.) The present preference, I am told, is for Polish country dining: pork, pirogy chicken, fish, potatoes, cabbage and pickles, and your choice of żurek, borscht, or flaki soup. Recovering the old is the idea behind Restauracja AnaLogiA there on the old Bałauty square, and in the frescos on the building across the street. It’s implicit in the turn-of-the-century design of the shuttle bus that runs Manufaktura-Piotrkowska-Galeria-White Factory museum. In that goofy blue Soviet-era Milicja truck that drives around with a loud speaker promoting some bar. In cobblestones laid in front of elegant restaurants and hotels like the Holiday Inn, which opened in ~~May~~, let’s make that June on Piotrkowska, a block south of my apartment. We are engaged in a search for Old Poland, the old community and culture.

Maybe this is just another swing of the pendulum, and Poles will end up discarding the old almost as soon as they recover it, but perhaps they are learning a lesson. Perhaps.

Woody Allen’s film *Midnight in Paris* played in Łódź in March, 2012. Agnieszka Salska and I saw it together—the only two people in the audience, if you want the truth. *Midnight in Paris* is about a fledgling twenty-first century writer, Gil Pender, visiting Paris with his fiancé and her wealthy parents. The couple is a bad match from the git-go, and while his girl hobnobs with the snobs, Gil walks the streets of this historic city haunted for him by the ghosts of writers past. Each night upon the stroke of midnight, an old taxi pulls up to take him back to the 1920s, when Paris was the center of the “modern” world, full of soon-to-become famous writers, jazz musicians, painters . . . and their mistresses. He drinks with, learns from, seeks the advice of young Ernest Hemingway, Scott (and Zelda) Fitzgerald, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Gertrude Stein, and Cole Porter. He impresses Picasso’s mistress Adriana enough

that she mentions him in her autobiography, a copy of which he discovers during daylight hours in one of those old book stalls along the Seine. Gil and Adriana might have made it, too, had not a horse-drawn carriage appeared out of nowhere to transport them even further back in time, to Paris of the 1890s. Adriana finds the world of Degas and Gauguin and Talouse-Lautruac so much classier than Paris of the 1920s, which she correctly considers a pile of crap, and she decides to stay in the 1890s. Gil, while he cannot linger in the 1920s, finally breaks with his fiancé, settling for Paris 2010 and a young French lass he met in the Flea Market when looking for old Cole Porter records. She, like him, admires the old, but she bridges past and present.

The film is full of lines and ideas borrowed from Hemingway, Eliot and Faulkner, including Eliot's notion that his end takes him round to his beginning, and "The past is not dead. In fact, it's not even past." I too haunt old flea markets, read the old books, listen not to Cole Porter but to Bob Dylan. The voice in my ear is not that of Eliot or Faulkner, but of Chaucer's Parson: "Stand in the highway and look out, and inquire after the old road, which is the good road. . . ." But as Woody Allen suggests, the present might offer opportunities to which an excessive love of the past could blind us. Or maybe we can borrow from tradition to make a new start in the present. The old offers a tradition within which the new individual talent can grow—to steal another Eliot idea—even if it can't go back all the way. It was Fitzgerald himself who told us in *The Great Gatsby* that you can't repeat the past, that the dream is probably dead even as you dream it the first time. It all moves, and it moves pretty quickly.

Just one week after I landed in Poland, Maciek and Agnieszka Szymański invited me to dinner at the Złota Kaczka (Golden Duck) Restaurant. "You wrote about it in your book," Agnieszka reminded me, "and we ate there a couple of times ourselves. It is not on Piotrkowska any more, it is far out on the edge of Łódź. We figure you will not have the chance to eat there yourself."

She was right—on more than one recent visit to Łódź I had gone searching for the Złota Kaczka at Piotrkowska 79 and found it missing. I know it's alive somewhere: last summer I read the write-up in *Łódź in Your Pocket*: "Złota Kaczka stands out as the best Chinese food in town, so it's a bit of a shame you're going to have to head out of town to get there." Robin Williams and John Malkovich dined here! It is more than a bit of a shame, because this restaurant is one place I could eat twice a week every week. When it first opened in 1990, Michelle and I ate there three times a week . . . long before Williams and Malkovich discovered it. We were sometimes the only people in the restaurant, except for kids running in to snag empty aluminum beer cans. Very few Poles ate out in those days (one reason there were so few restaurants), and they generally resisted Chinese food, because it was all cut up in tiny pieces. To people accustomed to large chunks of pork, sausage, cheese, bread, whatever, this here Chinese stuff looked suspicious. The restaurant didn't need them: strategically situated across the street from the Grand Hotel on Piotrkowska, Złota Kaczka made a good living off of foreigners, and by 1990 it had upscaled itself into a modest elegance. "The owner knew his business," I wrote in *Poland in Transition*, "bet on a new, western-oriented Łódź, picked his clientele, and won his gamble." He had, in short anticipated the need for new tourist-based capacity in this city.

Between then and 2012, something happened and he abandoned that place. What exactly lay behind the move to Rąbieńska 53, I don't know: perhaps the Japanese sushi restaurant in the Grand Hotel trumped the Chinese restaurant across the street; perhaps taxes on Piotrkowska establishments rose; perhaps the owner saw tourism moving to the city's periphery. Maciek thought maybe the place was sold. In any event, I would never find my way to Rąbieńska 53, so this was a good idea on two counts: I reconnected with Agnieszka and Maciek, and I revisited my Golden Duck.

At noon on February 19, 2012, Maciek and Agnieszka rolled up to the front gate of Lodz International Studies Academy in a black Mercedes van, and off we drove through the rain and slush. A British voice on the GPS system spoke directions, but I was too busy talking with Agnieszka about their recent adventures in China to follow the route. After fifteen minutes and a lot of turns, we entered the parking lot in front of a very elegant building, new but in the old Polish style: thick cement walls, red tile

roof, “Złota Kaczka” in large Polish letters above twin glass front doors, potted and sculpted fir trees flanking the stairs. It didn’t look Chinese; it looked like new restaurant capacity for the new New Poland.

The interior was none too Chinese, either—more like new-old Poland. Chandeliers hung from the ceiling; the buffet to the right of the door was classic nineteenth century carved wood, something I would love to have in my own home. Paintings on the wall were Polish pastoral scenes framed in dark wood—new, but in the nineteenth century style.

Maciek’s theory was that the Złota Kaczka now makes its money on weddings and other “occasions,” and since no Pole is going to have a wedding reception in a Chinese restaurant, it keeps the old name while trying its best to look as classically new-old Polish as possible. The owner has bet on a new new clientele, one which is not particularly international, and we will see what happens. When we arrived the tables were mostly empty, but by the time we left they were filling up, mostly with Poles, so perhaps he’s won again. How quickly things change in this country.

The new menu offered fewer genuine Chinese dishes than the Chinese Buffet back in Montevideo, but several Polish dishes, from borscht soup to pork chops with French fries. Interestingly chop sticks were *not* part of the place setting. “This place is dead,” whispered Agnieszka.

“The soup is not Chinese,” observed Maciek, who lived a couple of years in Shanghai. “Neither are the dumplings. The owner—whoever he is—should hire a cook, Korean or Vietnamese. He could do a better job of faking it.”

“Still,” I reflected, “this would be a good venue for my daughter’s wedding—too bad she’s already locked up the place in Chicago.”

Another cup of Lipton tea, and we went on our way. “We will not come back here,” Maciek said in departing, “although we will get together again—up in Warsaw. You visit us in Warsaw when the weather gets warmer, and we will show you that city. It has developed in so many ways . . . remarkable.”

That’s the point, I guess: Warsaw, Łódź, Złota Kaczka, Sophora, Empik have all developed in so many ways. Maciek, Agnieszka, Michelle and I—we’ve all developed in so many ways. And we will continue to develop—at least they will, and their sons. So will the city, moving forward or backward, but always moving. That’s the essence of the postmodern world, the reason for staying, as Dylan put it, “Forever Young.”

However, as Dylan also noted in “Mississippi,” “You can always come back, but you can’t come back all the way.” That’s the paradoxical lesson preached by those abandoned barns and factories, renovated schools and churches, rehabilitated apartments, reallocated capacity, the reconfigured landscapes here and there. It’s a hard lesson to swallow, but at age seventy, I think I’m finally figuring it out.