SAMPLE

Building the Parks, Gardens and Recreation Infrastructure of Tomorrow

Anatomy of the Machine That Keeps the Ground

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IntroductionIntroduction

A state that mows a lawn no merchant paid for is making an unusual promise, and this book is about the office that keeps that promise. Parks, gardens, playgrounds, trails, allotments and playing fields are the country's quietest public works, and their whole catalogue of products fits in a sentence: a gate unlocked at the printed minute, a swing that holds a child heavier than the last one, a meadow left long so a wild thing can finish its summer, a bench with a stranger's name kept readable. The volume walks through that machinery one organ at a time, in the company of an invented country whose rules are short enough to quote and whose numbers are small enough to check with a pencil and a park bench to lean on.

The invented country carries about ten million people on about a hundred and thirty thousand square kilometres of ground. On that ground the machine keeps roughly four thousand two hundred parks and gardens of public size, one national park covering about three thousand square kilometres, some twelve thousand playgrounds, about eighteen thousand kilometres of signed walking route, a shade over two million trees along its streets and in its parks, and forty thousand allotment plots, for which the waiting list is itself a public document. One figure makes the scale felt: the amenity grass, the picnic kind, runs to about forty thousand hectares and is cut around twenty times between the late frosts, which works out, keeper for keeper, at roughly two kilometres of mowing per person per day through the growing months, an arithmetic any visitor can repeat with a stopwatch and a pace count.

Like every organ in this catalog, the machine's founding promise is written as a refusal. The National Parks and Gardens Authority does not sell so much as a metre of what it keeps. It raises no stadium, fields no team, referees no show and stages nothing, not even its own band programme, except under a licence it publishes and may be refused by. Its verbs are the patient ones: keeping, inspecting, letting, planting, opening, recording. Every louder use of the ground, the tournaments, the travelling fairs, the camera crews, the visitor counts, the floodplain's watery duties, is owned by machines this series has already opened, and each such machine comes to this one as a tenant, its hours agreed on a booking form the public may ask to read.

The volume's difference from its eighty one siblings is worth stating plainly, because it explains the chapters' method. Most of the catalog's machines meet a citizen rarely, at a counter, a bedside or a border; this one has carried her since she was lifted onto a swing, and it will carry her grandchildren on the

same inspected bolts. She has never once been asked why she came, because the coming is the point. So the chapters send her nowhere special: to stand on her own local grass and read its mowing standard against the actual cut, to be at a gate exactly when the printed hour arrives, to kneel at a slide and find the plate that certifies the last inspection, to count a ranger's queue. A keeping machine can offer the public no other proof than ground it may stand on and test.

The arithmetic habit of the series gets its paragraph here, for the reader who trusts sums more than sentences. Twelve thousand playgrounds divided into quarterly rounds is three thousand inspections a month, or about one hundred and fifty on an ordinary working day, and the inspector service carries sixty staff, which is two and a half sites per inspector per day, honest work at an honest pace that a schoolchild with the timetable and a calculator can verify to the last bolt. Two million trees on a five-year survey cycle is four hundred thousand soundings a year, which is why the register is drawn from the window of a van and not from the top of a ladder. The chapters keep every figure on that scale of checkability, a discipline the invented country's founders prized above any specimen tree they ever planted: sums the governed can repeat are trust that does not need a custodian.

The week the volume follows is deliberately overcrowded, and the crowding is the machinery visible. A quarterly playground round comes due across the eastern district just as a night gale fells the avenue oak in the city's oldest park, and the tree the gale spared leans over a school path and wants a judgment. The trail crew's season opens at a gorge whose footbridge has been found off its abutments by the melt. The allotment registrar must publish the year's plot list, forty plots against sixty one applicants, and pin it to the door at the printed minute. And a travelling fair wants the park meadow on the very weekend the fixture list claims both recreation grounds, so the fair's licence and the leagues' fixtures arrive together, on one clerk's Friday, under a rule that can bless only one of them. Hold those six troubles from the volume's Monday to its final page, and the organs will have introduced themselves by the end.

Two undertakings govern the telling, for anyone starting the series mid-shelf. The first is that nothing in the chapters exceeds what a person can verify from public ground: a bench, a noticeboard, a committee room with its door propped, a sheet anyone may hold. Rules are quoted in the maintenance code's own words, never summarised, so the reader can put the sentence and

the grass side by side. The second is that the country itself is made up, its storms scheduled, its oaks felled on cue, its gardeners and rangers drawn from a teaching imagination, for the reason the founders wrote in the margin of their charter: practice machinery needs weather it can order, and no real town deserves the blame of losing its avenue on demand.

Before the organs take the week, the calendar deserves a look, since the machine's anatomy shows best in its timetable. Monday is for the lists: the weekend's accident papers read in order, the gale call entered, the bridge report received and given a number. Tuesday puts the machine on its knees in the drizzle, wrench on bolt, tape on stump, ear on the spared oak's lean. Wednesday belongs to the trail crew and its gorge, where a season's promise is either a bridge by noon or a notice saying why not. Thursday is soil business, the plot list pinned, a refusal explained from the rule rather than from pity. Friday is the counter turned weekend-ward, one licence decided, the booking sheet closed, the mowers racked. Then Saturday and Sunday are the product: the grounds, full, ordinary, working to print. No organ manufactures that, and none may invoice it twice.

Two working customs of this machine have stories, and both are told here because every organ keeps them. The first is the name-board: no piece of the country's kept ground exists without one human being named on a board at the gate as answerable for it, a rule drafted after a common was found grazed by nobody, cut by nobody and picnicked upon by everybody, a wilderness with a deed. The second is the free hour: every organ must publish at least one hour in which a stranger may simply watch it being honest, the weighing of a decision at the ranger's bothy, the van at the tree, the minute-taking in committee, because the founders believed ground the public cannot watch being kept becomes ground the public is told it cannot enter. The chapters keep meeting both customs, and a reader who learns to spot them will recognise the machine's character whatever uniform it wears.

The book works as a tool as much as a story, and the chapters were built for disordered reading. A dangerous swing sends the reader to the fifth chapter, a spanner's worth of understanding in pocket. A closed footbridge sends them to the sixth, whose notice explains exactly what the crew owes the public and by when. A reader curious how a public office loses gracefully should jump straight to the tenth, where the acquisition fund must print, in full, the meadow it wanted and the warehouse that got it. The chapters' checks cost nothing but eyes and a bus fare, no licence, no qualification, no reason given,

which is the machine's own doctrine returned as prose. The price asked back is the machine's everyday politeness: note what you find, cite the code you cited it from, post the note to the office on the board. A reader who ends this book having sent one such note has been on the staff for an afternoon.

From the authority that governs ground nobody may buy, the route runs through the city's breathing lawns and the tables that keep them honest, past the wild park's gate and the queue it refuses to fake, into the glasshouse where every leaf has a file, out to the swings on their quarterly bolts, up the gorge to the crew's bridge, under the counted canopy with the sounding van, onto the pitch whose Saturday is booked in ink, down among the plots and their published waiting list, and home through the endowment that buys the last meadow before the warehouses do, holding, all the way, to the covenant that outlasts the council that wrote it.

The vocabulary of the machine deserves a paragraph before the walk begins, because the catalog's words are chosen, and the reader who knows why will read every chapter faster. A printed day, in this volume, means a day the machine has published in advance, the notice, the agenda, the round, the pinning, the ballot, and the country's whole trust in the machine rests on the difference between a printed day and a promised one, which is that the printed day has an address and a form. An honest report means the machine's own account of its failings, written by the machine, published by the machine, and the adjective honest, the founders insisted, belongs to the report and not to the machine, because machines are only honest when the paperwork forces them, which is the whole reason the paperwork exists. A printed rule means a rule the governed may hold, on paper, at the counter, for the cost price, and the phrase is not poetry but a specification: if the citizen cannot own the rule, the rule does not exist, only a practice with delusions. And the word organ, which this volume uses where other books would say office or department, is the founders' own joke with a serious point: an organ can be transplanted, and the catalog's machines are built so that any one of them could be moved, whole, into another country's public life and begin work the next Monday, because the rules are printed, the staff are named and the records travel, and the founders wanted their organs to be that good.

The composite country itself should be introduced properly, because the reader will spend a book in it. The country of this catalog is assembled the way a proving ground is assembled, from the terrain every real country eventually faces: a capital that densified too fast, an old industrial north, a farming

middle, a wild upland west, a river that floods honestly, a coast the storms are reorganising, and a public that is, in the founders' phrase, every bit as good as any real public, neither better nor worse, which is why the machine works and why the machine needs working. The founders of the composite country are a generation the catalog keeps half fictional and wholly serious: a drafting parliament that argued in public, a set of committee rooms, a civil service that believed in forms, and a few citizens with petitions, and their single shared conviction, printed on the first page of every code in the catalog, is the sentence this volume has already quoted and will go on quoting, because it is the whole machine in one line: the public may be trusted with the truth about its own institutions, because the truth is what the institutions are for. Everything the reader will meet in the week that follows, the gate that refuses the coach operator's money, the registrar who pins the queue, the fund that prints its regrets, is that sentence wearing a uniform and doing a job.

And the week itself, the volume's chosen clock, should be explained before it starts, because the catalog's weeks are not a gimmick but a method. A machine's true character appears at its busiest and dullest extremes, so the volume walks one ordinary week, Monday's cut to Sunday's dusk, chosen by the archive's own statistics as the median week of the median season, no bank holiday, no storm, no scandal, the machine at its working temperature. The reader should expect, therefore, no drama in the chapters that follow, and should read the absence as the deepest fact in the book: the machine's triumph is that its median week is boring, and the week will produce its eleven past nine, its drizzle, its torqued bolts, its regrettably lost ridge and its patiently won meadow, and anyone wanting to learn what a country actually is should watch what it does when nothing is happening, which is what the founders said they wanted the catalog to record, and what this volume, beginning tomorrow morning in the clerk's office with the Monday orders, is about to do.

How to read this volume is the catalog's last piece of front matter and the reader's shortest preparation. The chapters stand in the week's order and may be read in any order, because the machine is round, not linear, and the reader who begins at the allotments will arrive at the fund by the same arithmetic as the reader who begins at the committee table. Each chapter keeps the same room: an opening scene at working temperature, the organ's papers and powers, the week's visits, the checks a reader may perform, and then the deeper layers the expansion passes added, the people, the origins, the field-guide notes, the futures, the hand-offs and the chapter's own teaching, so

that the volume may be read at two depths, once as a walk and once as a study, and both readings are the intended one. The catalog's other volumes are cited where they touch this machine, the surveyor's, the flood, the legal, the tree-adjacent, and the reader who owns the set will find this volume's organs handing papers across the shelf, which is the catalog's quiet ambition: one composite country, kept by one grammar, described book by book until the whole machine may be audited from a chair, and the reader who finishes this volume has audited a tenth of it, and is welcome to the other seventy nine.

A note on the volume's style is owed to the reader who has met the catalog before, and to the reader who has not. The sentences are long because the machine's sentences are long: a printed rule must carry its exceptions, its addresses and its appeal route inside itself, or it is not a rule but a hope, and this volume's prose has tried to honor the drafting without imitating the pain, with mixed success the reader will judge. The composite numbers, the forty thousand hectares, the sixty one names, the two thousand and forty souls, are the archive's own, held consistent from chapter to chapter and auditable in the honest report's tables, and where the volume says printed, public or for ever, it means the words as the code uses them, as promises with addresses, and not as the newspapers use them, as weather. There is no hero in the book, by design: the machine's founders thought the heroic style the beginning of every public lie, and the volume has obeyed them, and if the reader finishes the week wanting to write one letter to one office about one bench, the style has done its work.

The acknowledgements the catalog permits itself are short and unheroic, and this volume should close its front matter with them. The composite archive, whose numbers this book borrows, is a fiction kept with the discipline of a real one, and the volume's debt to the drafting style of the act, the long clauses, the printed courtesies, the standing rule that the loser's argument is kept beside the winner's, will be visible on every page and is acknowledged here once with gratitude and a small apology, because style is the one thing a machine's founders are never modest about. The keepers, rangers, registrars, clerks and valuers who appear in these chapters are invented at true scale, and the volume's one hope for them is the reader's own: that the composite country's public servants will be recognised in them, and the reader will be moved to check the reality, which is the catalog's entire method of being useful, and the rest of the book, from the Monday orders onward, is the checking.

Chapter 1. The Parks Authority — Where the Common Ground Is GovernedChapter 1. The Parks Authority — Where the Common Ground Is Governed

The National Parks and Gardens Authority was not born whole, and its birth certificate is a quarrel. For a generation before the merger, the city's ornamental gardens answered to a gardens committee that would not cut grass on a Sunday, the recreation grounds answered to a trust that would not plant a tree it could not charge a fee beneath, and the commons answered to conservators who would not mend a fence until a bullock proved the need. Three boards, three hats, and between them a hundred plots of public ground that belonged to all three rules and therefore, on any given morning, to none. The merger act that folded the three into one authority is a short document, and its drafting note is shorter still: the ground does not care which committee keeps it, so there shall be one keeper per ground, one book of rules, and one public name on the gate.

The authority that emerged holds a power that is mostly the power to refuse. It may not sell a metre of the ground it keeps, a rule that has survived four councils and two wars in the composite country's invented history. It may not build a venue, so the stadium the city wanted on the meadow was built by the sports machine of an earlier volume, on ground that machine bought, and the meadow is still a meadow. It may not run a league, judge a marrow, or stage so much as a band concert without a licence it grants itself under its own published conditions, which sounds like a conflict and is in fact the point: the licence is public, the conditions are printed, and the authority's own event on its own ground must meet them or be refused like anyone else's. What the authority may do is quieter and larger: keep, inspect, let, plant, open, and record. The founders of the composite country, drafting late into the night of the merger, wrote that the new office should hold the ground the way a good tenant holds a flat, and every reader who has rented a flat will understand both the dignity and the strictness of that ambition.

The rulebook the authority keeps is called the maintenance code, and it is the most-ragged, least-read and most important document in the machine. The code is public, and its tables are why. It grades every parcel of kept ground into one of four amenity classes, and it prints, for each class, the mowing height, the cut interval, the litter round frequency, the hedge cut, the leaf clearance date, and the number of benches per hectare below which a ground

may not fall. The amenity grade, the picnic lawn, is cut to about forty millimetres roughly every ten days in the growing season; the meadow grade is cut twice a year, once in July and once after the seed has set, precisely so that an orchid the city does not own can finish its private business; the rough grade under the pylons gets one flail pass a year and an apology to nobody. A citizen who believes her lawn is neglected does not telephone a councillor, she opens the code, finds her class, and counts the days since the last cut, and the keeper, challenged from the printed page, answers from the printed log, and either the log or the challenge is wrong, and both are dated. This is the machine's deepest habit: the argument about the grass is conducted by number, in public, and somebody wins it, by name, on paper.

The authority's governing committee meets in public every quarter, and the meeting is dull by design. The agenda is fixed by the code: the asset register read and confirmed, the accident file summarised, the fee waivers for the quarter granted or refused in a batch, the season's works list approved, and one item, always last, called matters brought by strangers, in which any resident may put any question about any ground and receive an answer in the minute. The minute is the meeting's product, and it is drafted the way the founders insisted: every decision with its reasons, every refusal with the rule quoted, every deferred item with the date it returns. A reader who attends once learns the trick the regulars know, which is to read the register item before anything else, because the register never lies about the quarter: if a gate, a bridge or a bowling green is listed as open and is not, the committee's own first item is its own audit, held in front of the public, in the first fifteen minutes, before anyone can make the meeting interesting.

The money is simpler than the ground, and it is published more frankly. The authority draws a precept from the rates, a fixed slice that the council may trim but may not raid, and it holds the parks fund, an endowment built from a century of bequests, of which only the income may be spent, a rule a rich widow wrote into her will with a lawyer's teeth and the country has honoured ever since. Fees flow in from the bookings the later chapters follow, the sports pitch hours, the allotment rents, the film crews and the fairs, and they flow out again in a table the committee prints each quarter, income by source, spend by organ, variance explained in sentences. The fee waivers deserve their own paragraph in this chapter because they are the machine's politeness made into procedure: the code publishes the discounts, free pitch hours for junior leagues, free room heat for the pensioners' gardening club, half-plot rents for anyone the social register certifies, and it publishes them precisely so that no

applicant must stand in an office and make a case for mercy, because the founders held that a discount a citizen must beg for is a discount the machine will eventually forget to print, and a poverty the machine may not look at is a client the machine has shown the gate.

The staff of the authority is small per hectare and large per stranger, and its shape explains the calendar the whole book follows. Each region is kept by a round of keepers, the men and women with the mowers, the brushes and the keys, each with a named parcel and a name-board at its gate. Above and beside them stand the specialists the organs of this volume belong to: the rangers of the national park, the horticulturists of the botanical garden, the playground inspectors with their torque wrenches, the trail crews with their season, the tree officers with their van, and at the centre the clerks, whose booking sheets and minutes are the machine's true skeleton. The founders' staffing note survives in the code's preface, and it is the sentence every new keeper is made to copy out once, by hand, before being given keys: the ground must be kept by someone whose name fits on a board, and the books must be kept by someone whose name fits in the minute, and the two names may be the same person, and the machine breaks on the morning neither name can be produced.

The Monday of this volume's week begins, as the machine's Mondays always do, with the lists brought current, and the reader should watch how much governing happens in that plain sentence. The eastern district's quarterly playground round is due, and the inspection order is cut, sixty sites, printed, each with its last report's findings attached so the inspector must face his own history at each bolt. The weekend's accident file is read aloud in the Monday meeting, in order, with names removed and dates kept: a slipped swing chain with no injury, a bee swarm on a bowling green, and, logged at half past five on Sunday morning, the gale call, the avenue oak down across the park road, the road closed by the keeper on her own authority, the stump measured, and the spared tree, the one whose lean the file has watched for two seasons, standing forty metres from a school path. By the Monday's end the bridge report from the gorge has arrived too, the crew's foreman having walked in on foot to file it, a photograph paper-clipped to the page, and the week's three hardest problems are now three numbered items with three named keepers, which is what the founders meant by a list being brought current.

The honest report is the authority's annual organ of self-examination, and it is a document the committee dreads and publishes anyway. The report prints

the year's accidents with their causes, the inspections missed and made good, the fee waivers taken up and, more painfully, not taken up, the grounds that fell below the code's bench count, the trees lost against the trees planted, and, in a table that costs the chairwoman a night's sleep every year, the minutes taken to answer the strangers of the last four quarters, averaged, with the worst case named. The founders' instruction for the report is printed on its cover in the composite country's plainest ceremonial style: print the weakness first, the strengths last, and the reader who skips to the strengths has read the wrong half of the book. The machine's founders, who had watched three boards spend three generations telling the public how good the grass was, wrote the single-sentence rationale into the act itself, that a keeper's accounts must read like a keeper's ledger, losses where the losses are, and that a public that cannot find the weakness in the report will go looking for it in the ground.

The boundary paragraphs, which this series calls the sibling hand-offs, are a matter of survival for a volume about ground, because ground is the commodity every other machine in the catalog wants a corner of. The sports machine of the thirtieth and thirty-first volumes owns the stadium, the league and the academy, and this volume owns only the public pitch and its booking sheet. The entertainment machine of the twenty-ninth volume owns the theme park, the rides and the queue engineering, and this volume's playground owns only the public swing, which is smaller, older and inspected more often. The heritage machine of the seventy-fourth volume keeps the register on which a designed park may stand as a protected landscape, and where that happens, as it happens to the composite country's oldest ornamental ground, the two machines keep the same grass by a published co-keeping rule, the heritage office owning what the design means and this office owning what the ground does, the boundary between them drawn not on the map but in the code, where any reader may watch it hold. The flood machine of the seventy-third volume owns the hydraulic rule that lets a riverside park fill with storm water by design, and this volume keeps that same ground on the three hundred and sixty one days the design is not asked for, and the founders of both machines signed the joint note that now hangs in both committee rooms, that the park that floods is a flood organ on the wet day and a parks organ on the dry ones, and neither machine may pretend the other does not exist. The forestry machine of the sixty-seventh volume owns the production forest and its yield, and this volume's tree officer owns only the urban canopy, the street and park trees, counted, registered and sounded in the seventh chapter. The visitor

machine of the eightieth volume counts the people on the ground and sells them the welcome; this volume only grows what they stand on. A reader who holds all six boundaries at once holds this volume's entire foreign policy.

The chapter's checks, like every chapter's, are for the reader's own hands and need nothing but a bus fare and a working eye. Read the maintenance code first, in any regional office or on any noticeboard, and find the class of the nearest lawn, and count its benches against the printed minimum. Attend one quarterly committee if the reader's calendar allows, and listen to the register item, and afterwards read the minute against the meeting, which takes an hour and teaches more than a year of opinions. Find the name-board at the nearest gate, and verify that its keeper exists by the only test the machine admits, the free hour rule, and if the hour has passed unposted, write the note, quote the rule, and send it to the office the code names. And once in a life, read the honest report cover to cover, weakness half first, because a citizen who has done that once cannot ever again be told that the ground keeps itself, or that the grass is an accident of weather, or that the bench with the brass plate was put there by nobody, for nothing, which is, in the end, the whole doctrine of this machine compressed to a single sentence: the ground is kept, by a person with a name, on a budget that is printed, for a public that owes no reason at all.

The people of the authority deserve their paragraph, because a machine this printed runs on a staff small enough to know by name. The composite clerk who cut the Monday orders in this chapter's first pages has held the desk eleven years, and her drawer holds the predecessor's card index, kept current, because the office holds as standing law that a machine inherits its staff's memories or loses them. The chairwoman of the committee is a botanist by first trade, and her casting vote, the record shows, has gone against her own science twice, both times for the playground budget, both times recorded without comment, which the staff themselves call the highest style the room knows. The director keeps the founders' habit of walking one park each morning before the office opens, unannounced, with the code's paperback in the coat pocket, and the keepers' private name for the hour is the audit of the birds, because nothing is ever found, and everything is always better the mornings after. These people are invented, like the country, but they are invented at true scale: the authority's whole payroll, printed in the honest report, is two thousand and forty souls for four thousand two hundred grounds, a ratio the committee defends with the founders' own arithmetic, that a machine that could afford to watch the grass would be a machine that had

stopped trusting the citizen to.

The origins of the authority are printed in the act's preamble, and the reader should know them because the machine's shape is the history's shape. The country's parks began as three rival keepings: the capital's flagship park, founded by a subscription of citizens who wanted boating and ended up, by the subscription's own deed, owning the boating lake's banks in trust for ever; the district grounds, bought by the old town councils with the rates of their day and hedged with covenants the founders later had to honour at real cost; and the commons, the ancient grazing ground of the villages the city swallowed, which the country's own law had kept open by the accident of an old rebellion's aftermath. The act's drafting decade was spent mostly on the seams, and the honest history, kept in the archive, records the founders' hardest argument, between the party that wanted a single national keeping and the party that wanted the old councils' grounds kept local, and the settlement is the machine the reader has met, a single code and committee over a keeping that is federally enrolled, ground by ground, with each deed, covenant and trust carried forward unrepealed, which is why the authority's law list is longer than its payroll and why the committee's first standing rule, printed in the code's preface, is that the machine is the trustee of the dead as much as the servant of the living, and both at once, or nothing.

The field-guide note for the authority's papers is a practical page for the reader who wants to hold the machine's documents, and the volume closes each chapter with one from here. The committee's minute is printed within ten days of every sitting and kept at the record office's counter and on the noticeboard's paper week, and the minute's finding aid is the agenda it answered, printed with it, so the reader should always take the pair. The code's paperback edition, updated and dated each spring, is sold at the counter at the printing cost and given free at the free hour to anyone who asks for it, and the reader should check the title page's date against the spring of the year, because an old code is an honest document of what the machine used to be and a dishonest guide to what it is. The honest report appears each quarter with the year's table at the back, and the reader's fastest audit of any claim in this volume is the report's index, which is printed by organ and by ground, so that a sceptic may go from a sentence like this one to a table with numbers in it in a single walk, which is the entire design of the machine's paperwork, and of this volume's method in teaching it.

The future of the authority is already on the committee's table, because a

machine that keeps ground for ever must plan in decades the way other offices plan in quarters, and the long view deserves the volume's last word on the parent organ. The climate decade ahead is the largest entry in the honest report's forward pages, and the machine's planners treat it as a works order for the whole catalog: the meadow long, the tree stock diversified against the hard summers, the flood tolerance of the riverside grounds printed into the wish list's prices, and the drought's water economy written into the bedding books' futures as a doctrine the horticultural world is only now catching up with. The demographic arithmetic is quieter and stranger, the greying country that will need more benches, flatter paths and the shade of trees it planted in a younger country's springs, and the committee's forward minute on it is the machine's own voice, planning, as its founders put it, for the citizens it will never meet, on the strength of the citizens it does. The technology the machine will adopt is deliberately unglamorous and already visible in this volume's pages: the register, the file, the printed day and the public paper, digitised where digitising helps the reader find the drawer faster, and never once where the paper is the promise, and the committee's standing sentence on the matter is the last of this chapter's quotations and the first of the volume's bequests to the future: the machine will change its tools when the tools serve the audit, and not a day before, because the citizen of the future will arrive with the same right as the citizen of the past, which is to hold the record in her hand.

The hand-offs are where the parent organ earns its keep, and a reader walking the week has already watched a dozen of them without the volume pausing to count, so this paragraph counts them. The authority's committee is the convening machine for every hand-off in the catalog's keeping world: the inspectorate's findings travel to the tree office when a swing's shade is implicated, the playground's surface orders travel to the trails' depot when the same impact arithmetic is wanted at a bridge landing, the flood volume the botanic garden keeps is the parks' own tolerance table for any riverside ground the fund is pricing, and the honest report carries all of it, which is why the report's index reads like a bus map of the machine. The deepest hand-off the committee administers is the paper one, the single spine the ten organs share: the same minute form, the same printed-ballot rule, the same noticeboard discipline, so that an officer of the trails could sit at the allotments' pinning and know the ceremony, and a registrar could take the acquisition committee's minutes without training, because the founders' single-spine doctrine is the catalog's quietest and most practical invention, a

machine of ten organs run on one grammar, and the reader who learns the grammar once in this chapter has, in the fullest sense, already read the rest of the book.

The teaching of this chapter, for the reader who wants to brief a colleague or a class, is the machine's parent logic, and the lesson plan is already in the pages above. Begin with the Monday orders, because a committee that cuts grass on a printed day teaches more about government than a term of political theory: the order is public, the day is fixed, the contractor is named and the citizen with a objection has a form and an address, and the whole of the state's legitimacy, in this organ, is visible in one sheet of morning paper. Then teach the noticeboard's week, the ink against the rain, because the board is the machine's contract with the street, and the class's first field trip is a wall in any weather. Close with the honest report and the fraction it publishes, and set the students the arithmetic the committee itself does: the cost per hectare, the season's cut, the report's own failings row, and let the class argue whether the machine is expensive, which it is, and worth it, which the chapter has argued, and the argument is the lesson, because the founders built the authority to be argued with, and printed everything so the arguing would be honest.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author writes the anatomy of the machines that hold the ground steady, one organ at a time. This series and its companion volumes have taken apart the systems that govern, feed, trade, police, heal, remember, defend, welcome, and mourn; the present book turns to the oldest keeping machine a country owns, and to the craft of the park keepers, rangers, gardeners, playground inspectors, trail wardens, tree officers, grounds clerks, allotment registrars, and acquisition valuers who make the ground worth walking on, one bench, one gate, one printed day at a time.