

REVIEWS

SPACE AND PLACE, HASTE AND WASTE

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A review essay on Kevin Lynch's *Wasting Away*
(San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990)
and on Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*
(Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991 [1974])

Can a French philosopher and an American urban design theorist have anything in common? Even if one was a radical marxist and key activist in the May 1968 Paris revolt and the other a deeply conservative yet highly original educator of planners and designers? Their common ground is a commitment to making settlements more humane by understanding the processes that make them tick. These mature works, coming near or at the end of their respective careers, speak to all who care for places in urgent, compelling, yet timeless voices.

Their differences make a comparison eye-opening. Meet Henri Lefebvre, quintessential European intellectual: scholarly, pondering, dialectical, leftist. Kevin Lynch, better-known to the American audience, is pragmatist and individualist: precise, direct, empirical, down-to-earth. Their contrasting styles are apparent in Lefebvre's *Production of Space* and Lynch's *Wasting Away*. Despite differences, they are thematic bedfellows.

Their theme is space. Space and the awareness of its importance is reasserting itself into many spheres of our society. In planning alone, design and physical planning have increased in stature. The collective cacophony of scholarly and other writing in many fields seems to say we are now boldly going where we should have gone all along. Interestingly, Manuel Castells uncovers a paradox inherent in the new studies of space in his book *The Informational City*. Thus, while Lynch, Lefebvre, and others tell us to look at places and space-making, Castells writes that the new space emerging in our information-based, post-industrial society is not a space of places, but a space of flows.

Our two authors tell us that in our narrow disciplinary haste, the neglect of space has caused much waste on the urban scene. Buildings, cities, energy, resources, lives, and even nature itself have been carelessly (ab)used. For example, a peculiar form of urban social waste – riots – stems in part from the spatial dynamics of social conditions. Another example is the ecological movement, which reacts to profligate waste. The global nature of this movement belies its genesis and its grassroots – local opposition to local waste. Whatever its manifestation, at least one thing is clear. The interplay of space and waste has captured center stage on the stages that count most: politics, the economy, and the media.

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Lefebvre and Lynch look at different sides of the same issue. Lefebvre examines how space is produced. By space, he means settlement space: town and city, neighborhood and region. Space, as a universal phenomenon, is both rural and urban, though the book focuses on the latter. It is nevertheless given particular (non-universal) form in a specific settlement by a local culture. By production, he means the sum of human endeavors whose accumulated history has resulted in a settled place. It is not a process that can be codified in a how-to guide for real estate developers, nor in the development of regulations by government planners.

Lynch, on the other hand, takes the post-production view. (Broadly speaking, Lefebvre might have called this "production" and not "postproduction.") Once a city exists, how does it age, how does it deteriorate, how does it get reused, recycled, or reborn? Lynch recognizes that the wasting of places, like their production, stems from human actions and inactions. Choices made during production and (re)use affect the processes of wasting. Lynch uses wasting as a generic term for decline or deterioration. It is both the "dark side of change" and "a necessary part of life."

Wasting Away is not only about settled places. It also probes the wasting of lives and objects. We know from Lynch's earlier work that a place is a unique locality. It is not universal space. While readers may see Lynch's book as the more practical of the two, it is not a how-to manual either. It asks us to look at wasting in the same light as development. It asks us not to fear or deny waste. Rather, it asks us to waste well so we can develop well.

In a sense, the two books were not allowed to waste. Lynch's unfinished manuscript, on which he was working before his untimely death in 1984, was brought to life by Michael Southworth, student and colleague of Lynch. Southworth, professor of city and regional planning and landscape architecture at Berkeley, completed and edited the manuscript. He also contributed an introduction and a new chapter of photographs titled "Looking at Waste." *The Production of Space*, first published in France in 1974, is gaining a position of prominence among English speaking academics due to Donald Nicholson-Smith's translation. Lefebvre published more than fifty books prior to this, nearly seventy titles overall. It is the culmination of a series of seven books issued between 1968 and 1974 on politics, cities, space, society, and their intersections.

The authors, despite their differences, share a longer view of cities, regions, their interdependence, and the contemporary dissolution of each into the other. Both posit culture as fundamental to urban processes. Both mount daring social and philosophical inquiries into the persistent and pressing urban questions of our time.

What makes these two books daring? They go beyond exposing the institutions, individuals, and processes that produce and waste spaces and places, and how these affect our lives. They cut to the core by revealing value conflicts and convergences that result from the intermingling of the cultural and the personal. These values are central to our selves and our society, a fact that is affirmed by their being co-opted by the politics of power. Both authors show that ultimately, space and waste flow from and are connected to our bodies. They are both and at once highly personal *and* public manifestations. In sum, the production and wasting of space are contradictory problems that

are here to stay – and, the authors implore, here to haunt forever unless we understand their ways and mend ours. What of them? Let us take the books in turn, Lefebvre's first, though it defies brief summary.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre elaborates at length his analytical approach to space – the philosophical foundations, the epistemic frame, the aim of the project. In so doing, he establishes at the outset and confirms throughout David Harvey's observation in the Afterword that Lefebvre is a specialist, indeed a master, of the dialectical method. Sartre (1976) called it "beyond reproach" in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Harvey situates Lefebvre in part by what he argues against: the structuralism of Althusser, the detachment from everyday life of Foucault, the pessimism of French philosophy following Heidegger, and the unnecessary idealism of Sartre (p. 429).

Lefebvre posits that there was, prior to industrial society, a coherent code that was used to describe urban space. The code was simultaneously architectural, urbanistic, political, and cultural. It is "a code which allows space not only to be 'read,' but also to be 'constructed.'" Prior to the nineteenth century, the code of urban space was commonly known by its users and producers. The code was founded on classical positivism and Euclidean space. Jonathan Barnett (1986) has written city-specific case studies of several such codes in *The Elusive City: Five Centuries of Design, Ambition and Miscalculation*. Though well-known and coherent, these codes were locality-specific. No general code of space was possible.

Lefebvre follows this hypothesis with two questions. "If there indeed was such a [locally specific] code, how did it come into being? And when, how, and why did it disappear?" (p. 7). The rest of the book is a broad dialectical canvas on which he paints his answers.

Lefebvre posits a conceptual triad to explain how space is actually produced: (1) spatial practice, (2) representations of space, and (3) representational spaces. The first of the three, spatial practice, is lived. It consists of the combination of individual, economic, and government interests in the production and reproduction of structures, infrastructures, and spaces in particular locales. Second, representations of space are two- and three-dimensional plans and designs conceived by spatial experts – city planners, engineers, architects, and landscape architects. Finally, representational spaces are those perceived through images, myths, and symbols. They include such forms as churches, houses, and town squares. These representational forms and spaces become icons.

He plumbs the processes underfoot of the triad and asserts that like other global products – he specifies commodities and capital, today we would add information – "(social) space is a (social) product." A society forms a spatial consensus about its spaces and places. Not only were common codes developed to create them, common behaviors were patterned to fit them. We agreed to act according to accepted norms, with each space having its own norms. This exposition opens up Lefebvre's analysis into two powerful fields. One, his primary thesis, concerns the cultural factors that underlie the production of space. "Every society produces a space, its own space" (p. 31). Culture is as important as politics, according to Lefebvre. He details the relation between political means and cultural factors. By "political" Lefebvre means power and its institutions.

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The second field deals with human actions in space, and how people are conditioned by space. "The pre-existence of a space conditions the subject's presence, actions, and discourse" (p. 57). For Lefebvre, space is totalizing. This argument is familiar to readers of Michel Foucault, for whom people are the subjects of totalizing institutions – of justice, medicine, religion, and so on. This leads to Lefebvre's "strategic hypothesis":

Theoretical and practical questions relating to space are becoming more and more important. These questions, though they do not suppress them, tend to resituate concepts and problems having to do with biological production, and with the production both of the means of production themselves and of consumer goods (p. 62).

Thus, understanding space is necessary in order to fully comprehend societal institutions, such as government and the economy. These institutions are not merely the outcome of social processes. They are the outcome of the reciprocal relation of space and society.

Due to the complexity of the book, I will use a single example to show how Lefebvre develops his thesis. The example is that of urban monuments. In a chapter on spatial architectonics, Lefebvre details the multiple nature of space. Space is transparent, yet it contains and is made of bodies and objects. One is situated in space, yet one creates space. It is a field of action and a basis for action. It is actual (given) and potential (a locus of possibilities). He develops these and other dialectics masterfully, bringing space to life and endowing it with a richness that underscores its importance.

Monuments, significant to continental planning and design, receive little attention stateside. Lefebvre derives value from them because they embody all three elements of his conceptual triad: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. "For millennia, monumentality took in all aspects of spatiality that we have identified above: the perceived, the conceived, and the lived [spatial practice]; representations of space [monuments are designed] and representational spaces [they have powerful symbolic value]" (p. 220).

Monuments are referents that citizens identify with. Rome has the Vatican, Paris the Louvre, London its Tower, Venice the Piazza San Marco, and New York the Empire State Building. Each has other monuments, as do other cities and towns. "Monumental space offers each member of society an image of that membership. . . . The monument thus effected a 'consensus,' and this in the strongest sense of the term, rendering it practical and concrete" (p. 220).

Recently this social consensus has been altered. In the past, monuments were public. Today, as Michael Sorkin (1992) demonstrates in *Variations on a Theme Park: Scenes from the New American City and the End of Public Space*, new monuments are private: skyscrapers, corporate headquarters, shopping malls, athletic stadiums, and arenas. Lefebvre explores the privatization of space along several lines. One is the legal predominance of the private realm, a consequence of the privatization of land that accompanied the breakdown of the classical Greek and Roman orders of space and the subsequent rise of the Roman villa. The abstract principle of private property, by dominating space, "put an end to the mere contemplation of nature, of the cosmos or of

the world, and pointed the way towards the mastery which transforms" (i.e., legal dominion of private property).

The consequences of the end of nature, dealt its mortal blow by the abstraction of space, share the latter half of the book with the origins of accumulation – capitalism – and its consequences for space. After posing a fascinating thesis on the psycho-sexual origins of accumulation by applying a Marxian-Freudian analysis replete with tales of the liberated ego's assault on space, the alliance of the ego and the phallus, and their subversion of the earth/female/vagina, he unleashes a powerful historical critique of the capitalist development of space.

This critique is set against a backdrop of the distinction between work and product. For Lefebvre, a work is a work of art, whereas a product is the reproducible product of a mechanical process. Venice, Lefebvre's ultimate city, is a work. Today, urban space is a product of industry and politics. For example, the mass-producing industrial economy has translated the dream of a single family home the only way it could, into large-scale suburban sprawl. Zoning and related development controls which enable uniform suburban subdivisions are political abstractions that are used by politics to subjugate space. Lefebvre concludes that abstraction serves to alienate people from space and to facilitate the exercise of political power over it.

For Lefebvre, it was both capitalism and its politics that broke the common code of urban space that existed prior to the industrial revolution. The state, using political strategies, seemed to take the leading role. "The state was built on the back of the old cities, and their structure and code were shattered in the process" (p. 47). An extended passage reveals not only his ideology, it sets up his agenda for action.

[E]very state is born of violence, and that state power endures only by virtue of violence directed towards a space. This violence originated in nature . . . namely wealth and land. At the same time it aggressed all of nature, imposing laws upon it and carving it up administratively according to criteria quite alien to the initial characteristics of either the land or its inhabitants. At the same time too, violence enthroned a specific rationality, that of accumulation, that of the bureaucracy and the army – a unitary, logistical, operational and quantifying rationality which would make economic growth possible. . . (p. 280)

Abstract space sprung from violence, and is political and institutional. In the process, Lefebvre fills in the glaring hole of Marx's project by supplying a dialectical material analysis of urban space. In so doing he converts Marx's "land" to "space." Furthermore, he considers space to have an exchange value. Thus, space becomes a force of production. It usurps the role originally played by nature.

The book concludes with two calls to action. One is political. A call to grassroots arms is the only possibility of altering the hegemony of the centralized state. The second is a call for increased awareness, the root of all action. "[A]uthentic knowledge of space must address the question of its production" (p. 388). It is for this reason that this work deserves a central

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place for anyone desiring a deeper understanding of the complex, ever-present phenomenon of space.

After reading *The Production of Space*, the direct style of Kevin Lynch's *Wasting Away* is a blast of fresh air. The empiricist-cum-Taoist Lynch contrasts sharply with the dialectical Lefebvre. Lynch is also less extreme. He never goes so far as Lefebvre, who says "nature is being murdered by anti-nature," with humanity doing the killing, "and perhaps committing suicide in the process." Lynch is more measured, but we are as convinced of his thesis as we are of the Frenchman's. But this is getting ahead of the story.

Lynch goes against the discrete, analytical, dichotomous character of positivist thinking that has difficulty thinking in wholes, continuous processes, and the long term. His model is nature. In accepting nature as the model, he makes the mistake of many planners and designers who use the metaphor of nature to portray human activities that possess a different sort of teleology. The difference, in fact, is captured by Lefebvre. Nature creates space – it is nature's work. Humans created places; they now produce space; it is contemporary culture's abstract product.

As editor Michael Southworth points out in the introduction, "this book is a philosophical and social inquiry into processes of wasting. It raises many questions and provides few answers." Lynch asks us to look at our personal and cultural values and attitudes toward waste and wasting. He asks us to change our mode of thought. "[W]here we cannot redirect the wasting process, we must change our minds" (p. 11). He knows this is a tall order, and directly confronts the fact that our society is geared toward growth, not decline. Lynch, like Lefebvre, does not flinch from the challenge of taking on the status quo. He not only asks why "waste and loss are the dark side of change, a repressed and emotional subject" – he provides reasons and alternatives.

An example of how Lynch asks us to stretch our conditioned notions is in a deceptively straightforward sentence on the first page. It captures the essence of the style and the message. "Everything changes, and death is a strategy for maintaining biological patterns in the presence of change." Yet we fear death and its early warning signals, loss and waste. "Waste is an impurity to avoid or wash off." This rings familiar to readers of anthropologist Mary Douglas's (1966) book *Purity and Danger*, that shows that the cultural meaning of impurity is danger.

Lynch starts with extensive descriptions of two "cacotopias," the opposite of utopias. The two cacotopias he describes are extreme opposites. One is a society that wastes to excess, the other is waste-free. He uses the cacotopias to set the bounds of his study. He shows that neither is attractive or desirable. This sets the stage for a middle ground in which waste plays a meaningful part in real life.

Lynch defines waste as:

what is worthless or unused for human purpose. It is a lessening of something without an apparently useful result; it is loss and abandonment, decline, separation, and death. It is the spent and valueless material left after some act of production or consumption, but can also refer to any used thing: garbage, trash, litter, junk, impurity and dirt. As we

have seen, there are waste things, waste lands, waste time,
and wasted lives (p. 146).

Lynch recognizes that definitions of waste are culturally keyed to time and place. Because waste is a cultural construct, changing (deconstructing) our views of it is difficult. We must rethink who we are before we can rethink waste. A comparison is apt here. Both thinkers emphasize the cultural character of urban places. For Lefebvre, urban place was wasted – turned into mere space – by capitalism and scientific rationality. For Lynch, urban places decline due to social (and natural) processes.

Any effort at rethinking must plumb to our deepest selves. Lynch begins where Lefebvre ends, with the body. "[W]e have two metaphors for wasting, both intimately connected with our own bodies. For short run transformation, we think of eating and excreting . . . For long term change, our minds turn to dying" (pp. 40-41).

The chapter titled "The Waste of Things" details how extravagantly we waste. Yet it proffers no "reduce, reuse, recycle" slogans. It is a sober chronicle that not only asks us questions, it makes us ask questions. It reads like a chapter from the Worldwatch Institute's annual monograph *The State of the World*.

Of most interest to planners and designers may be the chapter titled "The Waste of Place." It deals with place on two scales, global and urban. For natural processes at the global scale, Lynch cautions against decrying wastes indiscriminately. For example, beaches, waterfalls, and supermooras are wastes. Waste is a human term – only humans produce things that cannot be assimilated by natural processes. Yet it is a conceit to say that humans will destroy the earth through wasting. Even a ten-foot rise in sea level over the next 100 years will only threaten human investments. The earth and its coastal ecosystems will adjust as they have in the past. This rise would be minor compared to the changes in continental location over time, or to past rises in sea level during ice ages. Between the last two ice ages, for example, the entire Florida peninsula was under water. Concern, therefore, should be directed to those human processes whose scale, concentration, and toxicity are beyond the earth's capacity to absorb. Without using the term, Lynch argues for sustainability.

Among wastes at the urban scale, catastrophic ones are described first – those produced by fires, earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, and so on. Good can arise from them if we mimic natural catastrophes, such as the cleansing aspects of fire in fire climax forest communities. The discussion illuminates not only the work of disaster planners and city planners, but also of forest and coastal managers.

Lynch gives slower, non-catastrophic urban decay processes more attention. He looks at the structural characteristics of a declining place: "Typically, a city in decline is one that boomed in the past, dominated by a single economic activity in which it specialized" (p. 96). There are two types of responses to decline. One is to manage the production of space. Policy remedies include controlling the rate of growth, ensuring a mixed and balanced economy, and differential capital appreciation rates to favor rehabilitation over new investment. Even these have their limits, as Lynch shows:

Public policies that treat decline as a local disease, or come too late, or encourage growth in other places, can be

ineffective or damaging. Typically, significant efforts are rarely made to address decline at its roots: to create flexibility and diversity at an early stage; to invest in the public amenity that will stabilize a place; to compensate for the social costs of mobility; to put control of enterprise in local hands; to capitalize on the hidden benefits of stability, stagnation, and decline (p. 97).

There are other limits. Often, growth managers work on the margins, affecting only a small portion of actual growth. Not only do they focus on only half the picture – growth and not decline – they do not match the management tools to the most important factors shaping growth: information, knowledge, and private capital. Castells's (1989) *The Informational City* documents the rise of the new "space of flows." Growth managers still deal with the space of place. Lynch points to the essence of this second mismatch. "Populations and public capital cannot match the free flow of private capital." Private capital has a logic of its own, and is busy creating a new "postmodern" space according to that logic. Deregulation decisions affecting global financial institutions, international free trade agreements, and the "one Europe" goal affect the production of space more than planning, zoning, environmental regulations, even infrastructure investments.

The second type of response to decline is to appreciate it for what it is: "Declining areas have their own values." We can learn from the examples of Pittsburgh and Cleveland, both recovered from bouts with pollution and overall decline. Their low costs of living, low congestion, and ample opportunities during their declines fueled recoveries, even while their populations continue to decrease.

Basically, cities seem to have a sticking power that goes beyond their mere physical presence. Lynch presents the great fires of London, Chicago, San Francisco, and the devastation of many cities during World War Two, as examples. Even the exception proves the point – the remarkable story of Antioch, Syria, during the sixth century A.D. It took seventeen separate and completely ruinous episodes of earthquakes, plagues, droughts, fires, and invasions over a 113-year period to finally reduce it to a minor settlement. Even then it persisted. "A city is hard to kill, in part because of [physical reasons], and even more because of the memories, motives, and skills of its inhabitants" (p. 109). Monuments play a role here. Christine Boyer's forthcoming *The City of Collective Memory* develops this idea at length for a different context.

In the end, Lynch is best understood in his own words:

Life develops, and we value that progressive growth, the countercurrent to the energetic running down of the universe. If my ultimate value is life and development (a value that is the very basis of my argument, and which I will not further argue), and if wasting is an essential component of the living, developing system, then wasting may be judged by the degree to which it supports that growth of organized complexity. A wasteful event is one that produces a discontinuity on biological or cultural development (p. 155).

The final chapter of Lynch's book is called "Wasting Well." True to his systematic nature, he provides criteria for measuring good wasting. In developing the criteria, he takes care to distinguish economic waste from developmental waste. The book is about developmental, not economic, waste. Economic waste is measured against efficiency criteria. Developmental waste is measured against life-supporting criteria.

Wasting Away is the work of a wise man. Its zen-like approach uses a combination of intuition and logic, experience and observation, facts and values. It is a satisfying mixture of these ingredients, and of specificity and generality. It opens us to new vistas, as well as to subtle distinctions, such as waste and loss. Despite his command of the subject, and his original and consistent perspective, Lynch admits his own lack of resolution about it. This may merely reflect the contradictory nature of life, development, and waste; or may point to a limited understanding of biological processes and their misapplication to human processes. In either case, this book is immensely valuable to all interested not just in waste, but cities, people, and life itself.

After reading both books, one cannot escape the impression that the production and wasting of spaces and places are large phenomena, beyond the grasp, much less the control of, "spatial experts." The best experts can aim for is to continue as they have, working on the edges. Only fundamental institutional change would alter this fact. True change, both authors maintain, comes from within and rises from the grassroots. In this way they share a final characteristic – hope.

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