

## **“You Ask We Explain”, Part 3**

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MUSIC

STEPHAN

What does it mean when our senses fail us, when the world becomes invisible and all sounds fall silent? Does a child have the right to make their own choices? How do we define happiness?

“You Ask We Explain“, a podcast from TU Dresden in cooperation with the Dresden Art Association, the Cosmo Science Forum, and the City libraries, in the hope that people can change the world.

For me, that's also true today in this exhibition at the Raskolnikov Gallery. Guests from Coventry are also joining us to record our podcast, and our podcast is called ““You Ask We Explain“, so you can contribute to the discussion. I think Dave would be one of those who would like to speak up again, and he's also prepared a few things that are important to him to mention and discuss here.

DAVE

Town Twinning

Town twinning began in 1944 with the Bond of Friendship agreement between Coventry and Stalingrad.

We must remember that this was as much an initiative of our concerned citizens (concerned about developments in the ‘Cold War’ and the increased nuclear threat caused by the Cuban Missile Crisis) as it was of political leaders.

Over a period of about 50 years, Coventry took the initiative to establish 26 town twinning agreements.

Much of this development was driven by ordinary people who welcomed the opportunity to get to know people and places previously unknown to them, particularly in Germany, where hostility and enmity had to be replaced by peace, mutual understanding, reconciliation, and atonement for past aggressions.

Therefore, we maintain the principle that town twinning, as an international exchange of friendship, is for everyone, not just political leaders.

Since 1990, many of these formal, civic ties have become what I call "moribund," frozen into empty repetitions of a historical narrative of which many people have only a vague understanding, or into symbolic acts performed merely to maintain a semblance of honouring the past.

In our experience at CAIF, particularly over the last decade, twinning only has relevance, meaning, and purpose when it is active, consistent, and lasting, and carried out by people who are passionately committed to the original goal: enabling each participating partner to see themselves through the prism of friendship.

In this way, twinning activities offer participants benefits in many forms: they add dimension, meaning, and direction to people's lives and provide emotional well-being by evoking positive feelings from knowing they are working on something valuable for others and for society.

We meet new people, forge new friendships which become lasting ones, and learn and acquire new ideas, knowledge, and insights, often by stepping outside our comfort zone. This is good for personal development, general knowledge, and ... it can be fun and enjoyable.

Partnership activities bring together people from diverse backgrounds, countries, and cultures, benefiting our societies and fellow citizens. Partnerships offer opportunities for lifelong learning, broadening horizons, overcoming stereotypes, and developing mutual understanding. And above all, they promote peace and - where necessary - reconciliation. If partnerships also lead to the development of business relationships, thus contributing to job creation and prosperity, all the better.

Today, our only remaining active friendship partnerships are with Kiel in Schleswig-Holstein, Cork in the Republic of Ireland, and, most notably, Dresden. The traumatic experiences our two cities endured during the Second World War form the basis of our city exchange, within which we jointly fight against the hydra-headed monster of racism that lurks behind all right-wing movements and nationalism, counter the spread of false historical narratives and interpretations, and – particularly for us in Coventry and the United Kingdom – continue to repair the damage caused by Brexit and reconnect with our natural allies and partners in Europe, a relationship that is urgently needed.

STEPHAN

Thank you so much, Dave, for your truly moving words and for painting a societal picture that resonates with us all and that I assume also brings us together here at the Raskolnikov Gallery. With words like these, Dave, you've given us a real boost and an emotional impulse which benefits us all, that makes us say, "Yes, this is right, what we stand for: we stand for exchange, we stand for togetherness, and we stand for a sense of community and exchange among ourselves and with each other." It is with this openness that we naturally go out into the world, and that's why these words haven't faded away in this space, but rather have fallen

on fertile ground and will be carried on and lived out. Many, many thanks to you as well, for your openness and for the insights you've given us.

APPLAUSE  
MUSIC

STEPHAN

Tine, if you think back, you went to Coventry with pictures and exhibited them there, can you say how, in what context, and how people reacted?

TINE

It's difficult for me to generalize. They were basically long-term series, documentaries of businesses, houses, projects, ...

GUENTER  
Families ...

TINE

... and families, over a longer period of time, and that was evident in the exhibition that Mark set up in the Priory (Visitor Centre/Undercrofts) in Coventry, where it was clear that it aroused curiosity and interest in some cases, although I have some doubts here, because there were voices asking why you would tear down something like that, such an old factory (Spinnerei), but then again, it's not entirely unknown in Coventry that existing buildings are torn down and something more modern is built on top of them, regardless of whether it is beautiful or less beautiful. There were mixed reactions, but there was definitely interest. Of course, we had a bit of a language barrier when it came to discussing some sociological issues in depth. If you can't express yourself, it's a shame.

STEPHAN

But on the other hand, you can sense it, you can tell whether someone is open-minded or whether you are met with rejection. Have you ever had the feeling of rejection at any point?

TINE

I can't remember

STEPHAN

Because when I flew to Coventry, I got off the plane and thought, 'You've in the \*\*\*\* now, you're just saying you're from Germany and maybe even from Dresden, so how will people react to that?' Because it's well known how the story unfolded, but I didn't experience that at all.

TINE

So, we had an experience when we were travelling by bus from the brewery to meet Mark, who works at a brewery, when we were travelling back into the city centre from a little distance on the outskirts of the city. We were passengers, we didn't know this man, he heard us speaking German, asked where we were from, and then he heard Dresden and apologised for what England had done to Dresden. I was speechless because it's a crazy world somehow, obviously not so unthinkable for normal people to say something like that. I can't imagine that happening here. I can't imagine it. I've never experienced it, and I simply can't imagine a passer-by on a Dresden tram talking to an English-speaking person, hearing Coventry and then apologising. Unfortunately, I can't imagine it at all, and it really moved me.

STEPHAN

Well, perhaps we can use these ideas and approaches in our daily lives. I always start small and work my way up to the big picture, so there's something quite magical about that.

JOHANNES

But I'm usually more interested in the opposite direction - how the 'big' relates to the 'small' - how you as an individual actually find your way in this sometimes magical, but mostly very sober, world, and then try to find your bearings again. People talk about how our world has become disenchanted, because religion as a phenomenon has been set aside, but without it, things don't really work, and this gap is then filled by other forms that give meaning, and these can be nationalism, or they can be socialism, but it can always be these big, very big ideas that somehow also put the small individual human being in their place, oppress them, weigh them down.

STEPHAN

And somehow we manage to cope with it again or ...

JOHANNES

Sometimes more, sometimes less, yes, and that always depends on many different factors. Mmm ...

STEPHAN

When you walk through Coventry, you can clearly see so many traces, so on the one hand you can see that this city has been virtually rebuilt, that many new buildings have been constructed, and that there is a kind of historic city centre, a kind of 'heritage' area where old houses have been thrown together again as they once were, but on the other hand, you tend to see new buildings. When I walk through Dresden and along Prager Strasse and then come to the Kulturpalast, I even see parallels there, so it's as if history is repeating itself in both cities on that level.

SABINE

Yes, definitely, after the war, the question was how to deal with our cities, and that was no different in Germany than in Great Britain and many other European cities. Modernism was

very much on the rise, and there were modern approaches to urban planning and a lot of 'tabula rasa', so, not long after the destruction, there was a lot of clearing away as well, that didn't need to be cleared away, and there were already plans for this before in Coventry. Above all, what is not so well known is that the destruction of the entire city centre was actually planned before the Second World War, not by the Germans, but by the city planners, in Coventry, the city architect, who wanted to destroy the entire city centre and rebuild it in a modern style and with modern interior design. It was only the war that made this conversion and new construction possible.

STEPHAN

But today, once again, with all this redevelopment of the city centre, if I've understood correctly ...

SABINE

Yes, unfortunately, the Phoenix has also been declared a symbol - the Phoenix rises from the ashes - so everything that is reduced to ashes and then rises from the ashes is more beautiful than ever, so to speak. That is actually a very destructive symbol, which is not helpful. I myself take the view that a city must always show these layers, and a city, a living city, has old and new and things that mix together, and this 'tabula rasa' actually repeats the trauma over and over again, the trauma that is then repressed again, and so there are some very interesting dynamics at play, but it's not necessarily always in demand. So, now we have Coventry City Centre South, where whole sections of the post-war reconstruction are simply being demolished and rebuilt.

GUENTER

It will be huge.

SABINE

Yes, huge, a huge area, and the developer has no interest in the history or what lies behind it, and the city is not strong enough to oppose it.

STEPHAN

If I may put it in simple terms, it sometimes rains in Great Britain, but then there are actually buckets everywhere in these shopping centres because water comes through the ceiling everywhere, and that really affected me because I noticed a kind of social distortion that is very present in this region, and I sometimes thought to myself, well, if this is a development that we are going through as a society, the automotive industry, as we can see in the pictures, the British automotive industry has clearly fallen behind the Saxon automotive industry, and if you want to continue developing and constructing such scenarios, then I somehow had a \*\*\*\* feeling about it.

SABINE

Yes, and Coventry isn't the only example of this, because there are many cities in Great Britain that look like this, and there was no money left for normal building maintenance.

Although a lot was invested before and after the war, there was then a lack of money for basic things like building maintenance, where roofs are maintained and repaired and so on, and there was no urban development programme like in Germany, where there was always a lot of money available and cities could do something. So many cities have problems and look like this, and it's no different in Coventry. And of course, this is reflected in how people from Coventry see their city themselves, with a lot of scepticism, a lot of criticism and a lot of negative opinions.

MUSIC

APPLAUSE

STEPHAN

Have we arrived back at the start and can take a breath?

GUENTER

No, I wanted to say something else about Sabine's statement, namely that it all seems so familiar to me. New construction is lucrative, but there's no money for preservation, and that's how it looks, and I think we all know where that comes from, right, the cityscape.

STEPHAN

So, a completely different meaning right away.

GUENTER

Yes, I take that in the right sense, I wasn't born in March, the cityscape in Coventry surprised us a bit, you stand in front of a half-timbered house and think, Oh God, Olde England, Shakespeare is just around the corner, and then we realise, yes, the thing is 20 years old. Our friend Nikolai put it nicely, he says, if there's a hole somewhere in Coventry and an investor comes along, he goes there and builds something there. If there's no hole, he punches a hole in it ... that's how it looks sometimes. However, I think we felt very comfortable because that's the city centre. We didn't get to see too much because we worked hard here, but what makes a very lively impression and what we particularly liked, of course, was that (only) about 50% of the people were white.

STEPHAN

But, together after all.

GUENTER

And everyone was very friendly and polite. When the traffic comes through, and you never know how to cross the road, you just raise your arm and everything stops and waits. We really liked the politeness and friendliness in the shops and in the hotel itself.

STEPHAN

After seeing the parallels in architecture, after seeing the social and historical parallels, we come back to what Rainer said at the very beginning - that we are small cogs in the wheel

and can bow to external pressure, but we can still make a difference, and I believe that if we carry this in our hearts and in our interactions, we can already achieve a great deal.

STEPHAN

Thank you very much for being here as our audience. Thank you to Sabine Caddy Schäbitz as architect, thank you to Günter Starke and Tine Starke as photographers and hosts here at the exhibition, thank you to Johannes Schütz as historian for the insights and for putting everything into context. Thank you Rainer Barczaitis for the anecdotes, for keeping watch together, and for the many stimulating ideas that you have given me in the latest conversations we have had, and many thanks to the people in Coventry, from Coventry, who also opened the door for me and made me feel welcome, and to all of the Podcast team: Johannes Gersten Gabe with the studio, Jo Aldinger with the organ, and André Wirsig, who takes the photos for us and always posts them on the homepage. Thank you, Doreen, for your patience and participation. Many thanks to Galerie Raskolnikow. I hope I haven't forgotten anyone, and many thanks to Nikolai, who has always brought us together so well on the phone. Unfortunately, he couldn't be here today. Many thanks to all of you.

APPLAUSE

MUSIC

APPLAUSE