

City Image & City Design: The Lynchian Tradition

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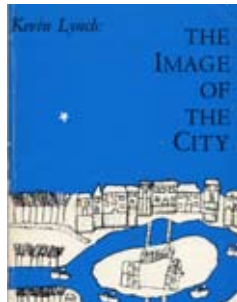
Design and Development
Mental maps
Normative goals

Most of Kevin Lynch's ideas about city form were already percolating during his first years as an assistant professor. As early as 1951, he urged that MIT's department create a new "Center for Urban Research" focused on the "basic question" that would mark his life-long passion: "What should be the physical form of the metropolitan region in the future?" Lynch knew it was an unwieldy and normative question that could not be "answered directly by research." Nonetheless, he argued, "it could be used as a basic direction" and as a means for assessing whether research projects held any "significance".¹⁷ Thirty years later, Lynch wrote *A Theory of Good City Form*. As a *Boston Globe* memorial editorial put it, "Lynch's work was pioneering because, unlike more imperious city planners, he consulted people first and plans second."¹⁸

A tribute essay written by three of his colleagues observed that, "Throughout his years at MIT, Kevin kept his hand in practice, testing his ideas, forming new ones, making things. He was a brilliant and subtle designer, always looking for those few simple strokes which would both give form to a place and open it to the creativity of its users. He always began with the site and the people who used it or lived on it. He believed in the right and ability of individuals and communities to shape and manage their own environments and pushed gently but firmly at the institutions and governments who hired him to recognize that right. Working nearly always as a member of a team, he entered his ideas in simple words and sketches, letting them sink or swim on their own merits."¹⁹



Kevin Lynch, shown seated 2nd from left, studied architecture with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin during the late 1930s.





[above] Composite view of the imageability of Downtown Los Angeles in the late 1950s as seen by its residents.

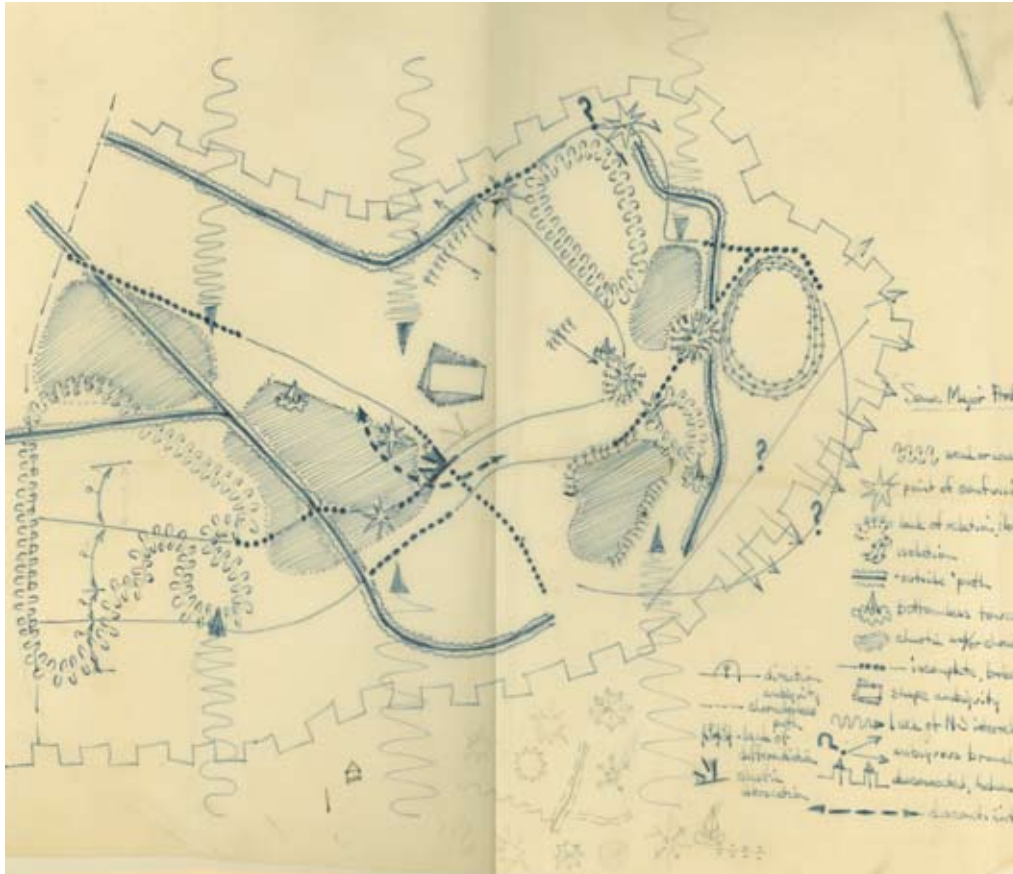
Kevin Lynch

Imageability
City form



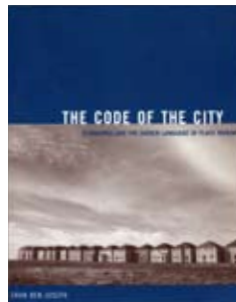
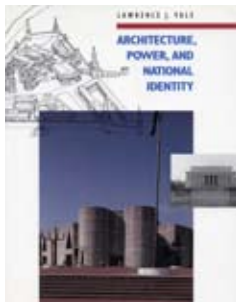
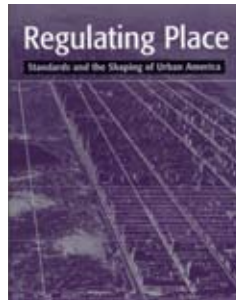
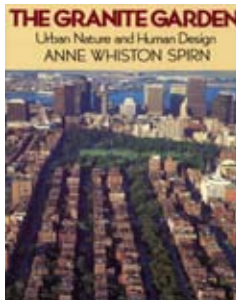
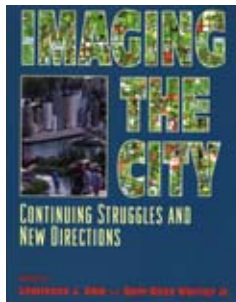
“An environment that facilitates recalling and learning is a way of linking the living moment to a wide span of time. Being alive is being awake in the present, secure in our ability to continue but alert to the new things that come streaming by. We feel our own rhythm, and feel also that it is part of the rhythm of the world. It is when local time, local place, and our own selves are secure that we are ready to face challenge, complexity, vast space, and the enormous future.”

— *What Time is This Place?* 1972



[above] Lynch's classic sketch showing problems with the image of Boston, used in *The Image of the City*.

“It is clear that the form of a city or a metropolis will not exhibit some gigantic, stratified order. It will be a complicated pattern, continuous and whole, yet intricate and mobile. It must be plastic to the perceptual habits of thousands of citizens, open-ended to change of function and meaning, receptive to the formation of new imagery. It must invite its viewers to explore the world.” – *The Image of the City*, 1960



After his retirement, Lynch worried that the Environmental Design program might fade away, but was heartened by Dennis Frenchman's leadership of the group. Renamed the Joint Program in City Design & Development [CDD] in the late 1990s, it is again headed by Frenchman.

40 years after *The Image of the City*, a CDD colloquium examined Lynch's legacy in the light of new media, published as *Imaging the City*. DUSP's CDD faculty continues to explore issues of land-use and community growth (Philip Herr and Terry Szold), urban design studios in the U.S. and around the world (Gary Hack, Tunney Lee, John de Monchaux, and Dennis Frenchman), questions of design standards (Eran Ben-Joseph), production of urban identity (Lawrence Vale), the role of urban natural systems (Anne Spirn), links between transportation and environmental performance (Christopher Zegras) and connections among city design, public policy, and preservation (Mark Schuster). The Lynchian influence has remained salient in the City Design curriculum, most notably through the Theory of City Form subject, taught by Lynch and/or Julian Beinart every year for more than a half-century.



DUSP biannually presents the Kevin Lynch Award to honor outstanding contributions to the making of places that invoke and capture a generous relationship between an urban place and the people who use it. The diversity of recent awardees includes: Boston's "First Night" (1990); planner Allan B. Jacobs (1999); Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley (2005); and the planners who championed "The Vancouver Model" (2007).