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The Major Published Works
of Kevin Lynch

Institute of Urban & Regional Development
University of California, Berkeley

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AN APPRAISAL

by

DONALD APPLEYARD

"Reprinted from the *Town Planning Review*. Vol. 49, No. 4, October 1978".

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It is now twenty years since Kevin Lynch started writing on the subject of urban planning and environmental design. During that time he has produced four major books,* co-authored another, *The View From the Road*,¹ and edited a sixth, *Growing Up in Cities*.² And, since he is now spending more time on practice and writing, more may be on the way. Nevertheless, there is a certain sense of completeness to the books already produced; the field of study is defined, the philosophy is clear and some worked examples have been carried through, even though the books represent only a part of his total contribution to the field. Some of his articles, such as the 'Theory of Urban Form' and 'Environmental Adaptability', have been almost as important as the books;³ some of his planning reports, such as the *Visual Analysis of Brookline*, and *Looking at the Vineyard*, though virtually unobtainable, have been models of environmental analysis which should be far better known.⁴ His teaching has directly influenced a whole generation of MIT and Harvard students.

To comprehend the significance of a person's work, the context within which it has been created should be understood, a difficult matter when looking back over the twenty years since Lynch's influence has become part of our present context. In the late 1950s, urban planning in America was primarily an administrative activity, attempting to regulate, without much success, urban growth that was taking place on an immense scale. Suburbs were mushrooming, freeways were in full construction, the urban redevelopment programme was getting underway. Architects in the tradition of European architect-planners were beginning to envisage the opportunities for a new enterprise called 'urban design'. Meanwhile, Kevin Lynch, with Gyorgy Kepes, a European who had taught at the Bauhaus and Chicago's Institute of Design, had received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to study the 'perceptual form of the city.' For its time, it was a large grant: many people worked on it, creating an aura of anticipation. I remember a disappointed and somewhat angry audience at one of the first Harvard Urban Design Conferences hearing from Kepes that there was still nothing to report. Three years later, in 1960, after all the research assistants had left, Lynch, writing alone, came out with *The Image of the City*.⁵

The book offered a totally fresh and remarkably developed analysis of how people view cities. It was apparent to most reviewers that this was a seminal book, which would change the way we would all look at cities. In Kuhn's sense, it merited the title of a new paradigm, an exemplar, not only of new concepts but of new methods of understanding and planning the city. What was so new about this book? First, there was the style of empirical research; Cullen and Rasmussen had sketched and written eloquently of the urban landscape, but these were personal views. Asking ordinary people what they perceived and felt about their cities was unheard of in the design fields at the time and still rather rare in planning. It broke

**The Image of the City*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1960.

Site Planning, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1962 (second edition, 1971).

What Time is this Place?, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1972.

Managing the Sense of a Region, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1976.

out of the professional cocoon. And the rich array of questions asking people to draw maps, make sketches, describe routes, recognise photographs and so on were themselves so innovative that even psychologists and sociologists later adopted them in their own research.

The Image of the City, more than any other work, initiated what has become a flourishing and significant new field of activity in planning and design, the study of environmental psychology, relating the physical environment to human behaviour. But *The Image of the City* had other things to offer. It coined a new urban value, imageability, an awkward word but an enduring concept. Imageability is a quality of the urban (and natural) environment that previously had been embedded in more cloudy terms like amenity, aesthetics, or 'form.' It could be clearly identified, and even, in later research, measured. Further, Lynch identified his famous five elements of the urban image—landmarks, nodes, paths, districts and edges—and described their relations in an urban-scale system of conceptualising, and therefore designing cities. While forging a human connection between cities and individuals on the one hand, the identification of a large scale structure, on the other hand, assumed heroic dimensions. Though not couched in the hortatory style of most urban design manifestos (one reviewer was disappointed at this), it was in fact more ambitious than most urban design of the time which was simply overblown architecture. His book proposed a language whereby we could design whole cities and regions, a heady project even in the late 1950s. But then it was not to be the kind of 'total-design-to-the-last-detail' that was implied in most designs for new cities. It was to be a strategic and tactical form of design, selecting critical elements and attributes, dealing with the existing metropolis as well as its expansion. More than this, the book had style. It was beautifully written, insightful, incisive and compact. The diagrams and symbol systems were neat and pointed.

What has been the effect of *The Image of the City*? Eighteen years later it is really too early to say, and I lack the empirical data. Some 80 000 copies have been printed, and, hopefully, read. It has been translated into several languages. As with any seminal work, it may take time for its full effects to be apparent and by then they may be blurred by other influences. I have already mentioned the spurt of research in environmental psychology that took place a few years after in the late 1960s, which looked to *The Image of the City* as a source of inspiration and legitimacy. In the narrower field of environmental cognition, a number of researchers in geography, sociology, psychology and planning have pursued many of the issues raised in *The Image of the City* (e.g. Lee, Canter, Suttles, Downs, Stea, Hart, the Kaplans, Moore, Golledge, Lowenthal, Appleyard, among others). Lee was actually writing in this field before Lynch.⁶ The environmental cognition of particular population groups, such as children, the elderly, handicapped, and transit travellers are now being studied, as is the image of housing projects, street systems, neighbourhoods and wilderness areas.

But in the field of planning what has been its effect? The concept of imageability has found its way into many urban plans as a worthy goal, and numbers of cities have been surveyed in this manner. Too often, however, professionals have adopted the skeletal concepts, and carried out their own image surveys without reference to the citizens. The result has been pretty diagrams divorced from social reality, or proposals for a few more landmarks and nodes to clarify and order a city's image. Too much has been carried out in the name of orientation, too little in the name of richness, or social relevance. The Covent Garden Plan shows that the use of image concepts is no guarantee of a socially sensitive plan. But such surveys have probably helped to conserve many valued places in American cities. *The Image of the City* has encouraged conservation because it was primarily an empirical study supplying an easily understandable method for analysing existing cities.

Perhaps the most influential effect on urban design has been on the layout of transportation routes. *The View from the Road*,⁷ by applying the concepts of *The Image of the City* to highways, influenced a number of freeways and new highways in the United States and elsewhere, for instance in Canberra, Australia, though not, apparently, the

imageless path system of Milton Keynes! Later, many of the ideas in both books were incorporated in the design of Ciudad Guayana.⁸

Conceptually, there was one important dimension missing from *The Image of the City*. It is the deliberate neglect of social meaning. The urban environment is read by its inhabitants as a symbol system—one well understood by some symbol creators. Yet, although class distinctions and social prestige occasionally crept into the text, *The Image of the City* dealt principally with surface appearance. Meaning was seen as too complex to cope with in this treatise, a clear conceptual position but difficult for designers used to holistic ideas to understand, and perhaps a critical omission. It did free Lynch to concentrate on the materials and elements of urban form, but the missing link with the city's social, economic and functional structures meant there was only a partial *explanation* of why a city's image might be the way it was. This may have encouraged a certain asociality in the studies of many followers.

On the other hand, Lynch would argue that meanings are ephemeral, personal and elusive. If symbolism were to be considered, it had to be done well; not in the trite mode of Beaux Arts design, nor solely as a symbol of some class struggle. The full connections between the social structure and environmental images have yet to be drawn.

Chronologically, *Site Planning*⁹ was the next book to be written, but it will be more coherent to deal first with *What Time is this Place?*¹⁰ whose subject is also environmental imagery. *What Time is this Place?* was written over ten years after *The Image of the City*. During this time, a PhD programme was developed at MIT and people like Stephen Carr, Carl Steinitz, Robert Goodman, William Porter, Robin Moore, and Michael Southworth were attracted to the programme. Many of the ideas suggested in *The Image of the City* were pursued. The Brookline *Visual Analysis*, the planning of Ciudad Guayana, *City Signs and Lights*¹¹ growing out of a student course on *Signs in the City*, the *San Francisco Urban Design Plan*,¹² Steinitz's work on visual resource inventories¹³ and Moore's work on childhood environments¹⁴ all emerged in this period. However, it was also a time of social turmoil in the cities and on campus. A book on metropolitan form was started, but never completed, so it was not until a sabbatical in England came along that time and context allowed the writing of *The Image's* temporal counterpart. And time itself had affected the style.

Beginning with a tour of cities in various states of change (London after the Great Fire, Ciudad Guayana in rapid growth, Bath overwhelmed by its history, Stoke-on Trent after the industrial revolution, Havana after the political revolution) *What Time is this Place?* addresses the issues of conservation, environmental change, planning for the future, and the expression of time in the urban environment. It is much more introspective and speculative than *The Image of the City*. As in the first book's Appendix A, Lynch researched the subject with enthusiasm, endowing the book with a cultural depth and richness that make it easy and fascinating reading. *What Time is this Place?* deals primarily with the moral and intellectual questions facing conservation, planning and futurism. It looks beyond (or beneath) the stereotypical positions of conservationists and futurists to an ethic that emphasises the needs and perceptions of individuals, and acknowledges the new pluralist context of planning. In consequence, he gives primacy to local and personal history rather than remote 'official' history; to environmental education and the need to inform citizens about the nature of change and the immediate future. This experiential view of time questions the abstract view, and relates change to people. Lynch has more distance on this subject than most polemicists in the field who are polarised between past or future. His quiet criticism of Bath's devotion to conservation is a far cry from Angus Fergusson's passionate and forceful *The Sack of Bath*;¹⁵ then Lynch has always been more the empathetic but rational observer than the cavalier activist. Less dramatic than *Future Shock*,¹⁶ it faces the same issues. Though his engagement is quieter, however, it is no less strongly felt, especially when talking of the needs of others. And his sheer intellectual grasp cuts the mystique of decision theory, futurism, and long-

range forecasting down to the level of lay comprehension

I think this book is as significant in its own way as *The Image of the City*, but it may be less influential. Times have changed, of course, and we are attuned to some of the ideas. It is not so firmly anchored in the analysis of one city, neither are case studies the sources of concepts as they were in *The Image of the City*. While fascinating in themselves, they are not well connected to the text. Methods, too, of temporal urban analysis, much more difficult to grasp, are not nearly so developed as in the *The Image*, so readers will have to invent their own methods.

But *What Time is this Place?* contains helpful ways of conceiving change, and it advocates specific policies for situations of abandonment, disaster ('much easier to cope with than abandonment'), development, adaptation, and mobility. It is also replete with wonderful and often brilliant ideas. On nearly every page, the reader is reminded or encouraged to think of what 'might be' or what 'could be' from detailed design ideas, such as the creation of 'public attics' to concepts of 'temporal collage' and 'episodic contrast.' These are important contributions to a theory of conservation.

And now to *Site Planning* which came out in a first edition in 1962 and was substantially revised in 1971.¹⁷ *Site Planning* is much broader in scope than the other two books for it describes every aspect of design at the site level. The second edition covers not only sensuous form and imagery, but site analysis of natural ecology, activity and transportation issues, social and psychological analyses, the technical aspects of utilities, streets and earthworks, design methods, costs, control and management strategies. It also contains brief sections on housing, shopping centres, industrial districts, institutions, open space and renewal.

To compare the second with the first edition is to realise how much the context of environmental design has changed in only ten years. As Lynch ruefully points out, in the first edition he predicted that the technical sections would quickly become obsolete. In fact, it is the chapters on fundamentals, ways of looking at sites and values, that have had to be changed. There is now much more attention to ecology, to analysing human needs, to design methods, than before. Even so, the politics of site planning are not dealt with and the new concerns with energy will require another update very soon. Here the technical sections will need amplification.

Lynch brings even to this practical book his personal style. Well-researched with help from technicians and experts in some fields, he orchestrates all the possible variables that enter into consideration when planning sites. One characteristic of his style is to demystify the technical aspects of site planning, such as climate, grading, transportation and site ecology which are described in ways that any lay person can understand. Personal freehand drawings, rather than mechanical diagrams, detechnicalise these activities, and suggestions of how to build your own wind tunnel or sundial encourage anyone to take up this activity.

It is interesting to compare this book with Alexander's *A Pattern Language*.¹⁸ *Site Planning* maintains a certain 'distance' from the depiction of solutions. Unlike Alexander he does not try to provide detailed design for each component of site plans. The book may lose something through this lack of specificity but gains by concentrating more clearly on understanding the variables, values and approaches to the subject. The designer has to work the solutions out for himself. This may be less attractive to designers who prefer to select from patterns, but epitomises Lynch's teaching style which encourages independent thinking and action rather than adherence to a design doctrine.

This is a modest view of site planning. There are no signs here of the slick sophisticated monumental presentations which characterise the heroic style of urban design. Indeed, there are few modern examples of site planning in the book, which only suggests by implication Lynch's opinion of current activity in the field. This modesty values more the careful analysis of the site, of human needs, of technical matters, than the grand style. As with all his writing, there is a depth to the texture that makes careful reading and re-reading continual

rediscovery. There are well-tuned judgements here about hundreds of small and large dilemmas that face every site planner. I can only plead that every architect, landscape architect, engineer and planner has this book on his or her shelf, and reads it again every now and then.

Finally, we come to *Managing the Sense of a Region*,¹⁹ the most ambitious of the four books in some ways, since it attempts to incorporate in one activity the planning and design of the physical environment from its small details to the scale of regions. This book, like *Site Planning*, is policy, plan, management and design-orientated. Narrower than *Site Planning* since it does not deal with technical, social, functional or economic matters, it is nevertheless broader than *The Image of the City* or *What Time is this Place?* for it covers the wider aspects of environmental experience, sensuous qualities, liveability, imagery and symbolism. It also grapples, though briefly, with the constraints created by the natural environment, and the legal and administrative context of 'sense management.' The purposes of such management based on interpretation of human environmental needs, and its principal phases, diagnosis, policy, regulation and design are outlined in detail. They are followed by a proposed way of organising a regional planning agency to carry on a programme of sensuous environmental management. The essay concludes with a commentary on some of the more thorny issues of environmental management, the question of how to decide on priorities, the issue of conservation, the politics of the environment, and how to manage social science research.

These issues are discussed with deft insight. On politics and equity, the most difficult issues for environmental planners and all planners, he acknowledges the correlation between affluence and environmental quality and the unfortunate dangers that sensory studies may be a 'cover for environmental domination.' 'An agency must be careful to reject this connection.' He identifies the problems of centralising power, yet does not see total decentralisation as possible. Decisions have to be made at a regional level where, he argues, the professional has to speak for others, while emphasising the role of education, 'widespread environmental sensitivity and skill, openness and diversity of form rather than the grand effect, user control and user consultation, and the use of techniques that keep decisions open and fluid.' He leaves the question of working within the system or changing society to individual choice, while pointing out that the techniques of analysis and design will be different in each case:

'A planning agency can raise issues, provide information, or facilitate political action. To go further, and to press for the transformation of the structure of society (which may well be what is needed) will be beyond the bounds of any official agency. True enough, its information and its way with its clients may help others headed that way.'

On the use of social science, he has one statement I particularly like: 'Scientific knowledge enlarges our grasp, but we already have some hold. We are all experienced in using our senses,' that is, do not be overwhelmed by scientism.

An appendix documents several examples of city and regional environmental analysis, much inspired by Lynch's own work; another outlines a glossary of analytical techniques with a number of illustrated maps and diagrams; a third too briefly reports on current research in environmental values and perceptions, and a final appendix details more satisfactorily some hypothetical examples of how to carry out this kind of environmental management.

This, it seems to me, is an essential book for those concerned with planning environmental quality at all scales. One of his most significant insights is to show that managing the quality of a region necessitates concern for small details such as benches and the preservation of heritage trees, as much as the conservation of larger areas of open space. A major failure of planning has been the divorce between those who work at the regional scale on abstract

'structural' planning and those developers, designers, and urban planners responsible for detailed environmental quality, where the impact of regional decisions is felt. In the United States, antagonism towards regional scale decision-making has led in some cases to a breakdown of this distinction. The Boston regional transportation study, for instance, was carried out with a massive neighbourhood participation programme in which the impacts of regional-scale decisions on the neighbourhoods were decisive in formulating regional policy. The California Coastal Commission, responsible for over 1500 miles of coast, works within a set of over 150 detailed policies, but makes decisions at the level of the individual project review *without a spatial plan* (a style of planning not without its problems).

Splendid though it is, *Managing the Sense of a Region* is a frustrating book, for it is too brief. Of course, this provides the opportunity for Lynch (or others) to write a more detailed exposition of method. A separate volume of selected case studies would be of enormous help to those who find the generalisations difficult to relate to everyday experience. We need a counterpart to *Site Planning* at the regional scale. Lynch hints that this may be on his agenda.

Common throughout Lynch's work can be found a number of themes. The physical environment (earlier called the 'form of the city') can serve a whole range of human psychological, social and physiological needs. These needs and values can be identified through empirical research, but also through insightful introspection. (Lynch has never felt bounded by the lack of evidence, and has practically invented some environmental values!) These values can act as goals or criteria for environmental professionals. The perceived environment contains a number of identifiable attributes, elements, and types of event that can constitute a new language of planning, design and management. Every analysis or understanding can be the basis of a new idea or possibility for improving and enhancing the role of the physical environment. Environmental professionals must develop personal skills, sensitivity and judgement and juggle with complex sets of values rather than assume a 'natural' order. Neither can they rely on one-dimensional stances. They must act within their capabilities, but also be aware of the broad social and political implications of their work. Modesty is preferable to grand effect. And, acknowledging the trends of the last ten years, his later work is characterised by an advocacy of pluralism and participation, and a broadening of professional planning and design to include the activities of management and education.

But this does not explain his extraordinary contribution to our field. What makes his contribution unique? A mixture of qualities. First, he is able to comprehend and articulate new, complex and often foreign concepts with shining clarity and remarkable power. He brings a depth and breadth of culture to his writing that is beyond that of most professionals. He is in the tradition of Lewis Mumford, and yet he brings cultural implications more specifically to bear on professional issues. His writing is a model of clarity, succinctness, and readability, imbued with a rich and poetic vision. But perhaps the most unique quality of these works is that each book and each page exhibit an active and live imagination. He is able and willing to suggest possibilities towards an ideal world. He is not afraid to dream. He listens, he analyses, but that is simply a starting point, not an end. In a world where Utopias are being supplanted by doomsdays, where it is safer to be analytical or talk of constraints or indulge in fantasy, Lynch connects reality with the ideal. He keeps alive the flagging tradition of Utopian planning. Although he has made some attempts to picture his ideal city in 'The Possible City' and 'Grounds for Utopia',²⁰ his idealism is more evident and successful in *the way* he treats each problem—as an opportunity. He always points towards a more humane environment where citizens are freer to be creative and control their destinies, whose diversity and richness allow for pluralist values. As its image becomes more coherent, it emerges as an enchanted world, without cynicism, anger, or small-mindedness. It is, of course, a reflection of Lynch's own character, a man whose humanity, kindness, modesty and generosity are known to those who meet him. But do not be beguiled. Beneath the surface, there is an iron will, moral strength and critical intellect that in an era of professional

turmoil has consistently produced works that are courageous, authoritative, and superbly organised. Read, appreciate and create!

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CONSERVATION REPORTS AND STUDIES

CONTINUATION LIST AND COMMENTARY 1977-1978

by

ROBIN BLOXSIDGE

The commentary to the 1976-77 list of conservation reports, published in last October's issue of the *Town Planning Review*, mentioned briefly the role of local authorities as sources of information and education in relation to local conservation and improvement. This role has been a continuing theme expressed in many of the publications listed annually by the *Town Planning Review* since 1975 and is the focus of this year's commentary.

Town (and country) trail leaflets are an increasingly popular method of publicising the environmental heritage of an area. Some examples of those sent by authorities for listing this year are considered in the first section of this introduction. The second section looks at two specific education projects and the third section glances at the growth in the number of design award schemes, which are one way of giving positive encouragement to the conservation and improvement of the environment.

Trails

The definition of pedestrian routes through historic towns, with explanatory notes about the history and architecture of the towns and their buildings, has been common for some years and is a principal method adopted by local authorities for increasing public awareness of listed and other buildings of architectural interest and of conservation areas.¹ The principle of such 'town trails' has been extended to rural areas to include countryside trails, village trails and motor trails. In general there is a high standard of presentation and production in the leaflets and booklets which describe and illustrate the trails, although the detail and amount of information given is variable. This variation is the main reason for the difference in format between simple leaflets of one folded sheet of paper and more lengthy booklets of about twenty pages. Booklets tend also to be more extensively illustrated with drawings and/or photographs.

Some publications on trails acknowledge, as the reason for their existence, the impetus of European Architectural Heritage Year 1975 (EAHY). For example, the *Bedlington Town Trail* leaflet (Northumberland County Council) was first produced in EAHY and Perth and Kinross District Council's *Dunkeld Heritage Trail* leaflet for 'one of the most historic places in Scotland' is in a series of 'Heritage Trails' promoted by the Scottish Tourist Board as a contribution to EAHY and the years to follow. Undoubtedly many other trails owe their existence to the long-term influence that EAHY has had in arousing a knowledge of, and conscious concern for, the built environment.

Three leaflets produced by the City of Edinburgh District Council are worthy of mention because they cover the three completed sections (Dean Bank Footpath, Slateford to Juniper Green and Juniper Green to Balerno) of the *Water of Leith Walkway*, the imaginative development by the Council of a natural feature running through the City for recreational purposes. The leaflets carry historical descriptions and locate buildings and other features on a plan of the walk in the conventional manner by use of numbers.