

TWO STANZAS FROM *DOZENS*

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Plink, plink, plink. The trees on the plan are seeds  
for trees in the world in neat rows to show  
scale, to relieve the brutalizing of concrete,  
apologizing--as bas relief motifs  
of oak and acanthus and ivy leaves used to  
acknowledge nature out there somewhere, begging  
its gentle blessing or forgiveness. Nature  
and art now are fixed percentages  
of the cost, the public policy paying lip service  
to what no one believes. Each tree has its hole  
in the concrete where dogs go, bunched over,  
straining to imagine fertile fields.

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So Carlos Williams begins, considering  
a dog sniffing, considering, a tree  
in Paterson. A dreadful city, as Whitman's  
Camden is a dreadful city. The worse  
it is, the better it is. To live in a foundered  
dream is instructive. The squalid moment, blind  
as a boarded window, turns the vision inward  
or backward to the dead builders' desires  
for grace and order. Communal efforts, cities  
are cathedrals of our time, never finished,  
monuments to the happenstance of what  
we are, or wanted, or what has become of us.