

Walking, Sitting, Sketching:

Un/Building the Future:

the Country & the City in the Anthropocene

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Stepping Inside Coventry Cathedral

Henri Lefebvre speaks of the "spatial architectonics" of cathedrals in *The Production of Space*.

Architectural volumes ensure a correlation between the rhythms that they entertain (gaits, ritual gestures, processions, parades, etc.) and their musical resonance. It is in this way, and this level, in the non-visible, that bodies find one another 1991: 225).

People and Cities Conference in Coventry Cathedral in 1968.

The Hopes and Aspirations of African Nationalism, lecture by Mr K.E de Graft Johnson, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Ghana.

"For a long time it was the underdeveloped world that produced the basic raw material that enabled the rest of the world to develop. We have become as it were your rural field. Most developing countries produce raw materials and they depend upon what whatever price the developed world will give. Any capitalist in any country can afford to close this shop for a long time, but the worker cannot go hungry for too long – we are in the position of not being able to go hungry for too long and therefore we cannot bargain. The only thing we can hope for is a change of heart. African developing nations are not asking for charity, but for a recognition that every worker is worthy of a decent wage. When this is done it could start to help us solve our problems." (p.21-22).

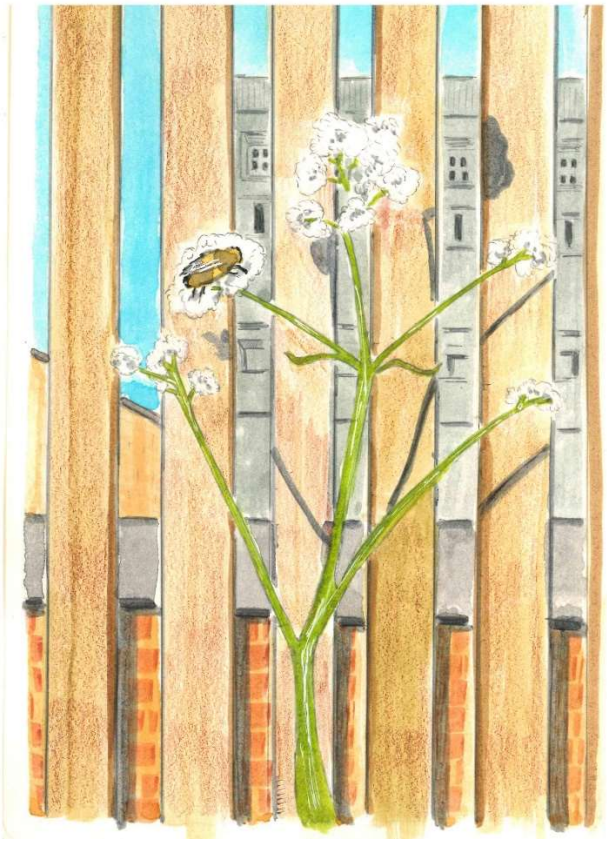

People
and Cities
Conference
Coventry '68

Much of the real history of city and country, within England itself, is from an early date a history of the extension of a dominant model of capitalist development to include other regions of the world. And this was not, as it is now sometimes seen, a case of "development" here, "failure to develop" elsewhere. What was happening in the "city", the "metropolitan" economy, determined and was determined by what was made to happen in the "country" … Thus one of the last models of "city and country" is the system we now know as imperialism.

Raymond Williams *The Country and the City* (1973:279)

Stepping Outside the Cathedral

Jan Gehl (2011) *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space.*



THE LIVE & DYE GARDEN

Coventry Cathedral.

Serviceberry is known as a calendar plant, so faithful is it to seasonal weather patterns. Its bloom is a sign that the ground has thawed and that the shad are running upstream—or at least it was back in the day when rivers were clear and free enough to support their spawning. The derivation of the name "Service" from its relative *Sorbus* (also in the Rose Family) notwithstanding, the plant does provide myriad goods and services. Not only to humans but to many other citizens. It is a preferred browse of Deer and Moose, a vital source of early pollen for newly emerging insects, and host to a suite of butterfly larvae—like Tiger Swallowtails, Viceroys, Admirals, and Hairstreaks—and berry-feasting birds who rely on those calories in breeding season.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *The Serviceberry: an economy of abundance*, https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/the-serviceberry/

The Plant Kingdom has evolved and changed. Today, the names of those early plants are rarely heard. *Psilotum*, *Rhynia*, *Archaeopteris*. They came, they grew, they changed the world and changed with the world—or if they didn't, they are known today only as fossils, for extinction is the fate of most. Far more plant species have come and gone, evolved, and become extinct than are alive today.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Ancient Green: moss, climate and deep time*.
https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/ancient-green/ (20.04.22)

Walking For…

The intrepid walker, activist and writer Rebecca Solnit, states in *Wanderlust* -

"I began hiking ten years ago to walk off my angst during a difficult year. I kept coming back to this route for respite from my work and for my work too…"

One Mile Walk

Walter Benjamin's text which took him 2 years (1924-26) to explore the length of a single, half imagined street in *One-Way St*. A text which is as Nicolas Whybrow puts it:

"A conjunction of the acts of walking and writing – or as I would have it – wandering and wondering." (cited in Nicolas Whybrow, *Street Scenes*, 2005: 79).

The basic metabolic functions of construction and demolition in urban areas produce a huge amount of waste material in the form of concrete, asphalt, brick, masonry blocks, drywall, steel, rebar, ceramic, etc. This material is expensive to remove, so it is typically mixed with fill or simply buried. Like the soil sediment deposited by rivers, the building materials mixed into the soil create a clear geographical and even architectural specificity to the soil. In at least this sense, the soil and the city are mirror images of each other, not only in the negative image of extraction, as has often been pointed out, but also in the positive image of deposition.

Denizen, S. (2012) 'Three Holes. Architecture in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Design, Deep Time', *Science and Philosophy*, 29-46.

Sunday morning, 4 June, we step off one bus, the number 9, to walk across the road to catch another bus, the number 12 to Warwick University, to reach my daughters weekly swimming class. She skips over the zebra crossing, running towards the raised square of mature maple trees, where she will dance amongst the ample umbrella of mature maple trees. Running from one trunk to another. My neck turns, anxiously, from the live electronic timer on the bus stand, to the bottom of the road and my daughter on the mound, which is four feet off the pavement. As soon as I get a sighting for the number 12 double decker grey bus, I start repeating:

The bus is here, come down. Jump off.
Come down, we are going to miss it.
The driver will drive off.

Today, running towards her weekly dance with the trees, she abruptly stops in her playful tracks. She starts running back to me, with wide eyes, catching her breath.

Mum the Trees have gone.

As a take a few steps, I realise what she is trying to process. All of a sudden the trees had been chopped off, they had gone, and were now logs all over the place. Mounds of sawdust were blowing in the air around us. I found it hard to take in the desecration of the mature canopy of trees, of 6-8 trees. And this has occurred on university land.

I take my mobile phone out of my coat pocket; my daughter urges me Mum do something. I say 'I am texting Ann, the tree warden'. She urges 'Mum text everyone, text everyone'.

Hi Ann, sorry to bother you on a Sunday morning. I don't know if you already are aware of the huge trees which have been chopped down on Cox Street.

No Nirmal. It's fine, I have already walked the dog today. Where exactly is this spot.

It is outside the Graham Sutherland building, on university land.

Where exactly is that?

The junction with Jordan Well, on the way to the Herbert Gallery.

I will call the other tree wardens, see what I can find out and get back to you.

My fingers can't text fast enough. It is Sunday morning, should I be bothering people? Of course I should, they would want to know. They also care for the lack of civic care. How the university has shifted from being a post-war public place of education, to a corporate enterprise. I don't swear. I don't cry. My daughter is with me.

Mum tell the newspapers, get it on television.

We bond in rallying against the decomposition of civic life.

She runs from one jaggedly cut trunk to another, witnessing and dancing at the same time. We laugh at how a 3 ft trunk remains.

Mum they couldn't get this one.

She runs through the mounds of tree saw dust, throwing handfuls in the air, recomposing what is decomposing.

Though the trees had been classified as protected, the council raised no objections to the bulldozing. As green compensation for the brutalist architectural plan, new trees are to be planted across the city, a nod towards a recognition of the vitality of trees in an urban environment. The trees had their own memory cut short, leaving open the question, why could they not be incorporated into university development plans sensitive to what is already in place. A relation of kith and kin, developed from being passersby to a civic green heritage was unnecessarily severed with trees that stood tall for over fifty years, shifting, growing and sounding with the wind sun and rain. As Paul Chokran, artist and illustrator, sketched the scene, we discussed how our encounter with the scene felt similar to a masorse (Panjabi word), the grieving that takes place between friends and relations, straight after the death of a close one.

Nirmal Puwar, *One-Mile Walk* (forthcoming, 2024), Punctum Press.

Carparks

A point has been made of convenience for motorists. It will be possible… to enter a
car park from one side of the city centre and to continue through… to another. There
should rarely be need to pull out of a park and go in search of another.
Coventry Evening Telegraph, 1950.

Carparks. No one anymore seems to write or care about these crucial and once celebrated
but, of course, uniquely hollow buildings. Cities are filled with 'gaping holes: parking lots and
cavernous garages at virtually every corner, creating an aura of unfulfilled expectations'9.
Coventry has 24 public carparks, all of them equally anonymous.

Marijn Nieuwenhuis and Aya Nassar 'Porous cities: Coventry through 10 Holes', *Lines of Desire*
http://livingmaps.review/journal/index.php/LMR/article/view/102/186

Ring Road

Propositions for wildly speculating, with a "sixth sense" for the city to be "otherwise", Nicolas Whybrow, turns our attention to a concrete urban infrastructure predominantly designed around the needs of vehicles, stating:

"One 'preposterous proposal', which stands as a metaphoric paradigm of thinking the unthinkable, was to entertain the notion of permanently stopping car traffic on the problematic inner ring-road, repurposing the latter as an 'urban wild' or 'Coventry High Line', with tree planting, urban farming, opportunities for walking and cycling, small and large-scale pop-up events at which the citizens of the city would be *moved to mix and linger*, and so on. In truth, the undulating, 2.5-mile-long ring-road with its nine junctions has proven to be an unwieldy, domineering superstructure, whose sheer scale and presence are disproportionate within the context of a centre that can be crossed in ten minutes on foot. Perhaps its starkest blemish is that its construction necessitated the culverting of the river that runs through the city centre. The ring-road stands now as

a crumbling, propped-up testament to a misplaced 20th century fantasy of the private car as the solution to mobility in small cities, if not the solution to people's lives *per se*. The proposal in question was, then, for a new form of pedestrianised city centre, effectively *surrounding* the existing one, which in turn would reinvent itself as primarily a residential area – housing, and the failure to view it as a universal human right rather than a private financial asset, being another significant factor in the perennial inefficiency of cities."

https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/safer-and-more-sustainable-communities/devolution-hub/devolution-council-resources-8

Whybrow, Nicolas (ed) (2021) *Urban Sensographies* (London and New York: Routledge



Sketches by Manuela Galetto