In its centenary edition this journal published an item entitled "Road Rumour: ground plans for the sky blue city" which reported on the discovery of an anonymous document depicting a part of Coventry's city centre ring-road (Whybrow 2018). Using a montage technique of black and white photography and quoted text, the document in question, which bore the title 'Bare City: "We'll live and die in these towns"', appeared to be presenting a utopian proposal, effectively a détournement, that would witness the repurposing of the ring-road, among other things as an 'urban wild' for pedestrians and cyclists. In other words, vehicular traffic would cease to circulate round it and the citizens of the city would be lured into using it as a space to linger and mingle – effectively a new form of city centre. Reproducing 'Bare City' in its entirety, my framing article sought to contextualise and rationalise this urban fantasy, welcoming the radicalism of its 'subjunctive mood' and giving it credibility as a genuinely constructive attempt towards re-visualising Coventry's city centre as a place that would prioritise people over cars.

At the time it was indicated that a search for further material relating to this 'blueprint' was underway and it has since emerged – in fact, as an immediate consequence of the publication of "Road Rumour" – that further mappings of the ring-road with its nine junctions and ringways either exist already or are in development in a similar basic montage form. These the author in question intends eventually to present as a 'ring cycle' series made up of a portfolio of conjunctions. While the endeavour as a whole remains under wraps (for now), and the author persists, in the interests of continuing to pursue an unencumbered strategy of making radical interventions, to reserve the right to anonymity, permission has been given for a further segment to be published in Performance Research. Where the previous document addressed Ringway St Patricks between Junctions 5 and 6, the present one steers us a little further to the west of the city centre, focusing exclusively on Junction 7. More importantly, where 'Bare City' amounted to a hypothetical projection – a utopia, indeed – this document, entitled 'Dysjunction: These towns will live and die', has been selected as an antithetical counterpart – in the 'disjunctive mood', if you will – presenting as it does a dystopian portrait of the ring-road's underbelly or that which

lurks in its shadows. The inclusion of 'Dysjunction' in the journal's 'On Drifting' issue is appropriate since, as the title of the present article suggests, there is a marked sense of 'road drift' that characterises the structural environment and general atmosphere of Junction 7, where, unlike the dips below grade level at Junctions 5 and 6, the ring-road itself is significantly elevated. Implicitly the abject effects of the ring-road's brutalist <u>presence</u> seem to come drifting down to the junction at ground and sub-ground level. Here too Coventry's river, the murky Sherbourne, has been forced underground, filtering through an elaborate trash-trapping grate and only resurfacing again on the other side of the city centre.

'Dysjunction' represents, then, an attempt to stage its own mapping, a '<u>theatrum</u> Coventry' to invoke de Certeau's important recognition of atlases as theatres (1984: 121). It is a mapping that also seeks to document a residual temporal drift, confronting the reality of the present – what the then-becoming post-war city has become – with the recent past: what future or 'tomorrow' was being dreamed of, or up, for the becoming city in the heady era of 1950s and 1960s civic planning and rebuilding. In other words, it marks the hopeful, subjunctive mood of 'then' drifting entropically towards the disjunctive reality of 'now'. In fact, such a perceived drift would align itself closely with de Certeau's point about atlases as theatres, wherein the narrative figurations of cartography, which "had the function of indicating the operations – travelling, military, architectural, political or commercial – that made possible the fabrication of a geographic plan, […] like fragments of stories, mark on the map the historical operations from which it resulted" (121). And, if the portrait of Junction 7 represents a theatre, perhaps its performance can be seen as that of a flawed protagonist in the historical tragedy that is the projected 'city of tomorrow': the epitome, in fact, of the failed post-war enactment of an all too neat blueprint-as-playscript, whose unseen structural design error was, for all its claims to provide for a pedestrian scene-scape, to focus on buildings, zones and urban layouts rather than bodies and movement in space. A double tragedy, then, invoking the compromised drift away from a modernist urban planning vision whose civic, commons-orientated intentions were in many respects morally laudable and good, but which already contained the seeds of its own demise in taking the abstract 'perfection' and totality of the plan or map to be the territory.

The montage of the ring-road, and Junction 7 in particular, records a drift, but not that of the pedestrian or, indeed, situationist "small group of adepts" in the city (Lavery 2006: 111); rather it is the drift of a road in time and space and, by figurative extension, the drift of the city itself. That spatio-temporal drift, moreover, is also one that can be understood as performing the prevalent mood or <u>sense</u> of the locale, as in 'catching its drift', at which point the effaced pedestrian can be said to stage a reappearance: the ring-road's drift, its sense, projected as the pedestrian's 'scarred mental image' (see Lynch 1960: 45), evokes an atmosphere constituted of defensive concrete barriers, the rush of traffic and a bemusing labyrinth of pathways and tunnels that are figuratively reminiscent of the gutters and drains that receive and process the city's effluences. 'Dysjunction' appears to present a perspectival montage in which a juxtaposing of vertical portrait formats – customarily reserved for the capturing of <u>people</u> or 'figures' – is used to represent the structural landscape of the ring-road environment at Junction 7. The use of a portrait format where landscape dimensions would otherwise be employed to capture the horizontal contours of the cityscape, throws into relief an implicit 'absence of humanity'; these are portraits without people. This aspect of the montage seems to propose a form of architectural construct in its own right – perhaps a photographic artwork-as-architecture – that seeks to evoke, if not celebrate, a kind of negative or tragic sublime based on the sheer scale and brutal(ist) presence of the ring-road as it swoops overhead. If this represents a form of 'theatrical backdrop', foregrounded detail, which deliberately skews perspectival scale, magnifies the sense of entropic drift, a spatio-temporal 'near' to the 'far' of post-war urban planning visions. Meanwhile, the detritus of quote-snippets grafted on to the scene-scape, offers, like the work of taggers, a momentary writing of the city. Thus, as a fragmentary whole, 'Dysjunction' performs a psycho-geographical drift on the page, what the artist Wilfried Hou Je Bek might call a "city-space cut-up" (O'Rourke 2013: 7), whose grainy, somewhat rough and ready presentation echoes the feel of the location, as it simultaneously maps the recovering life and re-death of a city.

Dysjunction: these towns will live and die

Concrete island

"…but there are other islands far nearer home, some of them only a few steps from the pavements we tread every day. They are surrounded not by sea, but by concrete, ringed by chain-mail fences […] As we drive across a motorway intersection, through the elaborately signalled landscape that seems to anticipate every possible hazard, we glimpse triangles of waste ground screened off by steep embankments. What would happen if by some freak mischance, we suffered a blow out and plunged over the guard rail onto a forgotten island of rubble and weeds, out of sight of surveillance cameras?" (Ballard 2014: vii-viii).

Car cost

"People are waking up to the realisation that the dream of ownership is not all it seems: it can be a hugely expensive way of getting the benefit out of a product. […] The average car, for example, sits idle for between 20 and 23 hours a day. For the privilege of having it available you'll pay several thousand pounds in capital or borrowing; several hundred a year in insurance; maintenance costs; taxes; and the cost of depreciation. That's a costly status symbol" (Dobson 2015: 118).

River flow

"What do I think of when I think of Coventry? The ring-road is still the dominant image now. 45 years ago the river was still a dominant feature of the city centre. The ring-road came into being and the river was culverted. […] Coventry wouldn't be here if the river wasn't here. […] The great thing about rivers is that they are social spaces. They are slow, they can change the pace. […] A conversation about a river

in a city is a conversation about flow, pace, about shifting behavioural patterns, activity patterns" (Hawkins 2014: 6 and 8).

Grade separation

"Local transportation authorities usually have it written in their charter that transportation embraces pedestrians as well as vehicles and that they ought to plan for them. But they do not. They plan against them defensively. […] One of the most venerated of planning concepts has been the separation of vehicular from pedestrian traffic. […] From the Victorian era on, almost every utopian projection of the future has featured such separation, often in romantic terms – great bridges and tunnels in the sky, subsurface pleasure grounds and promenades […] The separation provides safety from cars, fumes, noise, and the like. In actual fact, the separation is for the benefit of vehicles. Who gets the prime space? Not the pedestrian. He [or she] had it once: ground level. The point of separation is to get him [or her] off it. So he [or she] is sent to the cellar, or upstairs" (Whyte 2009: 68 and 193).

Mental image

"Motion awareness: the qualities which make sensible to the observer, through both the visual and kinaesthetic senses, his or her own actual or potential motion. […] It is important to maintain some great common [urban] forms: strong nodes, key paths, or widespread regional homogeneities. But within this large framework, there should be a certain plasticity, a richness of possible structures and clues, so that the individual observer can construct his [or her] own image: communicable, safe, and sufficient, but also supple and integrated with his [or her] own needs" (Lynch 1960: 107 and 111).

Social scale

"The classic architectural scale is 1:100. Throughout the world, architectural students are exhorted to draw up their schemes at 1:100. Plans, sections, and elevations. It is a scale that is detailed enough to give a semblance of reality, but not so detailed that one has to confront the actuality of spatial occupation in all its mess and uncertainty. In its removal and abstraction, 1:100 is a comfort zone in which architects can twiddle with compositional niceties and play aesthetic tricks. What if, instead of being a scale of abstracted metrics, 1:100 is first considered a social scale? 1:100: one
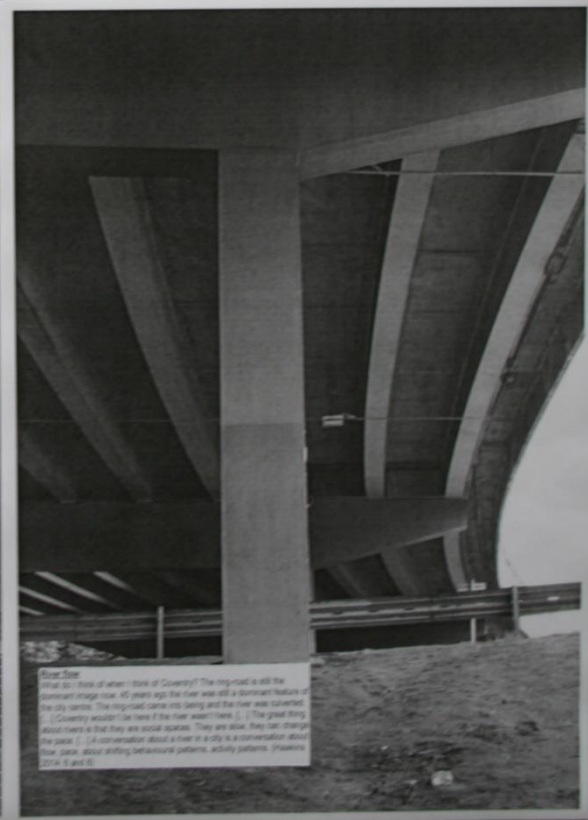
architect to one hundred citizens. What does one do when faced with one hundred different characters? In this light, 1:100 as a social scale assumes an ethical dimension, facing up to one's responsibility for others" (Till 2009: 178-9).
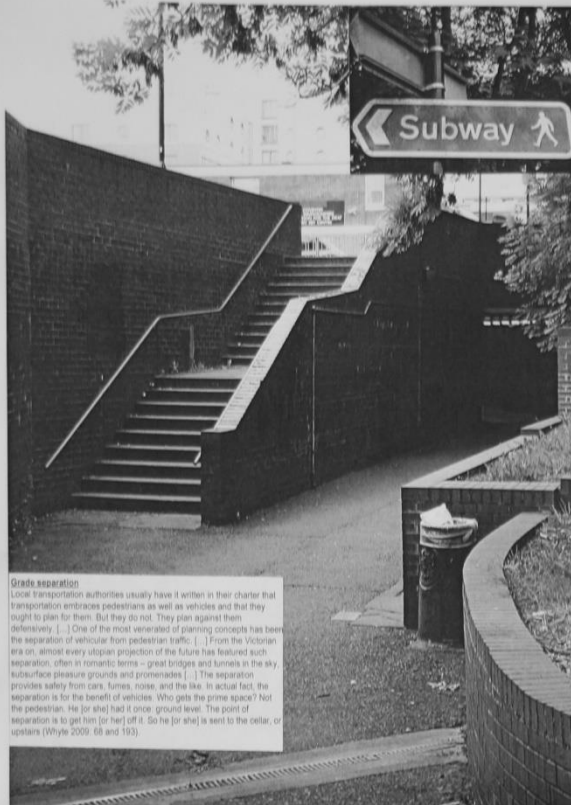
A drama of juxtaposition

"There is an art of relationship just as there is an art of architecture. Its purpose is to take all the elements that go to create the environment: buildings, trees, nature, water, traffic, advertisements and so on, and to weave them together in such a way that the drama is released. For a city is a dramatic event in the environment. […] Since it is an instinctive and continuous habit of the body to relate itself to the environment, this sense of position cannot be ignored; it becomes a factor in the design […] There is, for instance, a typical emotional reaction to being below the general ground level and there is another resulting from being above it. There is a reaction to being hemmed in as in a tunnel and another to the wideness of the square. If, therefore we design our towns from the point of view of the moving person, it is easy to see how the whole city becomes a plastic experience, a journey through pressures and vacuums, a sequence of exposures and enclosures, of constraint and relief. Arising out of this sense of identity, this feeling of a person in street or square, […] we discover that no sooner do we postulate a HERE than automatically we must create a THERE, for you cannot have one without the other" (Cullen 1961: 10 and 12).
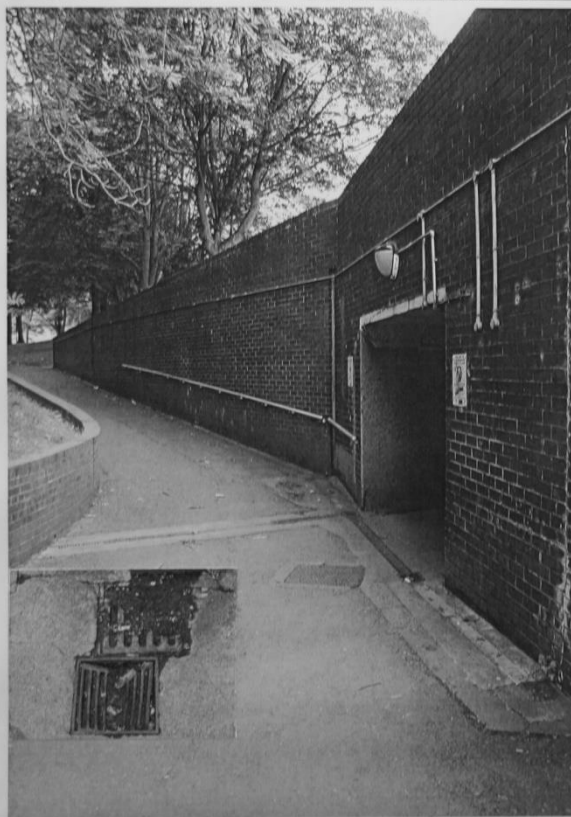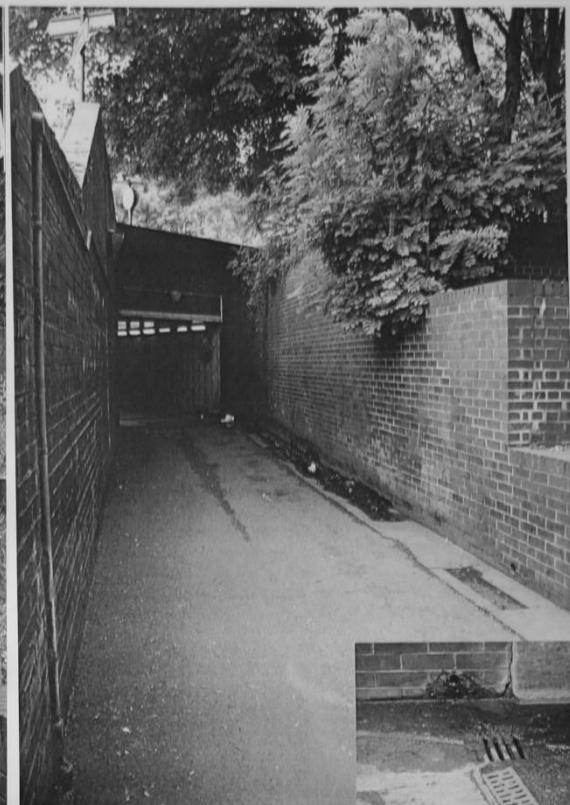
Live towns

"To create civilised, healthy and active town centres, priority has to go first to pedestrians and people with mobility difficulties; then cyclists and those using public transport […] The aim of transport policy in town centres shouldn't be simply to get people from A to B as rapidly as possible; it should be to bring places to life and keep them alive" (Dobson 2015: 180-1).

Dysjunction: these towns will live and die

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...but there are other islands far nearer home, some of them only a few steps from the pavements we tread every day. They are surrounded not by sea, but by concrete, ringed by chain-mail fences [...] As we drive across a motorway intersection, through the elaborately signalled landscape that seems to anticipate every possible hazard, we glimpse triangles of waste ground screened off by steep embankments. What would happen if by some freak mischance, we suffered a blow out and plunged over the guard rail onto a forgotten island of rubble and weeds, out of sight of surveillance cameras? (Ballard 2014: vii-viii)

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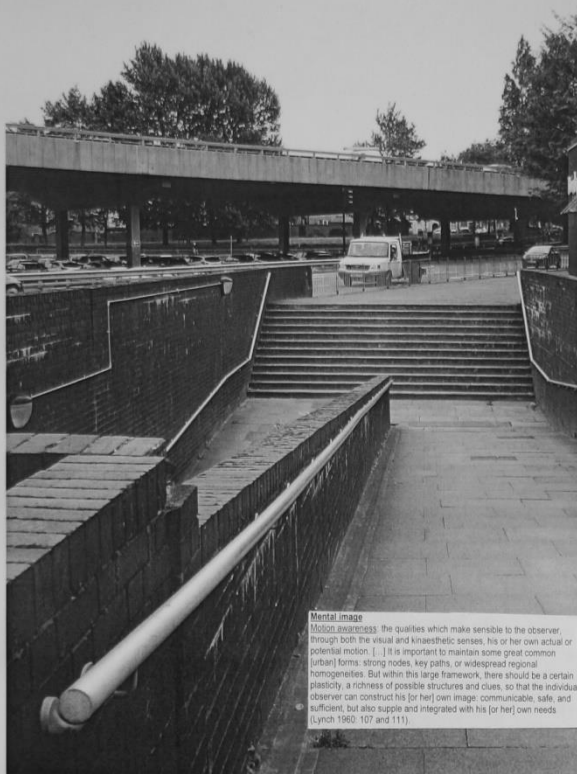
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