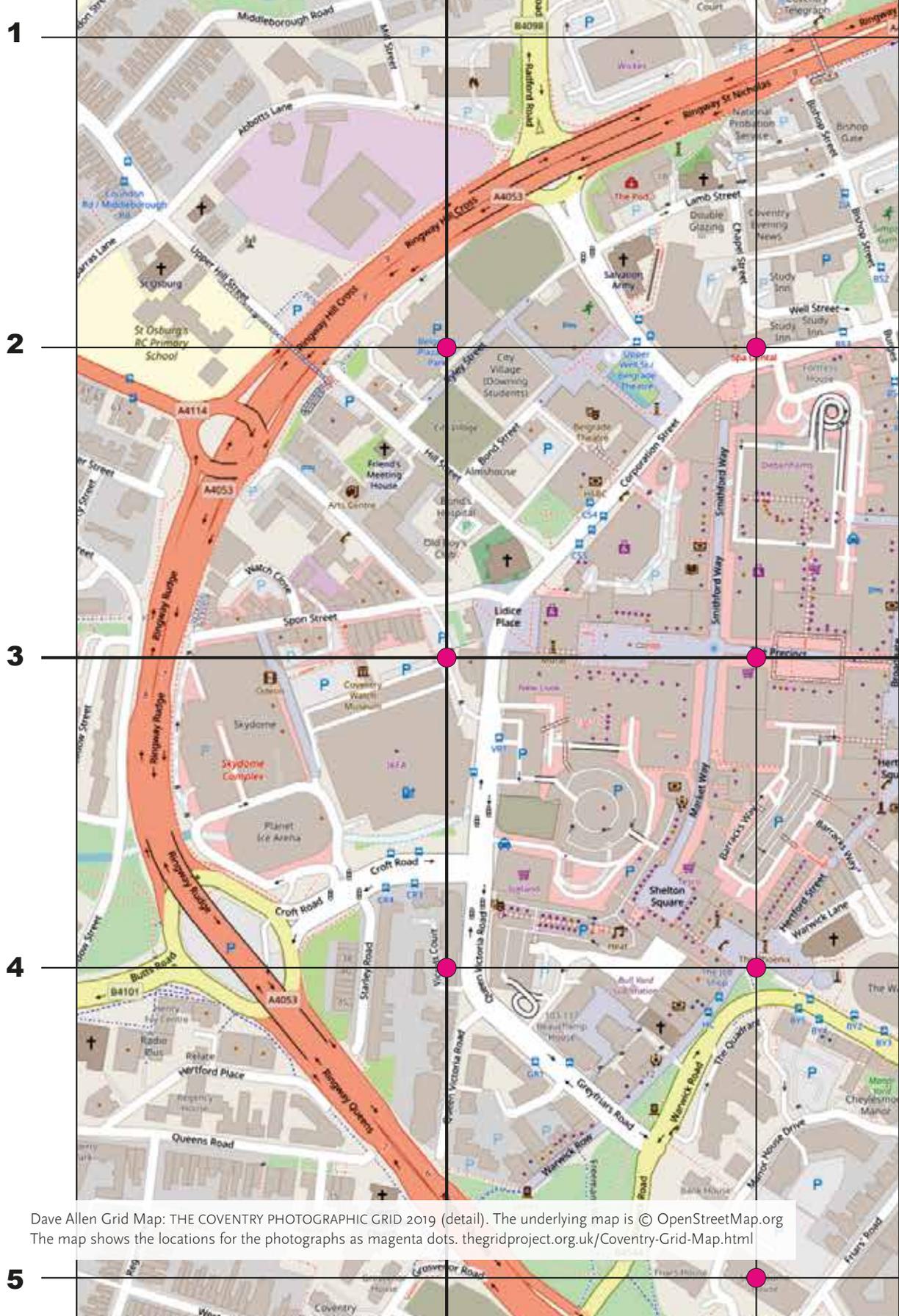


# SENSING THE CITY: AN URBAN ROOM



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Dave Allen Grid Map: THE COVENTRY PHOTOGRAPHIC GRID 2019 (detail). The underlying map is © OpenStreetMap.org  
The map shows the locations for the photographs as magenta dots. [thegridproject.org.uk/Coventry-Grid-Map.html](http://thegridproject.org.uk/Coventry-Grid-Map.html)



Moving and Mapping © Christian Kipp (detail)

## Sensing the City: an Introduction to Our Urban Room

“After almost 50 years of neglect of the human dimension, here at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have an urgent need and growing willingness to once again create cities for people.”

Jan Gehl, architect and urban planner, *Cities for People*, 2010

- How can the human body be *in measure* of the city?
- How can a focus on *human sensing* enhance the habitability of urban life?
- What do the sensed contours, textures and atmospheres of the city tell us about it?
- Who and what is Coventry city centre for?
- What kind of city do we wish to live in?

These are just some of the key questions posed by this exhibition. As a collaborative research group of artists and academics, specialising in the application of experimental methodologies in dance and choreography, creative writing, performance, film, photography and sound technologies, we have spent three years exploring them in and around Coventry city centre. Our aim was to produce an integrated embodied mapping of the city centre which, using multiple spatio-temporal forms of expression, would consider its viability as a place supposedly designed for *people*. We did so against a backdrop of Coventry’s medieval, post-second world war and recent 21<sup>st</sup> century history, all of which is reflected in an eclectic, changing built environment that generates very particular atmospheres.

An implicit point of departure was the realisation that the city centre is increasingly struggling to know what it is for, after over half a century of giving predominance in its practical organisation to forms of consumerism on the one hand and vehicular traffic on the other. As shopping struggles to retain its appeal as a physical activity and public awareness grows of a climate emergency rendering private car use deeply problematic, the time is ripe for a reconsideration of city centres from the point of view of *you* the pedestrian and citizen as ‘sensitised user’.

We hope you will find our creative responses to the city and the questions posed by the exhibition as relevant to the present moment as we have. With Coventry set to be UK City of Culture in 2021 and the City Council launching a 10-year strategic programme of cultural initiatives and repair in 2017, the city is uniquely placed to engage in issues around the cultural infrastructure of the built urban environment in both a sustained manner and for the common good of citizens. One way of facilitating that debate would be to set up an *Urban Room* in Coventry during 2021. This would act as a resource centre for the city, hosting exhibitions, talks, workshops and informal drop-ins for citizens and professionals alike to explore collaboratively the opportunities for urban change in Coventry. We hope that our exhibition here will play its part in highlighting the potential value of such a facility which many UK cities have already introduced.

Welcome to our pop-up Urban Room!

Sensing the City Project Team:

Professor Nicolas Whybrow, University of Warwick

Dr Natalie Garrett Brown, University of East London

Dr Emma Meehan, Coventry University

Dr Michael Pigott, University of Warwick

Carolyn Deby, *sirencrossing*

Dr Nese Ceren Tosun, University of Warwick

Rob Batterbee, University of Warwick



Still Life © Anonymous

## CONJUNCTIONS: Some Road Maps (in Multiple Moods)

NICOLAS WHYBROW

Presented here is a portfolio of four collaged mappings of Coventry city centre's ring-road, authored mysteriously by "unknown-but-knowing hand". The four discrete text and image items are entitled in turn *Still Life*, *Dysjunction*, *Bare City* and *White Noise*. The collagist may be a professional artist for whom this is no more than a provisional mock-up. But, given the obvious absence of hi-tech production values involved, the creator is quite possibly an amateur urbanist. In asserting anonymity, the person concerned is perhaps giving themselves licence to be provocative without recrimination.

The *Conjunctions* portfolio seems to concern itself with the aesthetic infrastructure of central Coventry, surfacing as it did in 2017 at the time of the city's successful bid to be UK City of Culture and the City Council's development of a comprehensive ten-year cultural strategy. In particular, the mappings are preoccupied with the effects on the habitability of the present-day city produced by the inner ring-road. This was constructed, in the wake of the destruction wreaked by the second world war and as an immediate consequence of the 'best laid plans' for the city, presented in the City Corporation's *The Future Coventry* brochure in 1945.

Each of the four road maps relates to a segment of Coventry's inner ring-road, intentionally presenting it in a particular mood. Conceptually these moods conjure diverse spatio-temporalities which equate to the temper of the location – not unlike the tempo allocated by composers to their musical scores to evoke a certain feel. For example, the subjunctive mood of *Bare City* turns out to have a hypothetical premise underpinning it – a futuristic vision of urban space which implicitly proposes that the ring-road should be closed to cars and repurposed as a new form of city centre. But some of these moods are coinages. Most obvious in this regard is the "hyperjunctive" mood of *White Noise* which is intended to project a sense of the clamour and claustrophobia of the built environment around the Whitefriars section of the ring-road, producing a form of "hyper-present".

While *Conjunctions* may share the sentiments of a Paul Chatterton with his persuasive manifesto demands for "real change", involving among other things a car-free, post-carbon, commons-based sustainable city<sup>1</sup>, the methodology of these road maps is far less prescriptive than suggestive. In other words, via its focus on indicative spatio-temporal moods, as opposed to evidence-based data gathering for example, it appears to work from a projected form of intuitive sensing about the infrastructure of the city – a sixth sense perhaps.

<sup>1</sup> Chatterton, P. (2019) *Unlocking Sustainable Cities: a Manifesto for Real Change*, London: Pluto Press.

## CONJUNCTIONS: Some Road Maps (in Multiple Moods)

### *Still Life: Som[n]a in the City (adjunctive mood)*

The year 1961 serves as a running point of reference in this road map. Gordon Cullen's *Townscape*, whose spirit effectively sets in motion the sequence of set-piece "still lifes" presented here, was published that year. So were Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and key texts of the Situationist International movement, including Kotányi's and Vaneigem's on the pivotal notion of unitary urbanism. Meanwhile, Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* had been published just the year before. All of these publications are concerned in their own unique ways with urban living, with spatial scale and movement and, above all, with the social and physical human body being, like the technical instruments of a land surveyor, in measure of the city. The body as protagonist, including the way its urban surroundings affect and position it, is then the test of whether the city works.

A key aspect of Cold War German history also figures in this mapping, relating to the construction of the Berlin Wall, which commenced on 13th August 1961. Coventry's phased inner city ring-road construction was also underway in the early 1960s and the second section, Ringway St. Nicholas between Junctions 1 and 9, where this road map is based, was completed in 1961. The five triptychs of *Still Life* invoke an adjunctive practice that is reminiscent of the complex, intertwined stratification as well as striations involved in geological layering. Here it echoes the various supplementary features of the physical ring-road itself – the slip-roads and pathways and bridges, to say nothing of its unforeseen, unnamed, nooks and crannies.

There appears to be another, more personal dimension in play inasmuch as 1961 seems also to be the year that the figured protagonist of *Still Life* was born. This relates to the "sleeping-dreaming corpse" – the performer of both soma and somna in the city – depicted in the centre of each triptych, whose face is invariably turned away in a kind of "un-portrait" and who cannot, therefore, be formally identified. Intriguingly, the passport photocopy that offers this potential linkage to the recumbent body also connects it to the Berlin Wall with clear evidence, in the form of German Democratic Republic (GDR) visa stamps, of visits by the person in question to the Cold War frontier city. It should be noted that the "Nicholas" in question appears to have been born on the very day, 15th June 1961, that the GDR president at the time, Walter Ulbricht, had famously assured the nation that "no-one had any intention of erecting a wall", as the State newspaper *Neues Deutschland* reported the following day. Thus, a potential conjunction emerges, via the personal narrative of the figured body, which allies the monumental effect of the building of the Berlin Wall with the localised impact of the ring-road's architecture on the centre of Coventry.

### *Dysjunction: these Towns Will Live and Die (disjunctive mood)*

This road map steers us towards the west of the city centre, focusing exclusively on Junction 7 of the ring-road, which is significantly elevated at this point. Where its counterpart *Bare City* amounts to a speculative projection in the subjunctive mood – a utopia indeed – this mapping effectively forms its antithesis in the "disjunctive mood", presenting as it does a dystopian portrait of the ring-road's underbelly or that which lurks in its shadows. This is reflected in *Dysjunction's* inversion of *Bare City's* subtitle – foregrounding towns rather than people – which riffs at the same time off the title of Jane Jacobs' seminal book on urban living *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (see *Still Life* road map).

*Dysjunction* appears to present a perspectival montage in which a juxtaposition of vertical portrait formats, customarily reserved for the depiction of people, is used to represent the structural landscape of the ring-road environment at Junction 7, which in many respects resembles a maze. 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. If this voided terrain represents a form of "theatrical backdrop", inserted foreground 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.

### *Bare City: "We'll Live and Die in these Towns" (subjunctive mood)*

This road map appears to provide a form of conceptual blueprint which proposes that Coventry's inner city ring-road be converted into a New York City-style High Line development. It presents an assemblage of subtitled and attributed quotations against a photographic backdrop of part of the road itself (identified as Ringway St Patricks, which runs between Junctions 5 and 6). One of the citations, entitled "Taking the high road", invites the viewer to draw comparisons with the High Line, which has been developed as a form of urbanwild with sited public artworks on a disused section of the city's raised metropolitan railway in Lower Manhattan.

*Bare City* no doubt carries deliberate echoes of the Situationists' famous *Naked City* screenprint of 1957 which depicts Paris as a fluid and continuous psycho-geographical "map of experience". That aside, the main title of the road map also appears to reference Giorgio Agamben's complex notion of "bare life" which is premised to some degree on identifying a growing global "precariat" – essentially human beings who find themselves existing in implicitly sanctioned circumstances of acute risk and vulnerability that include poverty, homelessness, modern slavery, enforced migration and so on. The road map's subtitle, meanwhile, represents the title of a 2007 album by the then emerging Coventry band The Enemy.

## CONJUNCTIONS: Some Road Maps (in Multiple Moods)

The first quotation in *Bare City*, which has no subtitle of its own, can be assumed to be a form of signature hint of authorship of *Conjunctions* as a whole by the unknown artist/amateur urbanist. In it they appear effectively to be casting themselves as the “photographer” in question, thereby making a small gesture towards identifying themselves as the originator of the road map. The centralised surveillance of public space that haunts, and implicitly criminalises, their activity serves perhaps as an explanation as to why anonymity has been preserved in the *Conjunctions* portfolio.

### *White Noise: a Farrago (hyperjunctive mood)*

The final road map in the *Conjunctions* portfolio, takes us to the eastern side of the inner ring-road and the segment between Junctions 3 and 4 known as Ringway Whitefriars. This area of the city centre is predominantly Coventry University territory and in many respects evokes precisely a campus atmosphere. But the Ringway is also topped and tailed by the municipal “Elephant Building” at its northern end at Junction 3 and the relic of the 14th century Whitefriars Monastery at its southern end at Junction 4. The Carmelite monastery finds itself pressed up against the ring-road, whose main overhead carriageway, tributary feeder lanes and forest of supporting pillars rudely bisects the university campus here as it tears from one junction to the other.



*White Noise: a Farrago* is suggestive of a blurred riot of visual static produced by this dense urban hotchpotch of a built environment: “Whitefriars noise” on the one hand, “Farrago Village” on the other, to echo, first, the monastery and, second, the recent repurposing of a disused factory site as a tight-knit complex of small-scale arts and crafts enterprises at the nearby Fargo Village (on Far Gosford Street). But the clue is also, of course, in the presentational form of the mapping, whose mood in this case is deemed “hyperjunctive” – a neologism probably coined so as to evoke precisely the sense of an overdetermined, not to say manic convergence of diverse built forms and atmospheres. The elongated collage of colour images forms a panorama (left to right) between Junctions 4 and 3, within which discrete cubist configurations replicate the felt intensity of localised micro-zones within this urban landscape.

The road map’s discrete zones, which are suggestive in their distorted constellations of the way shifting light conditions at different times of day, or in different seasons, generate varying micro-moods or perceptions of space, are embedded within a supporting superstructure of ring-road close-ups. The rough-cast fabric of its original cladding, with its grainy monochrome hue, seems to create its own version of optical “white noise”. Taken as a whole, the horizontal reach of the collage reproduces the elevated monumentality of Ringway Whitefriars, almost as if the ring-road had absorbed into its carapace the ground and buildings pressing up against it on either flank. The ring-road may dominate here but it is visibly depreciating as the striations of material fracture, discolouration and decay in the surface texture of its brutalist cladding betray. At the same time, though, there is evidence of renewal along the Ringway: replacement cladding in two-tone shades of grey, evoking forms of both “cuboid camouflaging” – paradoxically drawing attention to itself – and monochrome pixilation, which returns us implicitly to the notion of visual static.

If the wide-angled collaged topography of *White Noise* conjures an environmental aura of frenetic excess, temporally captured in a form of synchronous present, the compressed assemblages of associative and suggestive text that accompany it as a series of five scrawled airmail postcards “to whom it may concern” (linked via a red thread to their corresponding images) point towards the potential antithesis of such a “hyperjunctive mood”: to what might be called the imperceptible, precious air of the unbuilt environment.

## Moving and Mapping: Knowing Sites through Dance Practice

NATALIE GARRETT BROWN & EMMA MEEHAN

Situated in the city of Coventry, *Moving and Mapping* has explored how the creative processes of dance artists, making site responsive work, can contribute to current city planning approaches. Established in 2007, the artist collective enter & inhabit creates live and mediated site-responsive work, within the mediums of dance, photography and writing. As part of *Moving and Mapping*, enter & inhabit co-curated labs and salons which brought together dance artists, town planners, architects and those working within public realm planning. Our interest has been to model interdisciplinary approaches to city planning which foreground the lived, felt and experiential aspects of inhabiting place and space while recognising the inhabitants as co-creators.

enter & inhabit have also returned to durational, site-responsive dance practice in the underpasses of Coventry ring-road. This practice first began in 2007 as part of the Summer Dancing Festival run by former Coventry-based dance organisation DECODA. The practice has for over ten years intermittently explored how dance might invite inhabitants to experience a sensory relationship with site and place, to enable new and alternative imaginings of the city. We invite those that happen upon our practice to pause, linger, breathe and notice through all of the senses, with the visual re-positioned as just one of several senses that might orientate us in the world.

Broad in its spread of references and lineages, the enter & inhabit project can be located within contemporary dance practice and specifically the British New Dance tradition. Following the teachings of UK dance artist Helen Poynor, it draws on US dance artist Anna Halprin's model of collaborative working, *The RSVP Cycles*. Formulated in partnership with Halprin's husband, architect Lawrence Halprin in the late 1960s, *The RSVP Cycles* offers a map for collaborative working across disciplines.

Other movement practices which inform our approach to working site-responsively include the elements of sensory awareness, improvised dance and reflective practice in Authentic Movement; and the anatomical structures and systems of the body as conceptualized by the Somatic Education Practice Body-Mind Centering (BMC)®. We have also engaged with practices of 'hosting' – how we host people to experience the city differently and how the city and its inhabitants host us as we dance in sites around Coventry.

In addition, we invited several movement artists who have previously worked with related dance practices in outdoor sites around Coventry city to offer a reflective comparison with our methods: Hilary Kneale, Paula Kramer, Helen Poynor, and Sandra Reeve. We are therefore connecting with the groundwork developed by these artists and DECODA which was integral in developing site based and experimental dance in the city.



(Detail)

All images:  
Moving and  
Mapping  
© Christian Kipp





The exhibition includes the photographic and creative writing dimensions of the enter & inhabit collaboration. These are understood by us as companion art works to the ongoing outdoor movement practice which will be happening daily in and around Junction 5 of Coventry ring-road during the exhibition. Postcards, photographs and a handmade book are offered in the exhibition as objects for handling and as invitations to revisit past memories or create new imaginings of Coventry.

Visit the underpass system at Junction 5 of the Coventry ring-road and surrounding areas daily between, 15:30-17:30 Monday 13 & Friday 17 January; 12:00-14:00 Wednesday 15 January and 07:30-09.30 Tuesday 14 & Thursday 16 January 2020, to encounter the movement practice of enter & inhabit .

Thanks to our four lab dance artists featured in the postcard series; Hilary Kneale, Paula Kramer, Helen Poynor and Sandra Reeve. And to our Salon and interview participants; Alice Sara, Annette Arlander, Ashleigh Bowmott (née Griffith), Aude Biquelet, Cara Davies, Caroline Salem, Dani Abulhawa, Ed Frith, Erica Charalambous, Helen Roby, Jo Shore, Katye Coe, Lily Hayward Smith, Marie Louise Crawley, Rachel Sara, Sabine Cody Schaebitz, Sara Wookey, Sarah Rubidge, Sarah Spanton, and Vicky Hunter.

More information at <https://www.enterinhabit.com> and <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/current-projects/2017/sensing-the-city/>



All images:  
Moving and  
Mapping  
© Christian Kipp



## Coventry Radiant City

MICHAEL PIGOTT/MICHAEL LIGHTBORNE

*For a Road can be a Thing of Beauty* (47 mins, two-channel HD video, 2019)

The title of this piece is a quote from *The Future Coventry*, a booklet produced by Coventry City Council to accompany a 1945 exhibition that presented a bold vision for rebuilding the city after the devastation of the war. The booklet expressed the ideas and ethics of City Architect Donald Gibson's planning department, who understood the aftermath of the war as an opportunity to re-think how cities can and should work. In this two-screen installation we drive around the ring-road for as long as it takes to read *The Future Coventry*.

*A Catalogue of the Great Buildings of Coventry* (240 mins, HD video, 2020)

A combination of macro photography and slow motion video, this film aims to document the great buildings of Coventry (which could include your house) in a manner that re-aligns our attention to the textures and materials of the built environment. It refuses to provide an establishing shot, and undermines notions of uniformity and homogeneity by displaying just how chaotically varied and diverse the surfaces of the city are, at a certain scale.

Stills from *For a Road can be a Thing of Beauty* © Michael Lightborne



*Coventry Looking Up* (28 mins, HD video, 2020)

I noticed how often I look down at the ground as I walk around Coventry, and how the city structure itself seems to discourage the upward glance. Areas like the Precinct, Hertford Street, City Arcade and even Corporation Street sometimes seem to enclose and submerge the pedestrian, making parts of the city appear warren-like, trench-like. The structuring principle for this film was to stop in my tracks and look upwards for a while. This revealed a stratum of activity, and a collage of historical moments and movements, that is not always obvious at ground level.

*Balloon Tactic* (3 mins, HD video, 2020)

What would it be like to see the city from the perspective of a helium balloon escaping into the atmosphere? Is the space 'above' a city a complementary component of urban space that might also be explored? This film demonstrates a cheap DIY alternative to drone footage that allows the air currents to determine a path through the vertical space of Coventry city.



## Coventry Radiant City

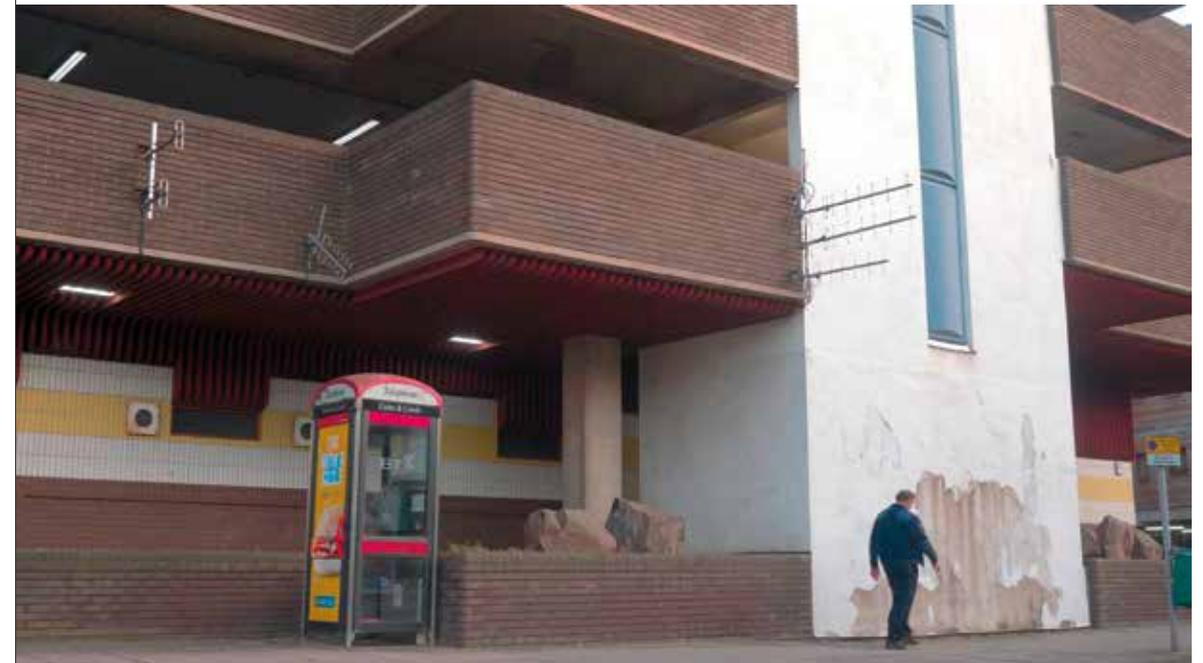


### *Ring Road Ring* (vinyl album, Gruenrekorder, 2020)

This album features sound recordings of the low-level vibrations pulsing through the megastructure that is the Coventry ring-road. To capture these sounds I used contact microphones attached to the concrete pylons that support the road, at various points around its circumference. I was immediately surprised by how melancholy the ring-road sounds. For this exhibition the turntable needle is stuck in a 'locked groove' at the end of the record; an endless loop that keeps going around and around. The album can be found at [gruenrekorder.bandcamp.com](http://gruenrekorder.bandcamp.com)

### *Coventry Radiant City* (approx. 88 mins, HD video, 2020)

Each of these film and sound fragments represents the culmination of one particular train of thought, or line of flight, out of the innumerable ways in which one might approach the complexity of the city. They each contribute, in one way or another, to a feature film project entitled *Coventry Radiant City*, which attempts to make some sense of the lumpen and chaotic data that these modes have provided. *Coventry Radiant City* is shown at The Tank, Jordan Well, Coventry University at 15:00 daily, Monday 13 to Friday 17 January 2020. Admission is free.



## urbanflows: immersed in worlds

CAROLYN DEBY

Commissioned by *Sensing the City* to lead a site-specific project entitled *urbanflows: immersed in worlds*, artist Carolyn Deby, with sirens crossing collaborator Jia-Yu Corti, undertook a series of immersive sensory experiences in Coventry in 2016 with local residents who shared their own everyday embodied connection to the city. Elements of those encounters can be viewed on the sirens crossing blog: [http://www.sirens crossing.com/sirens/SIRENS\\_BLOG/Archive.html](http://www.sirens crossing.com/sirens/SIRENS_BLOG/Archive.html).

In 2017, the research coalesced in performances of *urbanflows (you were here)* presented as part of the first Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art. The piece asked: "How does the city nest in your senses? Is it shaped by habit, honed through half-attention? Do you feel yourself a part of the shifting complexity... or stay safely within grids of expectation? Enter secret vantage points and encounter the unexpected. The city never settles, nothing is built to last. You were here". Taking place within everyday spaces of Coventry, the piece invited audiences to traverse the flows of the city, to notice how they simultaneously merged with it and left traces of their journey.

The idea of the city of Coventry as a hybrid human/non-human situation was developed further in the 2019 production of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*, with the piece journeying directly through everyday city sites. It sought to reveal the urban in Coventry as in fact, an aspect of a wild continuum – a place of animal and elemental movement and equally, urban space as social space and technologically reconstructed nature. This 'urbanwild' forms a field of converging flows and energies that is not an enveloping environment, but rather a situation with which we co-create our lived experience. The work contends that it is possible to tune audience attention in a way that might meaningfully shift their usual perception of themselves in relation to the city and its urbanwild.

Both the 2017 and 2019 productions of *urbanflows* incorporated mobile phones. With a parallel screen-based existence becoming increasingly commonplace for urban humans, the phase shifts required as our attention flickers between physical and virtual are highly significant. *urbanflows* explored how the distracted body participates in the urbanwild of Coventry as it navigates a hybrid existence characterised by both real space and screen spaces. Does screen life impede our ability to stay connected to our embodied entanglement in the world?

### Sensing in the city of Coventry

Coventry as a site for this work offered particular challenges. Though surrounded by green and idyllic countryside, the city is also one of speeding vehicular domination, concrete flyovers, and subterranean pedestrian underpasses with the urban and the wild arguably highly separated. Human bodies are less likely to experience the city on foot or via other body-powered



Image: © Carolyn Deby



Image: © Adele Mary Reed



Image: © Adele Mary Reed

travel and the general absence of traffic calming ensures that bodies (human and non-human) are restricted to special zones and narrow alleys and passageways. The homeless humans of Coventry are particularly marginalised, eking out bare survival – along with the non-humans, scrambling in the fissures and disused corners of the city. Much of Coventry's ground is thickly covered with pavement and concrete but, even so, it has the capacity to support all sorts of life and in surprising places. Taking all of this as its stage, *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* attempted to perform Coventry's fragmented urbanwild, implicating audiences, passers-by, and performers.

The local situation in Coventry sits within the wider contexts of Britain and the world, where the current political and ecological moment is such that this everyday context comes saturated with instability and urgency. The work contends that the ongoing global climate emergency makes more urgent the need to find a way of everyday becoming that honours and integrates our entanglement and to challenge the idea of dominance by or perceived separateness of humans.

Working through these notions, using the practice methods of urbanwild-sited audience experiences, the research sought to provoke embodied, tacit, and ineffable insight into the lived experience of humans in Coventry. Set in real urbanwild spaces, both indoors and outdoors, public and private, the audience experience intentionally embraced the incidental ongoingness of the world(s) passed through. Artistic interventions or additions to these spaces function in various ways (to draw attention, to focus, to exaggerate, to interrupt, to contrast, etc.) but did not erase or control whatever else is there. The existing rhythms, lighting, sounds, incidents and actions of the site were welcomed and considered in the devising of the experience, in order to be tuned and responsive to the ongoing tendencies and currents of the contexts passed through – a method that could be characterised as psychogeographic in its approach.

*urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* was created by Carolyn Deby in collaboration with performers Katye Coe, Jia-Yu Corti, Annalise Cowan, Rakel Ezpeleta, Warren Murray, and Lauren Sheerman. Funded by Arts Council England, with support from Artspace Coventry, The Pod, and Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art.

[www.sirencrossing.com](http://www.sirencrossing.com)

## Sense & Capture and Coventry Grid Project

DAVE ALLEN & NESE CEREN TOSUN

Taking Dave Allen's The Grid Project as a point of departure, a Sense & Capture workshop led by Nese Ceren Tosun extended a daylong invitation to explore, individually and collectively, the sensory challenges and opportunities of the city. Following a series of indoor and outdoor activities deploying the key questions and methodologies of the overall research project, fifteen participants captured their embodied responses to fifteen designated grid points within the ringroad in Coventry.

Dave Allen's photographic grid is a collaborative venture which aims to make a meaningful visual statement about an environment by adopting a systematic approach. What does this place look like? What does this place feel like? The grid imposes a system that may sometimes locate the picturesque but is just as likely to find the industrial, the rugged, the new, old, boring, threatening or just ugly.

The grid is based on the ordnance survey map grids, sometimes subdivided, to produce a matrix of intersections: these become the locations for photographs. Although the participants can respond in any way they feel fit, they are restricted in that they cannot move from the location to take the picture. In this instance of the project, the Sensing the City team also asked the participants to feel the connection to other points in the city, to be mindful of the flows of movements, encounters with the animate and the inanimate and where available, listen to the stories that emerge from the urban atmospheres of Coventry. The participants' responses to these encounters are displayed in the same format of the map from which they were produced.

**Coventry Grid Project Contributors** (As exhibited at the Herbert and online at [www.thegridproject.org.uk](http://www.thegridproject.org.uk)):

Rob Batterbee, Jan Bebbington, Michael Buck, Teresa Buck, Nick Drofiak, Emily Dunford, Jason Harrison, Sarah He, Hayley Hindle, Rowan Hindle, Sam Hindle, Xu Juan, Bo Kelestyn, Yafen Wang, Martin Wilkes

### Recent Grid Project Exhibitions and Events

*Sensing The Environment* (2019), Tate Gallery Liverpool, in association with RECAP (University of Chester), Tate Exchange and The National Arts Education Archive

*Playing By The Rules: The Yorkshire Sculpture Park* (2018), The National Arts Education Archive Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park

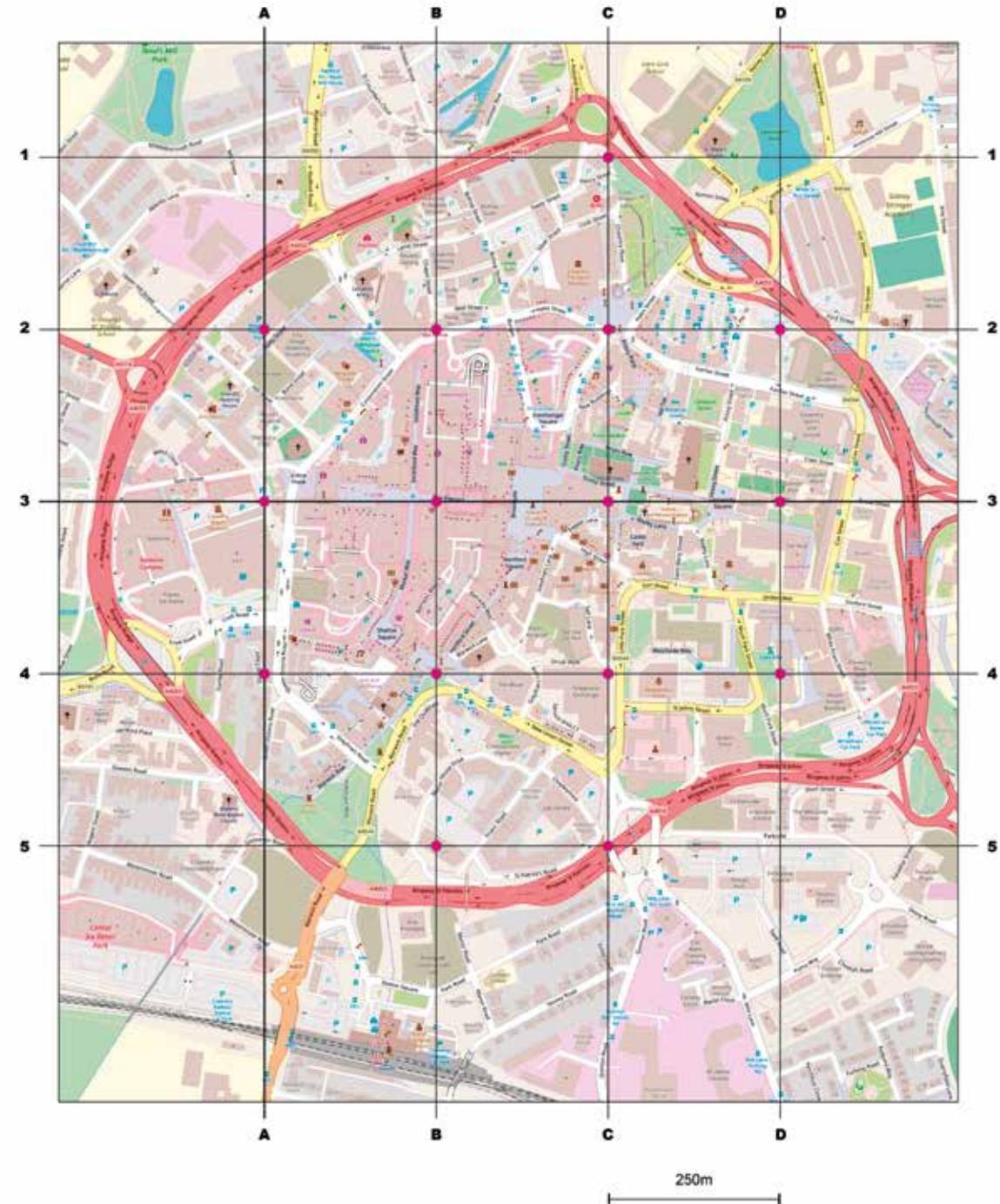
*The LOOK/17 Photography Festival – Liverpool Grid* (2017), The Bluecoat Centre for Contemporary Arts, Liverpool

*In The Footsteps of Phyllis...* (2017), The Library of Birmingham Gallery, Birmingham.

Dave Allen  
Grid Map:  
THE COVENTRY  
PHOTOGRAPHIC  
GRID 2019.  
The underlying  
map is ©  
OpenStreetMap.org

The map shows  
the locations for  
the photographs  
as magenta dots.

## Sensing the City



THE COVENTRY PHOTOGRAPHIC GRID 2019  
The underlying map is © OpenStreetMap.org contributors

## Sense & Capture and Coventry Grid Project



2A | NICK DROFIK



1C | NICK DROFIK



3D | JAN HERRINGTON



5C | EMILY DUNFORD

## EXHIBITION TEAM'S BIOGRAPHIES

### NICOLAS WHYBROW, Principal Investigator

Nicolas Whybrow is Professor of Urban Performance Studies in the School of Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures at the University of Warwick. A former Head of School, he is Principal Investigator on the 3-year Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded research project *Sensing the City: an Embodied Documentation and Mapping of the Changing Uses and Tempers of Urban Place* (a practice-based case-study of the city of Coventry). A book entitled *Urban Sensographies*, arising from this project and edited by him, is forthcoming (Routledge 2020). Also forthcoming is his book *Contemporary Art Biennials in Europe: the Work of Art in the Complex City* (Bloomsbury 2020). Other books include *Art and the City* (IB Tauris 2011) and, as editor, *Performing Cities* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014).

### NATALIE GARRETT BROWN, Co-Investigator

Natalie Garrett Brown is Head of Department for Music, Writing and Performance at University of East London and Vice Chair for DanceHE (Standing Conference of Dance in Higher Education). Her practice and research interests are situated within feminist understandings of embodied subjectivity and the ways in which somatic and reflective practices can inform education, performance making, creativity, writing and digital cultural practices. Natalie is a founding member of enter & inhabit, a collaborative site responsive project and is co-convenor of the International Conference for Dance & Somatic Practices, held biannually at Coventry University. She is also co-editor of *Attending to Movement, Somatic Perspectives on Living in this World* (2015) and founding associate editor for the *Dance and Somatic Practices Journal*.

### EMMA MEEHAN, Co-Investigator

Emma Meehan is Assistant Professor in Dance at Coventry University's Centre for Dance Research, UK. She received her BA and PhD from the Drama Department, Trinity College, Dublin. Research interests include somatic movement practices, dance in Ireland and practice as research. She co-edited *Dance Matters in Ireland: Contemporary Performance and Practice* with Aoife McGrath (Palgrave 2017) and *Performing Process: Sharing Dance and Choreographic Practice* with Hetty Blades (Intellect 2018). She is currently principal investigator on an AHRC funded network on dance and chronic pain. She is Associate Editor for the *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices*, and was co-convenor of the Performance as Research Working Group at the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR) from 2013-2017.

### MICHAEL PIGOTT, Co-Investigator

Michael Pigott is Associate Professor of Video Art and Digital Media at the University of Warwick. He is the author of *Joseph Cornell Versus Cinema* (2013) and has published articles on the image of the sleeping body, and the sonic environment of the cinema projection box. He is also co-investigator on *The Projection Project*, which investigates the cinema projectionist's role following the switch of most cinemas to digital projection, and the contemporary expansion of projected images outside of the cinema. He has research interests in experimental film and video, sound studies and field recording, and the relationship between moving images, architecture and urban space. Michael is also a practising artist by the name of Michael Lightborne. He has shown work in exhibitions and film festivals around the UK and internationally. His album *Sounds of the Projection Box* was released on vinyl and digital by Gruenrekorder in 2018, and his new album *Ring Road Ring* is released by Gruenrekorder in 2020.

**CAROLYN DEBY, Commissioned artist**

Carolyn Deby is an artist/choreographer creating site-based performance as sirencrossing. She was until recently Head of Professional Studies at London Contemporary Dance School, and is currently undertaking a part-time, practice-led PhD at University of Warwick, with supervisors Professor Nicolas Whybrow and Professor Andy Lavendar. She was Leverhulme Trust artist-in-residence at University College London's Urban Laboratory (2011-12), collaborating with Professor Matthew Gandy. During 2016, she was an artist-researcher in the AHRC-funded Rock/Body project (Exeter University). She is currently a commissioned artist for Professor Nicolas Whybrow's *Sensing the City* (2017- 2020), for which her micro-project is entitled *urbanflows*. The project premiered its first outcomes during the 2017 Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art with 12 performances of *urbanflows (you were here)*. Further Coventry-sited research culminated in the September 2019 performances of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*.

Carolyn's research involves devising 'audience experiences' that examine the urban as a place of wild nature, elemental movement, social space, and technologically reconstructed nature: a field of converging flows and energies that comprise our lived experience. Both human and non-human 'actors' are significant, as is the intermingling of conscious, unconscious, felt, and sensed ways of knowing.

**NESE CEREN TOSUN,  
Exhibitions and Impact Officer**

Nese Ceren Tosun is a Teaching Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL) (convening *Laughter: A transdisciplinary approach* and *Food: The Medium is the Message* modules; co-convening *Reinventing Education*). She works with embodied and creative pedagogical tools, deploying various sensory exercises to generate innovative interdisciplinary learning encounters. She previously worked in Istanbul Bilgi University and Warwick Business School. Her research is on food and migration and she currently explores food enabled pedagogies.

**ROB BATTERBEE,  
technical specialist & photographer**

Rob Batterbee currently works as an IT manager at the University of Warwick. He has contributed to the Sensing the City project as a technical specialist and photographer.

**SARAH SHALGOSKY,  
Co-curator of the "Sensing the City:  
An Urban Room" Exhibition**

Sarah Shalgosky is Curator at the University of Warwick. She has led the Mead Gallery and the University of Warwick Art Collection for over 25 years. As well as writing about art, she has research interests in the role and possibilities of university galleries. She is co-organiser of a major conference at UCL in January 2020 that examines how university art collections contribute to the public realm.

**FIONA VENABLES,  
Co-curator of the "Sensing the City:  
An Urban Room" Exhibition**

Fiona Venables has over 25 years' experience as a curator of international contemporary art and in managing galleries and their programmes of work. She has worked throughout England in a range of contexts: from the independent sector to museums. From 2012 - 2019, she managed the Mead Gallery exhibition programme at Warwick Arts Centre, the University of Warwick. In November 2019, she will be leaving the University to take up the post of Director of Milton Keynes Arts Centre.

**DAVE ALLEN,  
Guest Artist  
(The Grid Project)**

Dave Allen grew up in Balsall Heath, Birmingham and was educated at Moseley Road School of Art, a secondary school with an art entrance examination. He graduated in Fine Art (Cheltenham) and has spent most of his career as a teacher of photography and graphic design. In the education sector he has contributed to several national reviews including the 1994 Dearing Review of the National Curriculum and spent three years as an LEA Advisory Teacher and Inspector.

He is also a photographer with a particular interest in our urban surroundings. Since 2001 he has run The Grid Project, an inclusive-collaborative venture in which photographers record their environments in photographs.

He currently divides his time between part-time teaching and running The Grid Project.

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The exhibition: *Sensing the City, An Urban Room* is curated by Sarah Shalgosky, Curator, University of Warwick and Fiona Venables, Deputy Curator (Exhibitions), University of Warwick and is shown at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry CV1 from 13-18 January 2020.

[warwick.ac.uk/sensingthecity](http://warwick.ac.uk/sensingthecity)  
[twitter.com/SensingTheCity](https://twitter.com/SensingTheCity)

The *Sensing the City* Project Team would like to thank our many associates, collaborators and colleagues who have generously contributed to this project:

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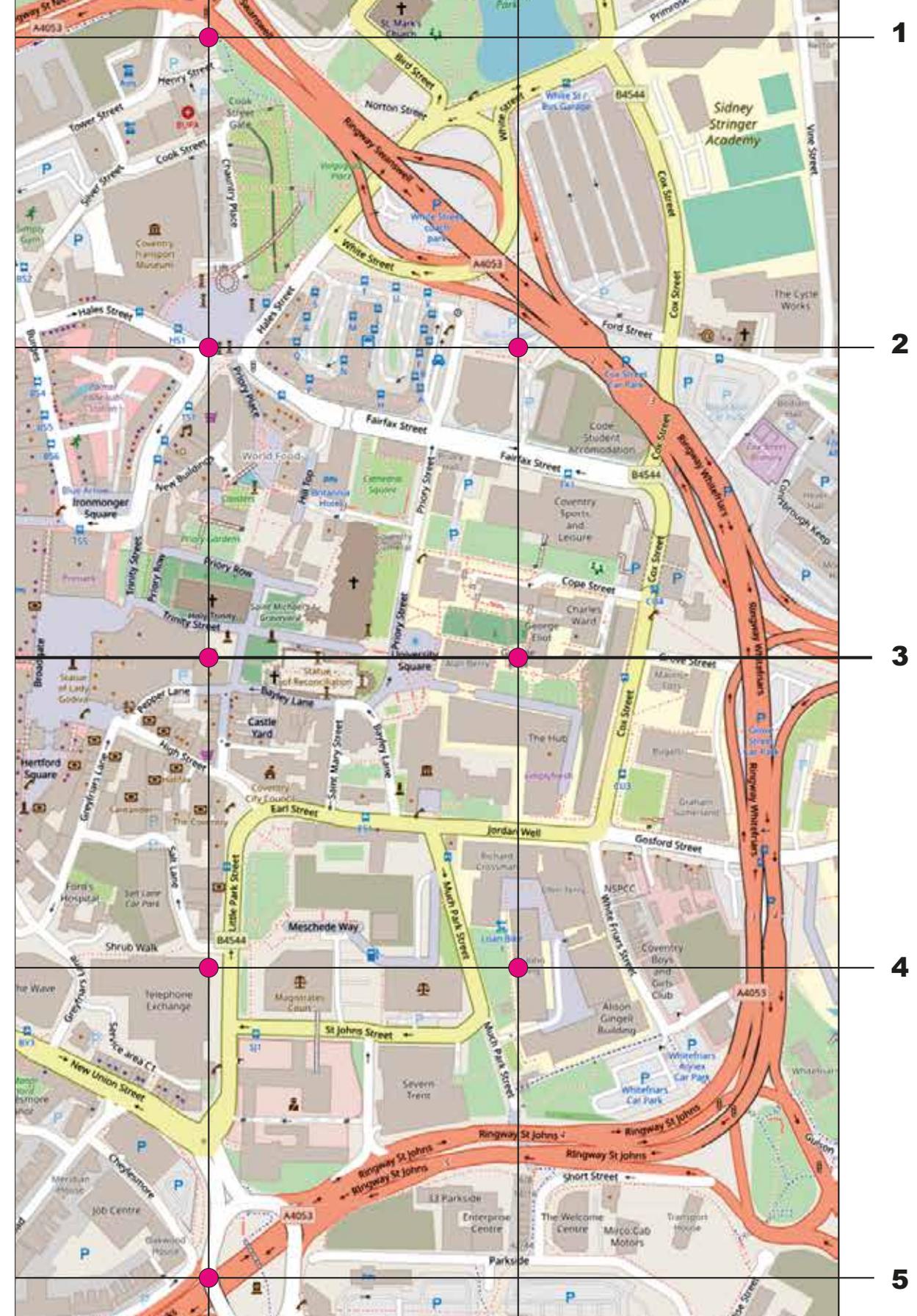
Warwick Arts Centre

Editor: Sarah Shalgosky, Curator, University of Warwick

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