

umbrella, read and write a little, and watch the world go by below with a slight detachment. In Alexander's terms this has become a frequently repeated pattern on each occasion I visit, and I associate it strongly with Singapore. There are of course many more such experiences. The point here, however, is that I strongly dislike the rather nasty aluminium garden furniture used by the café, and I hate the loud noise and pollution of the traffic. There is in fact much that could be improved in this setting, and I doubt I would tolerate it as an everyday event at home.

Thus knowing what is good and bad about a setting, and for who, is not so easy to establish, and Alexander and his followers are somewhat mute on such matters. Their work can thus be seen not as a theory but as a collection of practices that might be useful to know about. In effect, this is a sort of distilled vernacular process. Whether architecture that would be seen to have lasting value can really be constructed as a collection of such patterns is even less certain. Venice works as a whole, not just as a collection of parts. There is a meta-language used in Venice of form, shape, proportion and material beyond the organizational features of the place. In fact, to reprise an earlier chapter of this book, it is highly redundant, just as Amsterdam is in a different way. Of course what is repeated is worth repeating, and there is enough variation on the theme, with a few major exceptions thrown in, to keep us interested.

Where Alexander's work comes close to our argument here is by laying emphasis on the qualities of space that come from the repetition of similar patterns of behaviour. After all, in my little café in Singapore I tolerate the inelegant tables, chairs and umbrellas that actually form the space mainly because of the coffee and the views of passers-by and the possibility of detaching oneself from them for a short while. It is perhaps a sobering thought for architects that even for me the desirable dimensions of human relationships and food overcome the rather undesirable fixed architectural features!

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