

city, in order to learn what resources—physical and human—are needed to support, facilitate or enable them’ (p. 78).

David Thomas

Arguing from the basis of closely observed everyday activities David Thomas proposes ‘Normal Usage’ as the basis for a new approach to urban design.²⁶ Instead of concentrating upon the physical environment (those elements that can be owned, designed and individually made) designers should, he argues, concentrate on the realities that people realise during their everyday activities. Such an approach is implicit, but undeveloped, in the continuous, publicly accountable planning process which ‘created opportunities for people to express their concern for the kind of realities that they considered important and did not necessarily own, or that no-one can own’ (p. 5).

The separation of theory and practice

In recent years theory and research have developed apart from urban design practice. The opportunities and needs for the application of research, especially in environmental psychology have, however, been frequently stressed. David Canter sees patterns of behaviour activity and perception as fundamental to any description and design of ‘place’.²⁷ Donald Appleyard²⁸ and Gary Moore²⁹ while more circumspect in their evaluation of the immediate applications, nonetheless emphasise the potential to be explored. Methods for incorporating user viewpoints and needs are widely published and discussed, even in non-specialist design courses.³⁰

Such connections do not seem to have been taken up in the mainstream of urban design where the visual tradition, which translates idea to sketch to drawings to bill to works on site, almost automatically predominates. Recent new work by Kevin Lynch (*Managing the Sense of a Region*³¹) and Christopher Alexander (*A Pattern Language*³²) suggest openings towards a new synthesis of theory and practice of use and design.

A new synthesis of theory and practice

Managing the sense of a region

Traditional urban design analyses and policies with their emphasis on vision alone among the senses,

on normal (‘that is healthy, active, middle-class adults’, p. 86) people, their focus on special designed places and spatial effects, and the separation of aesthetics from other aspects of urban life and experience, receive little attention in *Managing the Sense of a Region*. Lynch’s principal emphasis is to propose an approach to design that deals explicitly with the environment in everyday life.

A consequence of the impoverished orthodoxy of much urban design theory is that fundamental questions of purpose are never asked; but Lynch begins his prescriptive analysis by asking ‘what for?’, identifying reasons and purposes which extend far beyond picturesque spatial effects. Fundamental to all his examples are human experience, use and activity; from them Lynch gives purpose and direction to urban design proposals, so that even the most obviously constructional elements are part of a programme embracing not only vision and aesthetics, but ‘how the well being of persons and small groups arises as they directly interact with their settings, and not primarily from their role of passive observers’ (p. 37).

Such purposes require new techniques and Lynch comments that ‘most sensory studies restrict themselves to a field survey and in so doing they implicitly impose the professional values of their staff on the results and lose much of the inner meaning of the sensed world’ (p. 61). In addition to reviewing techniques for the analysis of spatial and temporal form, sequences, visibility, ambient quality, ambience and information, natural features, from the perspective of ordinary use, Lynch describes techniques to analyse visible activity, spatial behaviour and the images people hold of places. Such integral analyses would systematically identify not only the placing of activity in time and space and how those activities relate to their surroundings, but also ‘how they picture it to themselves, what they feel about it, what it means to them’ for which ‘our basic source of information, however, is direct dialogue with people, and this is an analysis that should never be neglected in any analysis of seamliness’ (p. 111).

A pattern language

The genesis of *A Pattern Language* in the work of Christopher Alexander and the Centre for Environmental Structure has been traced elsewhere.³³ In the present review it is not so much the utopian philosophy behind the language (‘towns and buildings will never be able to be come alive unless they are made by all the people in society