

tive system. Thus, streets of all kinds became “paths,” squares and plazas became “nodes,” monuments became “landmarks,” historical quarters became “districts,” and city walls became “edges.” Lynch’s innovation came from his effort to render planning more democratic. By making these abstract, scaleless terms the means through which a city’s inhabitants could map a cognitive “image” of their experience and by making this image the pattern on which a design should build, Lynch was suggesting that the citizen’s *perception* should be the basis for changes in a city’s form.⁶ But Lynch was mistakenly assuming that the United States offered more than a handful of cities that were “imagable” in these terms. The repetitive, gridiron city, much less the amorphous suburb, cannot be understood, let alone transformed in Lynch’s terms, because those are terms of the delimited European town of passages, squares, and piazzas. Lynch’s affectionately drawn maps of Boston show that its original core had patterns like those of a medieval European town. But his own cognitive map of downtown Los Angeles reveals the limits of his methodology—it is poignant evidence of the wishful thinking currently debilitating urban design. Did Lynch’s mapping provide a critical tool for seeing the city as it was or merely a scaffold on which to hang an argument about how it should be?

While Lynch’s *Image of the City* text has been more decisive for urban design, in later years he did amend his approach in a *Theory of Good City Form*. Expanding his analysis to include regional scales, including the distributed, horizontal megacity of the automobile, Lynch attempted to develop the terms through which these territories could also be made “legible,” again assuming that a high degree of functional and iconographic transparency should be the hallmark of a good and just city. Nevertheless, because it brought the region into focus as an object of design, “Good City Form” represented a potentially important turn for urban design. Unfortunately the physical, design correlates of this work are almost ineffable. Accordingly, *Theory of Good City Form* stays well within the realm of planning theory, except, perhaps, the diagrams contained in the appendix, “The Language of City Patterns,” which, given Lynch’s empiricism, offer curiously rationalistic readings of regional patterns.

After Lynch come several figures whose ideas are critical to an evolving definition of urban design, most importantly Ian McHarg and Venturi and Scott Brown. McHarg distilled the pioneering ecological theories of the early twentieth century into a method for visually