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**urbanwild becomings:  
choreographing audience experience  
to reveal sympoietic entanglement  
in the Anthropocene everyday**

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**THESIS**

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## Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university. The practice-based research undertaken in a sequence of urbanwild sites in Coventry and finally presented as practice-as-research (PaR) in a series of public audience experiences (September 2019) is also my own work insofar as I conceptualised, instigated, and directed it. Owing to the nature of performance practice the research emerged under collaborative working circumstances. All contributors to this integrated process were aware beforehand that its outcomes would be presented as doctoral research in my name and agreed to this being the case. Their respective contributions have been given appropriate credit in the acknowledgments section of the thesis.



## ABSTRACT

This practice-led research draws on, and develops, practice methodologies developed over 20 years of site-based performance work with the company sirens crossing. The research articulates this practice as a phenomenological, embodied theatre of urban human life which seeks to perform and reveal biological, ecological, social, and technological entanglement. The thesis explores how this practice, shaped within a time-space field of affect, sensory inputs, and sign relations, might reveal the sympoietic nature of human life. The research has taken place within the frame of the Anthropocene (the currently proposed stratigraphic Earth epoch), recognising that Earth systems have been overwhelmingly altered by the actions of (some) humans. It proposes that by employing a specific approach to choreographing audience experience, the audiences in question will undergo an embodied insight into their own entangled lifeworld or *Umwelt*. The research examines the lived experience of urban humans, situating the practice within the everyday. It posits the urban as an aspect of a 'wild continuum' (Van Horne and Hausdoerffer 2017: 4) or rather as an *urbanwild*: a field of converging flows and energies encompassing animal and elemental movement, and equally, social space and technologically reconstructed nature. Both human and nonhuman 'actors' are significant within the enquiry, as is the inter-mingling of conscious, unconscious, cognitive, felt, and sensed ways of knowing. The human is understood to be porous and unbounded, as are nonhumans.

The written thesis is structured in two chapters: Chapter 1 sets out the relevance of the Anthropocene and the everyday. It then articulates the project's conception of the urbanwild, drawing on the example of *city:skinned* (2006). Next, Chapter 1 thinks through the permeable nature of bodies, the significance of sympoiesis, and relates these to the example of *rivercities* (2010-2014). Chapter 2 focuses on the practice as research (PaR) production of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry, 2019) exploring the significance of sign relations (biosemiosis), rhythmanalysis, and psychogeography as ways to perceive the patterning of the urbanwild. The PaR is considered in relation to relevant theories of theatre and performance, suggesting how audience experience produces a porous immersion in the everyday world.



## Introduction

Developing out of a 20-year professional practice of creating site-based performance in cities in England, Canada, and Sweden with my company sirencrossing, this doctoral thesis comprises, in equal partnership, an original piece of practice as research (PaR) that was presented live in September 2019, and a written component that contextualises and analyses the research in relation to a multidisciplinary body of scholarship. In laying out the territory, two previous sirencrossing performance works will be discussed, as well as the PaR submitted for examination, *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*. Along with video and still images, poetic/affective writing will be employed as an aspect of the practice documentation, aiming to 're-perform' some elements of the practice examples under discussion, not least for the benefit of the reader who may not have experienced the live performances. In doing so, the research hopes to underline the importance of experiential knowledge to the dissemination of its findings, by evoking for the reader an imagined bodily experience of the work. Although not the same as if the reader had physically experienced the practice, this research project contends that kinaesthetic and sensory imagination can be evoked through language and visual imagery in a manner that might enliven the reader's remembered sensation of similar moments. The embodied, sensorial, imaginative, and cognitive capacities of both reader and audience member are considered pivotal to achieving an inter-mingling of conscious, unconscious, cognitive, felt, and sensed ways of knowing that this project hopes to evoke. Therefore, while reading, the reader is invited to notice their bodily presence in the world, to resist the tendency towards two-dimensional inertness that the page or the screen might tend to lead to. Allow sensorial awareness to mingle with and inform what comes through from the words and the accompanying video/pictorial documentation, attending to the circumstances of the reader's own becoming, to its pulsed, polyphonic, and 'enworlded' situation. This is not to suggest a constant awareness of everything but is rather a reminder to notice and to return to that noticing; alongside reading, watching, reflecting, and remembering.

It should be emphasised that the method of capturing and representing audience experience employed in relation to all three case studies has relied on actual audience members' testimonies or comments, gathered through both written responses and in-person discussions. Throughout the years, by travelling (*in cognito*) through the work with each audience group I have also been able to observe reactions and notice how/where people's attention tends to focus. Thus, the sections of poetic/affective writing included in this written thesis have depended on verbal/written feedback from, and affective observations of, sirencrossing audiences. I have attempted to circumvent my desire as choreographer to

describe what I *hope* has happened or been received. Nevertheless, it must be said that all of this information is inevitably filtered through my own impressions.

This research project focuses on how performance practice might reveal some of the relationships, entanglements, and circulations between humans and nonhumans, on multiple scales (from Earth systems to single cell units of life), as well as with the schisms and disconnections in such relationships, entanglements, and circulations, as currently experienced by humans in everyday life. The city site(s) and bodies of the enquiry are proposed to be part of what the project terms an 'urbanwild', comprised of various degrees of human-made and other-than-human influences along a continuum of hybridity. Similar notions have been proposed by others, such as Rosie Braidotti's 'nature-culture' (2013), or Sarah Whatmore's 'hybrid geographies' (2002). Of particular interest to this research is Gavin Van Horn's 'wild continuum' where wildness is understood to describe all places, from cities to jungles, encompassing the inside of bodies, and beyond (Van Horne and Hausdoerffer 2017: 4-5). In all of these, as for the 'urbanwild', the contention is that humans and their affects in the world cannot be seen as separate from so-called 'nature'. Further, the status of places and bodies is not static. This research takes a position which concurs with anthropologists Tim Ingold and Gisli Palsson's assertion that humans are more accurately described as 'becomings' rather than 'beings' as they are in a constant state of life process or ontogenesis in collaboration with the world (Ingold and Palsson 2013), or, as Donna Haraway terms it, engaged in an ongoing process of *sympoiesis* or 'making with', where life is understood as a collaborative symbiosis, rather than a solitary undertaking (Haraway 2016, and Tsing et al 2017: M25-M50). Thus, whereas 'being' implies an intact and static self-contained ontology of the self (also implying that the human is at the centre of life on earth), in contrast 'becoming' points to crossed borders/porosity/fluidity and a constantly shifting ecology of selves that are mutually unfolding into and between each other.

This research project draws on new understandings in biology, variously termed as the 'Postmodern Synthesis' or the 'Inclusive Biological Synthesis', that move beyond neo-Darwinism and its over-emphasis on competition, discreet individuals, and the role of genetics (Tsing et al. 2017: M51-M69 and M73-M89, and Corning 2020). Among other key ideas, these new understandings demonstrate how *sympoiesis* takes place not only between bodies but also across permeable cell, skin, and species boundaries where the processes of exchange include "energy, information, and other materials" (Corning 2020: 10). Biosemiosis (the biological interpretation of sensory signs) provides a frame for discussing the role of audience sensory perceptions in noticing meaning within sirencrossing's practice research. Biosemiotic theory also offers an evolved concept of Jakob von Uexküll's terms *Umwelt* and

*Innenwelt* (describing the lifeworld of an organism): as will be explained, this project will follow Jesper Hoffmeyer and others in their distillation of *Umwelt* and *Innenwelt* into one inclusive and continuous inner/outer subjective lifeworld by using *Umwelt* to mean both (thereby avoiding Uexküll's binary description of a situation which is anything but binary). A continuous inner-outer lifeworld is understood to be true for all organisms, including the humans who are the audiences for sirencrossing's work.

The concept of the 'urbanwild' points to another key aspect of this research which is the contention that it takes place during a period in earth time proposed to be the Anthropocene. The recognition (or not) of this new geological epoch will be determined by the international Anthropocene Working Group of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy as they take a judgement on to what extent human influences (arguably the 'urban') have penetrated and affected the 'wild' across the entire globe. This thesis will offer an overview of some of the debates surrounding the Anthropocene, such as the criticism that it lumps all humans (anthropos) into one species basket when the various disruptions to earth systems, including the technofossils (plastics, electronics, concrete, radiation, CO<sup>2</sup> levels, etc) that evidence it, cannot be said to arise from all humans but rather only some. As will be discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the Anthropocene produces social, economic, ethical, and philosophical questions that are being hotly debated across more than just geological contexts. However, by framing this doctoral research within the current moment in time, using the contested concept of the Anthropocene, the research contends that the multiple crises of the proposed new epoch in Earth's history (e.g. climate change, pollution, mass extinction) demand a way of human 'becoming' that honours and integrates entanglement, reasserting humans as kin with all Earth beings, not as kings. It will be demonstrated that this emphasis on noticing relations in the world has parallels with various indigenous cosmologies as well as with articulations of multispecies relations and of ecological animism (Lorimer 2017, de la Cadena 2015, Wilson 2001, Atleo 2011, Salmón 2017, van Dooren and Bird Rose 2017, van Dooren et al 2016, Kirksey 2014).

It is important to highlight that this doctoral project maps my own transition from being an artist with research interests, to an artist-researcher undertaking PaR in carefully theorised experiments. The early work with my company sirencrossing has been significant in terms of the knowledge and experience that it contributed to my approach to PaR and thus two key earlier projects (*city:skinned* and *rivercities*) are discussed in this thesis. I revisit these early projects with new-found insights and demonstrate how they incrementally led to the questions and methods employed in the examined PaR production of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*. Key to note is that sirencrossing productions have always

been better understood as 'audience experiences' rather than performances, in the way that they incorporate not only the bodies and awarenesses of audience and performers, but also the entire context of the 'in process' everyday sites where the work takes place. A central purpose of this research is to some extent to step out of the singular shoes of the artist-choreographer and attempt to theorise how exactly an audience experience functions and how it may best define itself. The audience experience proposes a field of events, sites, materials, and systems to be noticed by audience, rather than comprising of a discrete, framed event that is separated from the circumstances of its context. Nevertheless, the work is described as being 'choreographed' with the understanding that the choreography is necessarily a responsive improvisation in collaboration with the other bodies, energies, circulations and tendencies that might characterise the site(s). In sirencrossing's practice, the word 'choreography' is understood to describe a dynamic and flexibly devised pattern of material, sensory, and energetic encounters across time and space. Audience members too may find themselves having to improvise in response to the work (make decisions, take actions, interpret signs). As UK dance artist Sandra Reeve has asserted, "choreographic practice is taken as a term applicable to daily life as well as to artistic performance" (Reeve 2018: 75). This doctoral research project maintains that the everyday patterning of lived experience is available and potentially meaningful within the frame of the 'audience experience'.

Thus, using the practice methods of sirencrossing's urbanwild-sited audience experiences, the research seeks to provoke embodied, tacit, and ineffable insight into the lived experience of humans in cities. sirencrossing has been an umbrella for my choreographic work since 1994. Projects have taken place in London and Coventry (UK), Göteborg and Trollhättan (Sweden), Vancouver and Dawson City (Canada), and Daegu (South Korea). sirencrossing encompasses an international range of collaborators (performers, dancers, composers, academics, photographers, visual artists, sound artists, designers, writers, poets, filmmakers). Where financially possible, project teams have been internationally constituted. In all cases, I take on the role of lead artist and artistic director. sirencrossing projects have always been devised in collaboration with the site(s), (frequently) with other artists, and crucially through an intuitive response to having spent time engaging with the humans/nonhumans, spaces, institutions, shapes, atmospheres, imaginaries, assemblages, and networks to be found in specific sites. Across a range of projects, the work has sought to capture, articulate, and choreograph aspects of the complex networked experience of individuals navigating their lived experience in relation to time and site. This doctoral research considers the body as process, as immersed in situations where acts of becoming, reflection, memory, and habit

move between the material/immaterial, the human/nonhuman, the incidental and the intentional. The approach has grown out of various 'performance' traditions (including contemporary dance, theatre, live art). Set in real urbanwild spaces, both indoors and outdoors, public and private, the audience experiences intentionally incorporate the incidental, ongoing situations 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 do not erase or control whatever else is there. The existing rhythms, lighting, sounds, incidents and actions of the site are embraced and considered in the devising of the experience. Local humans and nonhumans are partners: the work tends to be created over weeks or months of onsite experiments, including workshopping the project ideas directly with local people. In recent years, sirencrossing's concern with everyday life has extended to a consideration of the ubiquity of handheld mobile screens, seeking to question what effects the split focus between virtual and embodied realms might be having on individuals' experience of the urbanwild; this question was included as an aspect of the PaR production in 2019.

It should be noted that this written thesis refers to other performance practitioners where relevant but, for lack of space, it has not been possible to offer any in-depth comparisons. Not included, but potentially of interest, would have been the contrasting approaches of other urban-sited performances such as Fiona Templeton's *You—The City* (1988) or *Mugger Music* (1996-97) by Manchester-based artists Nick Crowe, Jane Grant, Graham Parker, and Ian Rawlinson. Influences on sirencrossing's approach have included Meredith Monk's early urban-sited performances (1970-80s) and Janet Cardiff's audio walk for Artangel *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* (1999). A comparison with the approaches of UK company Blast Theory might also have been productive, especially in relation to their concern with everyday technologies (smart phones, apps, games, film) and urban sites.

To date, sirencrossing has predominantly presented in globally northern, Canadian-European contexts, and therefore, I acknowledge that sirencrossing's insights derive largely from that perspective. This is not to suggest that perspective as being more valuable than any other. It is however the case that the work is highly specific to contexts and sites ordinarily accessible to the collaborators, and importantly, has been grounded in lived experience in those places. We have also been aware of the degree to which this sort of work isn't always accessible to all levels of ability. Where possible, we attempt to adapt each piece for individuals who might struggle to see, walk, hear, or otherwise apprehend the audience experience. Given that rehearsals always take place in the sites where the work will be 'performed' we have had great success in attracting audience members who don't ordinarily

feel interested in or able to attend performances in theatres. Because they see us daily in their everyday spaces and (often) ask what we're doing, we are able to explain in plain language and give them a postcard about the event. It is also essential to our process to run several full dress/tech performances with test audiences who are not asked to pay. During the actual run of public performances, we also distribute some free tickets where feasible. Thus, we are able to bring people from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds into the experience of the work.

The written part of this thesis is organised into two chapters. Chapter 1 sets out several key ideas, beginning in 1.1 with an overview of the Anthropocene and its significance to the research as a frame for characterising the current everyday. The section will also articulate some of the tensions and problems with the concept of this proposed new geologic epoch, especially as it seems to rely on entrenching one idea of the human which doesn't consider other long-standing cosmologies, in particular those held by indigenous peoples across the globe. 1.2 breaks down what is meant by the urbanwild continuum and why this usefully describes the arena within which the project takes place. As a first case study, sirencrossing's project *city:skinned* (2006) is presented and analysed in order to demonstrate early practice approaches to urbanwild themes. *city:skinned* will also be seen to approach the city as a layered site which can be considered across something approaching the deep time suggested by the Anthropocene. Following this, 1.3 focuses on the body by introducing notions of permeability and symbiosis, thereby expanding the idea of entanglement to incorporate scales from macro to micro, suggesting in fact that the layers, networks, and relations of which humans and nonhumans are a part, can be said to penetrate bodily boundaries and link entities across all categories and scales. This leads next to a consideration of hybrid bodies in the time of posthumanism and the technosphere, where assemblages including bodies, are increasingly mutated and altered by human-manufactured materials and alterations, and where bodies are neither valorised nor erased by an overriding ideal of one sort of (hu)Man. Hybrid bodies and ecosystems will be discussed using two examples of other artists' work: Pierre Huyghe's piece *After A Life Ahead* (2017: Skulptur Projekte Münster, Germany), and Pinar Yoldas' project *Ecosystem of Excess* (2014). Finally, the chapter ends with a case study of sirencrossing's *rivercities* project (2010-2014), which sought, through several different practice iterations, to consider global and bodily flows using the hydrosphere as a model to explore entanglement between Earth systems, urban sites, and bodies. As such, *rivercities* marked a new consideration of the permeability of bodies and of their ongoing involvement in material global flows.

Drawing extensively on the PaR outcomes of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry 2019), Chapter 2 dives more deeply into what the audience experience does and how, with concepts including biosemiosis, affect, atmospheres, and porous immersion. It will discuss the multiple layers created by different ways of knowing, proposing experience as a nuanced interplay between the felt, the sensory, the intellectual, the unconscious, the remembered, and the intuitive – as something that is enacted in co-movement in and with the world (see Manning and Massumi 2014, Nöe 2004). Relevant theories of theatre and performance will be considered such as Machon’s (syn)aesthetics (2011), immersive theatre (White 2012, Alston 2016), walking practices and understandings of psychogeography (Smith 2010, Hancox 2012, Wrights and Sites 2006). The chapter will focus finally on a more detailed case study of the PaR findings of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry UK, 2019) articulating those findings in relation to the theoretical ground laid in the first part of the chapter.

Documentation of all of the practice examples under discussion is provided in several forms. The text of each case study is accompanied by photographs and is further presented through the use of sections of poetic text; the latter most extensively employed for the final PaR example of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*. Finally, links to video documentation from each case study are provided at the end of each case study discussion and summary comments. The reader is advised to view the relevant video documentation after having read the related case study. This sequence of reading and then viewing will ensure that the video versions do not overly determine the reader’s impressions of the work, but rather the reader will carry into that viewing a remembered sense of the embodied impressions evoked through the writing and photographs.



# 1. Urbanwild becomings in the Anthropocene everyday

## 1.1. The Anthropocene and the everyday

Born to the vast flat prairies in the Canadian west, I grew up playing on the edge of a small city during the 1960s – the city not an interruption of landscape but a part of it. The micro-world of a child meant daily immersion in the details of dirt, plants, wind, sky, insects, birds, small animals, heat and cold. To this day my sensibility remains defined by those wide-open horizons, that huge sky, a sense of climactic extremes, wild storms, and the constant horizontal movement of wind. It was an imaginative realm too, immersed in stories, histories, and connection to other places. The world stretched out in all directions, the nearby TransCanada highway remembered not as a disturbance of a natural world, but rather as an invitation to follow it out and across the land to distant mountains and eventually the sea. As a family we made this journey west every summer and so the prairies became forever stitched into a wider understanding of landscape, with hints of its global reach and coherence. That land and its humans and nonhumans traversed annually through a seasonal cycle of challenging extremes. Winter was long and brutally cold. Spring and autumn were both brief interludes at either end of the short but blazingly hot summers. In June every year I would succumb to the onslaught of severe hay fever as the surrounding fields ejaculated clouds of pollen in a frenzy of fertilisation. Years later, I realised that my sickness also coincided with the arrival of daily crop dusting: a plague of small airplanes flying low to spray the fields with poison, eradicating weeds and pests. I realised also that the child's wild landscape was in fact one of monoculture – thousands of miles of wheat or rapeseed – the original tall-grass and mixed-grass prairie almost completely eradicated, over one hundred years before.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, I moved away from that landscape for good, feeling its deadness and hollowed-out-ness as a deeply profound and senseless blank.

My personal sense of dis-ease with a world transforming for the worst was one small whisper in a wider gathering storm of human alarm that all is not well on the planet. From Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 to later warnings about holes in the atmosphere's ozone layer, assessments of human-triggered climate change, mass extinctions, air and water pollution,

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<sup>1</sup> "The area of native prairie that once extended from Canada to the Mexican border and from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to western Indiana and Wisconsin is referred to as the Great Plains . . . Since 1830, the declines (estimated to be 82-99%) in area of tallgrass prairie exceed those reported for any other major ecosystem in North America including remnant old-growth forest in the Pacific northwest, temperate rainforest in British Columbia and southeast Alaska, and bottomland hardwoods in the south-central United States" (Sampson and Knopf 1994: 418).

the proliferation of plastics, to global pandemics, and more – it seems undeniable that something is going wrong on a global scale. In fact, a growing consensus amongst scientists and academics proposes we are now living in an epoch of human-altered Earth systems referred to as the Anthropocene. The contention is that these human-caused changes will eventually leave a record in the rocks – in other words, become measurable as part of Earth’s geologic record. While the international Anthropocene Working Group of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy considers this potential new geologic age in Earth’s history, “the Anthropocene concept has already become a rallying point for geologists, ecologists, climate and Earth system specialists, historians, philosophers, social scientists, ordinary citizens and ecological movements, as a way of conceiving this age in which humanity has become a major geological force” (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2017: 5). Kathryn Yusoff offers an extensive critique of this claim with ten reasons to dismantle the idea of the Anthropocene; her central premise being that “The Anthropocene contains within it a form of *anthropogenesis* – a new origin and ending story for ‘man’. It is a genesis that names man as the originator of a new geologic nature” (Yusoff 2016: 20). Like other critics (see Chakrabarty 2009 and 2015) Yusoff questions the assumption that humans can be lumped together under the ‘species’ banner as a single geologic force – huge discrepancies, across human populations worldwide, in their access to capital, earth resources, and other engines of ‘human development’ make the idea of a single Anthropos unsupportable. In particular, Yusoff attempts to untangle the more complex geologic story to be revealed: “To author the Anthropocene as attributable to the agency of man misses the material specificity of what is at stake in the mobilization of fossil fuels and tells the same old anthropocentric stories of man and his dominion over nature” (ibid: 18). As she points out, the Anthropocene has been fuelled by the burning of fossil fuels, which represent condensed solar energy captured in prehistoric bodies that were then compressed in the rocks, laid down during the Carboniferous era (coal) and the Mesozoic period (oil) (Nunez 2019). Taking this geological perspective, Anthropocenic changes could be seen as facilitated by the bodies of another geologic era and foreshadow the inevitable return of human minerality to its constituent ingredients in a layer of the rocks. That thought is relevant to this doctoral research project, which proposes bodies as continuous with the systems and circulations of the planet. Hence, including here concepts of the Anthropocene, despite debates around its exact definition and timing, introduces a deep time framing, spanning billions of years, that places human bodies as just one category of body that arises from and returns to the planetary.

Despite controversy, as a concept with increasing popular exposure, the Anthropocene has also become a rallying concept for artists, triggering a flurry of geologic and climate-change-

inspired aesthetics or 'eco-poetics' (Last 2015: 3). Angela Last points out the responsibility and danger in this turn, noting that it is predominantly "academics and artists from wealthier countries" that have been engaged in the 'Anthropo-scene'. She asks, "what could a 'geopoetic', one that reconsiders not only human-planet relations but the multiple asymmetry of such relations, potentially do in our time and predicament?" (Last 2015: 3). In trying to describe and define evidence in the future rocks, Anthropocene imaginings have spilled out into science fictions; stories potentially to be articulated by future (nonhuman) geologists (Lorimer 2017: 128-131). Andrew Yang, in the introduction to his 'bibliography for possibility aesthetics', also suggests that art and aesthetics have an important role to play in proposing possible futures in the face of the Anthropocene, cautioning of the need to recalibrate notions of human time versus geological time, and to ask who is the collective 'we' of our 'u/dystopian thinking':

If Earth is a collective lifescape, then the question is how we will contribute to its resilience or its decay, and what kinds of imaginaries will function as mediums for either path. Alas, art can no longer presume the privilege of humanistic neutrality (as if it ever really could). Representations of the human and nonhuman across art, design, and literature are nothing less than forms of possibility aesthetics. These aesthetics, as models, implicitly take a position on the shape of a future in which cultural and planetary histories have now irrevocably woven into one another.

(Yang 2018: no page number)

When exactly the new epoch began is still up for discussion, with suggestions ranging widely from the advent of measurable impacts from agriculture (2,000 to 6,000 years ago) to the Industrial Revolution (200 years ago) to the first atomic explosions (in 1945) or the start of the Great Acceleration (in the 1960's) when all measures of global human impacts are seen to have begun to increase exponentially (see Zalasiewicz et al 2015, and Crutzen and Steffen 2003). In 2016, the Anthropocene Working Group made a recommendation for formal adoption of the Anthropocene to the International Geological Society, recommending a starting point in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Malhi 2017: 25.5). According to Jan Zalasiewicz "The Anthropocene as a stratigraphic term continues to be informal, though a case is being prepared (it will take at least a few more years) for its formalization on the Geological Time Scale" (2020: 27). If eventually ratified as a geologic epoch, the Anthropocene will follow the Holocene, which began 11,500 years ago (just after the last Ice Age). The Holocene, it should be noted, represented an unprecedented period of climate stability on Earth.

The debate around setting a starting date for the Anthropocene is a geological concern, but also one with socio-political ramifications. For example, a date proposed by Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin – the year 1610 – marks a moment known as the Orbis spike – the point when there was a marked dip in atmospheric CO<sup>2</sup> apparently caused by changes triggered by the arrival of Europeans in the Americas from 1492. This arrival witnessed increased mixing of animal and plant life between the old and the new worlds through increased global import/export; massive depopulation of native Americans due to imported diseases, war, famine, and enslavement (down from 61 million to 6 million, over 150 years); and subsequent changes in vegetation levels across the Americas with the decline of indigenous agriculture (Lewis and Maslin 2015). Therefore, choosing the Orbis spike as the start of the Anthropocene would also highlight the role of colonialism as a world-changing force. As this illustrates, there are competing interests hoping to make use of this contested term. “Part of the chimeric nature of the term Anthropocene within the natural sciences comes from its intent and origins, as it is a concept deriving from the Earth system and environmental sciences, but it adopts the nomenclature conventions of geology” (Malhi 2017: 25.5). Earth System science developed relatively recently when it was made possible by “macroscopic tools of in-situ and satellite-based monitoring programs and computational models” (Malhi 2017: 25.3). Andrew Bauer and Erle Ellis offer this definition: “Earth System science (ESS) views Earth as a system of interacting ‘spheres’ – the atmosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere – and uses Earth system models to describe the long-term dynamics of Earth’s interacting physical, chemical, and biological processes” (2018: 210).

In fact, humans have been impacting the planet for a very long time, though sometimes in ways that have been merely local or regional, rather than on the scale of disrupting Earth systems; or human impacts have at times been relatively slow and incremental where effects gradually become globally widespread, such as the eventual but almost total world-wide eradication of mega-fauna, wholly or partly due to human activities (see Barnosky et al 2004). Taken from a purely geological perspective, it might be much too soon to determine whether human-caused changes to the planet could be said to have marked a distinct change in the future rock layers. Bauer and Ellis also flag the danger in becoming fixated on the geological setting of a start date as it potentially lets some humans off the hook and disregards the long-standing and “continuously changing process” of human-Earth interactions. “The challenge of the Anthropocene proposal is not simply its formal division of geologic time but also the need to call attention to the entanglements through which social relationships, inequalities, and environmental histories are continually unfolding and producing novel Earth trajectories”

(Bauer and Ellis 2018: 210). The Anthropocene is therefore not merely a geological proposal but also questions the state of human-Earth relations, in its many reverberations.

It is the entanglements of an *everyday* Anthropocene with which this research project is concerned, focusing on, as Sarah Whatmore proposes for cultural geographers, “returning to the vital nexus between the bio (life) and the geo (earth), or the ‘livingness’ of the world” (Whatmore 2006: 600). This research maintains that only by employing practices that interrogate, reveal, and reimagine the ongoing everyday involvement in human and nonhuman relations of the bio/geo, will the multiple crises facing humans on the planet be understood as truly urgent, as constituting a fundamental challenge to business as usual. Site-specific audience experience aims to draw together awareness on several levels, not unlike the situation further articulated by Whatmore:

This return to the livingness of the world shifts the register of materiality from the indifferent stuff of a world ‘out there’, articulated through notions of ‘land’, ‘nature’ or ‘environment’, to the intimate fabric of corporeality that includes and redistributes the ‘in here’ of human being . . . this redirection of materialist concerns through the bodily enjoys the technologies of life and ecology, on the one hand, and of prehension and feeling, on the other, in refiguring the ontological disposition of research – drawing cultural geographers into new conversational associations; research practices and modes of address that collectively mark what I have called ‘more-than-human’ approaches to the world.

(ibid: 602)

Chapter 2 of this thesis will examine more thoroughly the ways that audience experience can achieve enjoining of the ‘in here’ of human becoming with the multiple and fluid movements that define living relationships to the more-than-human world, drawing on insights into biosemiosis developed by scholars such as Wendy Wheeler and Jesper Hoffmeyer, as well as Jakob von Uexküll’s articulation of *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*, which described, respectively, the inner and outer subjective worlds of an organism. On the Earth scale of the Anthropocene, some of the imagining required is truly difficult: geological timescales are almost impossible to hold in the same thought-space as the ordinary everyday and yet this is precisely what is required if we are to meet the crisis of the new epoch. Meanwhile, urbanwild relations continue to mutate in the face of rapid change such as the rise of the so-called technosphere – globally networked systems of technology described by Peter Haff as

large-scale networked technologies that underlie and make possible rapid extraction from the Earth of large quantities of free energy and subsequent power generation,

long-distance, nearly instantaneous communication, rapid long-distance energy and mass transport, the existence and operation of modern governmental and other bureaucracies, high-intensity industrial and manufacturing operations including regional, continental and global distribution of food and other goods, and a myriad additional 'artificial' or 'non-natural' processes.

(as cited in Lorimer 2017: 126)

Yadvinder Malhi places the human even more firmly within (not separate from) the technosphere in defining it concisely as “the global emergent system that includes humans and associated technological and social networks” (Malhi 2017: 25.9). As will be illustrated in Chapter 2.2 of this thesis in a discussion of sirencrossing’s use of mobile screens during the PaR performances of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (2019), the technosphere distracts bodies by literally wiring them (through screen devices) into local and global networks that compete for their attention, offering a seductive alternative to the local embodied spaces of the physical world. These notions of the technosphere imply a technology that has overcome the human ability to control it. By contrast, the Ecomodernists claim that humans are now as gods and that in a ‘good Anthropocene’ it is human mastery of technologies that will save the future, claiming further that humans are now essentially ‘decoupled from Nature’ (Asafu-Adjaye et al 2015). A detailed rebuttal of Ecomodernist ideas is beyond the scope of this thesis, however it is important to note the dangerous extent to which some people might take them seriously. The Ecomodernist suggestions, that nature is only useful for the ecosystem ‘services’ it provides, and that humans stand outside the nonhuman world that feeds us, provides our oxygen/water/minerals, recycles the matter of our bodies, and so on, have been soundly refuted by several other academics including Bruno Latour (2015), and Bronislaw Szerszynski (2015). Ecomodernist claims serve to deepen a perception of human separation from and domination of ‘nature’ and place an unrealistic emphasis on speculative technological fixes for planet-wide systems breakdown. From an opposite perspective, David Abrams offers a poetic articulation of human *un-exceptionalism*:

Caught up in a mass of abstractions, our attention hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies that only reflect us back to ourselves, it is all too easy for us to forget our carnal inherence in a more-than-human matrix of sensations and sensibilities. Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth—our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with *other* eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese. To shut ourselves off from these

other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human.

(2017: 22)

The highly enmeshed nature of human and nonhuman ontologies impacted by the technosphere of the Anthropocene is evident in many ways, such as the ubiquitous distribution of human-made substances like plastics, which are now entering the tissues of living things, including humans, but especially marine life (Miranda and de Carvalho-Souza 2016). Further, the technosphere produces waste materials that will form an enduring record of the Anthropocene, the so-called 'technofossils' such as plastics, electronics, concrete, and radioactive substances (Zalasiewicz et al 2014). Thus, the urbanwild, of which humans and nonhumans are a part, is a messy, hybrid, and overlapping territory including energies, ecologies, and various aspects of reconstructed nature. What this doctoral research is concerned with is how individuals experience this situation in their daily lives, and how an audience experience sited in the Anthropocene everyday might enliven greater awareness and understanding of human embeddedness in such assemblages. As Mary Louise Pratt asserts, "What is at stake . . . is not what the Anthropocene *is* but how it will be *lived*. Whether the stratigraphic authorities authorize the term will make no difference" (Pratt 2017: G170). The Anthropocene suggests an imperative to rethink human/nonhuman relations on geologic timescales and also to remember other understandings of 'being with the earth.' This does not suggest a nostalgic return to some pre-industrial Garden of Eden but rather a re-centring that might encompass indigenous and other more-than-human cosmologies that have actually never gone away but are re-emerging through indigenous scholarship and other texts (see Lorimer 2017: 124 and 127). Marisol de la Cadena's notion of the 'anthropo-not-seen' tackles directly the historic erasure and apparent re-emergence of indigenous cosmologies which have *always* assumed becomings through 'more-than-human assemblages' and indeed understand these to "express a different relation: for example, one from which woman-land-lagoon (or plants-rocks-soils-animals-lagoons-humans-creeks-canal) emerge inherently together; an ecological entanglement needy of each other in such a way that pulling them apart would transform them into something else" (de la Cadena 2015: no page number). De la Cadena's text describes a Mapuche woman's feeling of oneness with all aspects of a lagoon site under threat of development by a petroleum corporation in Argentina. In articulating the radical inseparability of the woman from all of the more-than-human aspects of her home, this statement reveals a fundamental aspect of the Mapuche's indigenous world view. Shawn Wilson, an Opaskwayak Cree from Manitoba,

Canada, in his paper 'What is an Indigenous Research Methodology' articulates this same relational way of understanding the world:

One major difference between the dominant paradigms and an Indigenous paradigm is that the dominant paradigms build on the fundamental belief that knowledge is an individual entity: the researcher is an individual in search of knowledge, knowledge is something that is gained, and therefore may be owned by an individual. An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge.

(Wilson 2001: 176-177)

Wilson goes on to explain that the Cree *language* is itself structured around *relationships*; in fact, around relational *interactions*: for example, the Cree word for sofa translates to "someplace where you sit". It is named not as an object, but for the relationship it has to the person naming it. "This language speaks from an epistemology that is totally foreign to the other research paradigms, an epistemology where relationships are more important than reality" (ibid: 177). Hereditary chief of the Ahousaht First Nation and academic Richard Atleo (Umeek) confirms this fundamental emphasis on the *primacy of relationships* for indigenous peoples in his book *Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous Approach to Global Crisis*:

social, political, economic, constitutional, environmental, and philosophical issues can be addressed under the single theme of inter-relationships, across all dimensions of reality – the material and the non-material, the visible and the invisible . . . all questions of existence, being, and knowing, regardless of seeming contradictions, are considered to be *tsawalk* – one and inseparable. They are interrelated and interconnected.

(2011: ix)

De la Cadena's notion of the Anthro-not-seen describes not only the cultural erasure of indigenous ways of describing the world, but also asserts a cosmology that

includes more-than-human assemblages, both in the usual sense (i.e. that they may include humans and nonhumans), and in the sense that these categories (human and nonhuman, and therefore species) are *also* inadequate to grasp such compositions, which . . . may not become through these categories. The assemblages of the

anthropo-not-seen may be translated as ‘articulated collectives’ of nature and humans, yet may also express conditions of ‘no nature, no culture’.

(de la Cadena 2015: no page number)

As he goes on to explain, more-than-humans, particularly in the indigenous context, include all sorts of beings, such as “Earth-beings—entities that are also mountains” (ibid). This is echoed to a degree in other, non-indigenous texts such as that of Steve Hinchliffe and Sarah Whatmore who recognise “urban inhabitants as more-than-human; more-than-animal; more-than-plant and so on. They are complex assemblages, mutually affecting and affected by their fields of becoming” (2006: 128). Jamie Lorimer also questions thinking of organisms as the primary unit of such assemblages, citing Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome as “it challenges prevalent modes of thinking configured around bounded interacting bodies and offers ecologies characterized by flows above, through and below the level of the organism” (Lorimer 2012: 595). From his perspective as a Rarámuri (an indigenous people of Mexico’s Sierra Madre mountains), Enrique Salmón expands on the fact that for his people (and most indigenous peoples world-wide) there is no word for ‘wild’ and that the idea of anthropos as a separate entity does not exist either (2017: 24-32). In this light then, perhaps the crisis of the so-called Anthropocene could be understood as one of a failure in relations between humans and other-than-humans; a ‘pulling apart’ that has broken the natural order – rather than a failure of human domination or stewardship.

This failure in relations between humans and other-than-humans that the Anthropocene demarcates, has arisen out of Western or European Judeo/Christian traditions where indigenous concepts of relation to ‘nature’ are often dismissed as being ‘supernatural’ or magical. However, as David Abram points out this is a misinterpretation of the deeply ecological embeddedness of indigenous beliefs:

We can attribute much of this oversight to the modern, civilized assumption that the natural world is largely determinate and mechanical, and that that which is regarded as mysterious, powerful, and beyond human ken must therefore be of some other, nonphysical realm *above* nature, “supernatural.” . . . The deeply mysterious powers and entities with whom the shaman enters into a rapport are ultimately the same forces—the same plants, animals, forests, and winds—that to literate, “civilised” Europeans are just so much scenery, the pleasant backdrop of our more pressing human concerns.

(2017: 8-9)

Thus, the shaman is not a magical persona but rather one deeply tuned to the multiple more-than-human worlds in which all humans are entangled. “His magic is precisely this heightened receptivity to the meaningful solicitations—songs, cries, gestures—of the larger, more-than-human field” (ibid: 9).

The degree to which all humans are profoundly connected to the more-than-human can be measured in other ways. Neville Ellis and Ashlee Cunsolo demonstrate that something they call ‘ecological grief’ exists widely, for example amongst farmers on the Western Australian Wheatbelt and indigenous Inuit peoples in the Canadian Arctic, as well as being increasingly identified in other literature. They define it as “grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems, and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change” (Ellis and Cunsolo 2018). More than merely being a reaction to distant phenomena, they demonstrate this grief as a profound feeling of *personal* loss, of overwhelming individual and/or collective ontological changes: “people mourn the part of self-identity that is lost when the land upon which it is based changes or disappears” (ibid). Elsewhere, Timothy Morton points out the impossibility of mourning a loss of something that we can never survive: “We can’t mourn for the environment because we are so deeply attached to it—we *are* it” (Morton 2007: 186). ‘Ecological grief’ offers further proof that the Anthropocene is far from just a geological concern but is already impacting on individuals’ personal emotional health, sense of self, and ability to cope with planet-wide crisis. Personal grief is further magnified through the echo chamber of social media and the press: both have the capacity to increase a sense of urgency or give the sense that crisis is always occurring, by facilitating exaggeration and repetition cycles of the same stories. “How to grieve ecological losses well – particularly when they are ambiguous, cumulative and ongoing – is a question currently without answer” (Ellis and Cunsolo 2018). Is ecological grief (or grief more generally) merely a human phenomenon? Does human ecological grief indicate an ongoing empathy with some over-arching, more-than-human ecological grief? That some nonhumans can experience grief has been proven, such as elephants who mourn the death of other elephants (see King 2013). Therefore, a nonhuman sense of ecological grief may be possible although is currently not proven, potentially indicating that this is not merely a human concern. And grief or not, life on earth just gets on with living, adapting, and dying. Nevertheless, returning to the aims of this research project, for humans who are less aware of their entanglement in more-than-human assemblages but who nevertheless feel this grief as a vague unnamed loss, sirencrossing’s method of audience experience, sited in the everyday, offers possible strategies for

remembering and reawakening by opening up a space for shifting perspectives and suggesting unexpected routes of travel across spaces of the ordinary.

Thus, the aggregate of earth crises proposed to herald the Anthropocene, whether or not it is ratified as a new stratigraphic epoch, serve as a useful challenge to reconsider human relations with the more-than-human world at this point in earth history. According to many predictions, the stakes are high, not least for humans. It is proposed that we are currently in the sixth great extinction on earth, where humans, constituting only 0.01% of Earth's total biomass (Bar-On et al 2018), are understood to have caused on average a loss of 68% of global populations of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, and reptiles between 1970 and 2016 (WWF 2020). The conditions contributing to these extinctions and earth changes are complex and may yet claim humans too (see Ripple et al 2017). This thesis can only give a flavour of the numerous debates around the proposed new epoch and its ramifications, but those concerns are profoundly important in characterising the context within which this practice-based research is situated.

## **1.2. The urbanwild: energies, ecologies, and reconstructed nature**

The 'urbanwild' is so named here in an attempt to overcome any suggestion of a binary situation with the 'urban' somehow separate from the 'wild'. It is akin to what others have termed 'nature-culture' (for example, see Braidotti 2013), or the more-than-human assemblages described by Sarah Whatmore as 'hybrid geographies' (2002). Cities and the 'urban' are merely aspects of what Gavin Van Horn calls 'the wild continuum' where differing degrees of 'wild' are equally recognised and valued (Van Horne and Hausdoerffer 2017: 4). In using the term 'urbanwild' this research project contends that neither urban nor wild exist in any pure state uncontaminated by the other; conjoining the two implies a degree of hybridity at all scales. Nevertheless, in setting out the two ends of this continuum, I will attempt to define my approach to both *urban* and *wild*, using each in turn as a lens with which to think through the idea of *urbanwild becomings*. Finally, I will use the case study of sirencrossing's 2006 project *city:skinned* to demonstrate how audience experience might begin to reveal entanglement and meaning within the urbanwild and from a perspective that approaches the deep time of the Anthropocene.

## ***The urban***

The urban is here understood as a concentration of human-created and maintained spaces and systems (cultural, technological, ecological) usually found in towns and cities. Given the increasing urbanisation of the planet, the urban could also arguably be said to be at the forefront of bringing about the Anthropocene, as posited by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2017). Nevertheless, world-wide impacts of the urban have been incremental; cities have existed for a long time, far longer than most of the proposed starting dates of the new epoch. Thus, it is more accurate to say that what cities have *become*, the way that their infrastructural technologies now facilitate supra-urban networks of supply and demand, has had a significant role in bringing about the human impacts characterising the Anthropocene. Thus, geographic territories defined by the 'urban' comprise a footprint larger than that taken up by any individual city. Both agriculture and industry have contributed hugely to producing anthropogenic changes, are vital to making urban life possible, and yet are enterprises usually sited outside of cities. In another example, cities source their water from watersheds lying far beyond the edges of their visible built environment (see Gandy 2003). The urban is therefore a condition describing multiple situations on earth, not only that of cities and towns, although the degree to which the urban might be in evidence outside human settlements will vary depending on where in the world is being considered: for example, rural Mali might arguably display less of the urban, compared to rural Britain (see Potts 2018: 976-977). For all their geographic shape shifting, blurred edges, and the homogenising effects of globalisation, cities could nevertheless be said to constitute specific idea-spaces; they each have an individual identity at some scale of scrutiny. Their sheer force of synergetic place-making means cities might also be seen as territories that nurture an anthropocentric attitude to the world, particularly in the cities of the global north where supply chains are especially disconnected from their points of origin. In these cities, the food, energy, water, and other consumables can seem to be available as if by magic, dislocated from the fields, forests, mines, factories, rivers, or oceans from which they were taken. On another level, a city makes it possible for many humans to live very closely together, and seemingly asserts the human ability to control and reshape the natural environment. Especially in the utopian architectures of modernist cities, evidence of death or decay might seem to have been eradicated. Concrete, glass, plastic, and metal appear particularly impervious to mortality, but look closer and you realize these materials have been reshaped from the minerals, fossils, and rocks of the once living past. Even wood and brick, though more obviously of natural origin, have been coerced into the orderly structures of the urban built environment. Modern cities – whether built in post-war North America, in the Brazilian jungle, in southeastern China, or in the New Towns

of England – seemingly seek to eradicate the mess, the weeds, the pests, and the defecation of natural ecosystems. The circular progression of birth, life, death, and decay is replaced with a linear illusion of immortality, a shining, sanitized one-way road stretching into eternity – not actually true, but rather a trick of constant disposal and replacement that facilitates the modernist dream that we will never grow old. In fact, there are plenty of examples around the world of the failure of this ideal, where an unplanned, unsightly, and resolutely decaying urban crops up next to utopia:

Both the shine and the darkness are today present everywhere in their specific early-twenty-first-century form: the modernist utopia in its current corporate and consumerist hubris, with its suburbs, ex-urbs, and gated communities, right next to a modernity noir of ghettos, shantytowns, and favelas extending mile upon mile into the countryside.

(Huysen 2008: 5)

That the messy ‘wild’ of the planet is ever ready to reassert itself upon human-built environments (no matter how utopian) can be seen in extreme examples such as Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre’s photography of *The Ruins of Detroit* (2010), and famously in the unintentional rewilding of Chernobyl, Ukraine following its 1986 nuclear power plant explosion (see Taylor 2016). Alan Weisman’s extended thought experiment in *The World Without Us* catalogues in detail just how precarious is any illusion of urban immortality as he asks what would happen if all humans suddenly vanished from the planet. Among the answers he relates is the example of New York City which is built on a myriad of swamps, brooks, and streams: within 30 minutes, without constant pumping out, the city’s subway system would begin to fill with water, and within 36 hours would be completely flooded. After that it would take only a matter of days before roads in the city would start to buckle and collapse. Seasonal freezing and thawing would continue the process of destruction, with buildings starting to collapse as their foundations were compromised. First weeds and then trees would start to grow in the gaps and cracks. Meanwhile, the bridges would begin to fall apart within a couple of seasons as rust destroyed the expansion joints (Weisman 2007: 21-38). In this example, Weisman goes on to present a breath-taking picture of New York City’s incremental collapse and return to an eventually almost pre-urban wild state in the absence of human maintenance and repair.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing (Summer 2020) the world is witnessing a partial breakdown of human societies as energy and resources are redirected in response to a Covid-19 global pandemic. The illusion of societal stability is being challenged too by climate crisis, and economic and social justice upheavals which seem set to play out for some time to come. To what extent cities become flooded and trees overtake buildings remains to be seen.

Not only do cities comprise reconstituted natural materials in the structures of the built environment, but they defy the cycle of seasons, of day/night, and other connections to local changes and ecologies through employing artificial light, heating/air-conditioning, import of non-local foods, etc. Meanwhile, as countryside becomes increasingly defined and limited by monoagriculture, industries, and other elements of the city's exoskeleton, nonhuman life is moving into and adapting within the interstices, abandoned spaces, and microclimates of cities (see Gandy 2018: 101-102). This interpenetration running in both directions performs a blurring and blending that defies any attempts at hard definitions. As Amin and Thrift articulate, it is difficult to say where cities begin and end, and indeed what exactly we mean by 'the urban': "The city is everywhere and in everything. If the urbanized world now is a chain of metropolitan areas connected by places/corridors of communication (airports and airways, stations and railways, parking lots and motorways, teleports and information highways) then what is not the urban?" (Amin and Thrift 2002: 1)

Cities might be understood as spatially situated but this notion ignores their tendency to escape defined borders, or to be physically dis-contiguous. Most urban scholarship resorts to heterogeneous list-making in an attempt to define what cities are, and in that fact lies an expression of their multiplicity. It is perhaps the high *density* of multiplicity, which makes a city something particular. Conventionally, cities are defined as human settlements that achieve a certain threshold of population numbers, but I would contend that cities might also be understood as achieving a particular concentration or density of heterogeneous human influences and systems.<sup>3</sup> Conversely it is a density that is always coalescing and dispersing, energetically nebulous and ever changing. There is a force of combination, dispersal, and recombination that creates the currents and movements of the urban. This notion of movement or flows is one that I will return to in discussing examples of my artistic practice and research, in particular *rivercities* (2010-2014) and *urbanflows* (2016-2020). The idea that movements or flows are processes creating the urban is also explored in a collection of essays focusing on urban circulations, wherein Boutros and Straw assert, "The city never *is* but is always becoming through the circulation of images, things, languages, ideas, and perhaps above all, people" (2010: 20). In *Seeing Like a City*, Amin and Thrift take a slightly different approach to writing about the movements and intersections of the urban, identifying "a 'relational turn' in urban studies" whereby cities are understood as machinic assemblages: "Urban force is conceptualized as distributed, coalitional and heterogeneous, . . . a force field

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<sup>3</sup> This isn't meant to imply that cities represent a triumph of human mastery or ultimate control; many nonhumans thrive in human-dense situations (such as cockroaches, rats, or viruses) because those situations offer them increased opportunities for survival. This is despite any human attempts to eradicate such nonhumans.

of relational interactions . . . [whose] practical capability and intelligence spread across intersecting infrastructures” (Amin and Thrift 2017: 16-17). Heterogeneous relational interactions by definition involve many diverse constituents. If we focus on the individual experiencing or embodying the everyday city, what opportunity or difference does that present to them? How does the individual participate in or perhaps help to create the urban? How does the urban help to create the individual? As has been asserted in a wide range of disciplines such as physics (Barad in Tsing et al 2017: G103-120), biology (Gilbert in Tsing et al 2017: M73-89), or indigenous belief systems (see Lorimer 2017: 124 and 127, de la Cadena 2015, and Salmón 2017: 24-32), whether we’re referring to particles, microbes, cells, or species, an individual is never actually alone, but rather perpetually in relation, entangled and in a state of becoming. In expanding the notion of the individual to include all of the preceding categories, it is clear that we are not talking about bounded, non-permeable entities. Humans too are permeable and the flows of the city travel through and between human bodies (such as hydrological flows that pass through bodies, city infrastructures, landscapes, and around the entire planet, as explored in sirencrossing’s *rivercities* project). The ‘field of relational interactions’ referred to by Amin and Thrift includes humans, nonhumans, elemental movements, social spheres, energetic and material flows, technologies, sensory inputs, political situations and currents. It is a complex territory adding up to a collective production of the urban, which importantly combines different temporal threads, as described here by Iain Borden:

Social relations in the city are dynamic ones, and although we argue for the importance of space, time is increasingly entering into discussions of the social production of spaces—not solely the time of historical materialism but also personal and irregular times: bodily rhythms, unconscious and conscious memories, the flux of complexity and chaos.

(Borden et al 2001: 9)

Awareness of the presence of different rhythms, and an ability to orchestrate or devise rhythmically, are key tools in choreographing audience experience. It could be argued that rhythm structures our ontology, defining the frame within which we exist. Henri Lefebvre, with Catherine Regulier, significantly developed this notion in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (2004). Of particular relevance to this research into urbanwild flows, is Lefebvre’s articulation of cyclical time and linear time (ibid: 8). The urban could be defined as a move away from the cyclical time of nature: for example, sunrise–daylight–sunset–darkness is replaced by the eternal day of the artificially lit city where work and play routines are no longer tied to the progress of the sun in the sky. Conversely, undisturbed natural cycles feed

into and interlink with other natural cycles: energy is not dissipated but is rather transmuted such as in processes of decay that then feed new life. In contrast, in *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II*, Lefebvre explains what I would characterise as a technological or urban sort of time, one that is disconnected from natural cycles and where energy is lost or 'used up':

Linear time is both continuous and discontinuous. Continuous: its beginning is absolute, and it grows indefinitely from an initial zero. Discontinuous: it fragments into partial time scales assigned to one thing or another according to a program which is abstract in relation to time. It dissects indefinitely. Techniques which fragment time also produce repetitive gestures. These do not and often cannot become part of a rhythm: the gestures of fragmented labour, actions which begin at any time or cease at any time.

(Lefebvre 2002: 48)

Therefore linear (urban) time disconnected from natural cycles, fragments and dissipates, and is a-rhythmical, being attached to specific purposes and activities, and therefore dislocated from other adjacent conceptions and measures of time. Traffic lights go red, then yellow to green across the city in a choreography that might be coordinated to facilitate efficient traffic flows, but it will not have been devised to have any relationship to the walking pace of an elderly person making their way to the local shop, nor to the scent-driven explorations of a domestic dog on its twice daily walk. In another disconnection, the 'abstract time' as articulated in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, time and everyday life* refers to the invention of clock time and standard world time zones (Lefebvre 2004: 73). Although apparently based on the cycles of night/day they are clearly a political/cultural invention with an imperative for standardisation (and convenience) that bears little relation to what is really happening. Clock time regiments human behaviour in order to ensure that workplaces can function efficiently no matter what time of year it is or what sort of weather is taking place. An audience experience sited within the urbanwild will traverse intersections of both cyclical and linear time – in part the corporeal and habitual rhythms of the individuals in the audience – as well as rhythms of the systems, sites, or situations passed through. It will also (grudgingly) utilise abstract clock time in order to attract and convene audiences by attending for example to running the event during non-labour hours; the 'leisure' hours for a majority of potential audience members.

As will be discussed later in this thesis, there is much more to be said about time in relation to our stream of conscious experience. Barry Dainton (2008: 381-385) teases out concepts of time in relation to the continuity and discontinuity of our phenomenal experience, and in

relation to memory. In devising audience experience I am most concerned with time as it relates to the lived experience of the everyday. As such it is often numbered but slips as well into something more perceptually malleable. The present moment, or the 'now' is important, but so too is the accumulation of memory and the apparent layering of 'nows' that memory allows. Anticipation of the future is also important, offering potential for adding impetus or energy to the 'now' of audience experience.

Finally, in describing the urban, it is important to value *personal and individual* understandings within the collective relational field – especially given the ubiquity of technologies that seem to offer a seductive and unchallengeable authority, providing endless data about what the city is (see Amin and Thrift 2017: 26-27). In current scenarios, where power is concentrated with corporations and politicians, and valorised by mass media, what cannot be sensed, collated, and counted by live data feeds may cease to exist in any meaningful way. To what extent do many humans allow their well-being to be determined by the algorithms of their social media feeds? How sound are government decisions and policies if solely based on statistical analysis, ignoring the qualitative and the embodied? What human capacities are lost when GPS devices are the necessary accessory to facilitate human navigation through space? In returning humans back to their own embodied-entangled knowledge through their felt and sensed capacities, this doctoral research proposes the city as a *personally sensed* field of interlinking systems – of energies, idea generation/mutation, transportation/movement patterns, concentrations/dispersals of activity and stillness – and seeks to unpick the reciprocal impacts between site/territory and the sensing human body, and how those shape our lived experience. Through audience experiences sited specifically in the city, audiences are brought into a direct and meaningful encounter with all of these complex interactions.

### ***The wild***

The word 'wild' could be taken as a more-lively alternative to the problematic notion of 'nature'. In defining 'wild' and 'wildness', several authors look to the word's etymological roots which refer to the notion of 'self-will'. According to Jay Griffiths, (quoting Roderick Frazier Nash) the word has roots in "early Teutonic and Norse languages" meaning "self-willed, wilful, or uncontrollable" (Griffiths 2008: 49, see also Van Horne and Hausdoerffer 2017: 2). Already feeling an intuitive affinity for the untamed, beyond-human-control freedom suggested by 'wildness', it was Griffiths' book *Wild: An Elemental Journey* (2008) where I first felt a deeper synergy with the term 'wild'. She writes in a fever of yearning, using phrases such as "its urgent demand in the blood," "its howl," "elemental vitality," and so on.

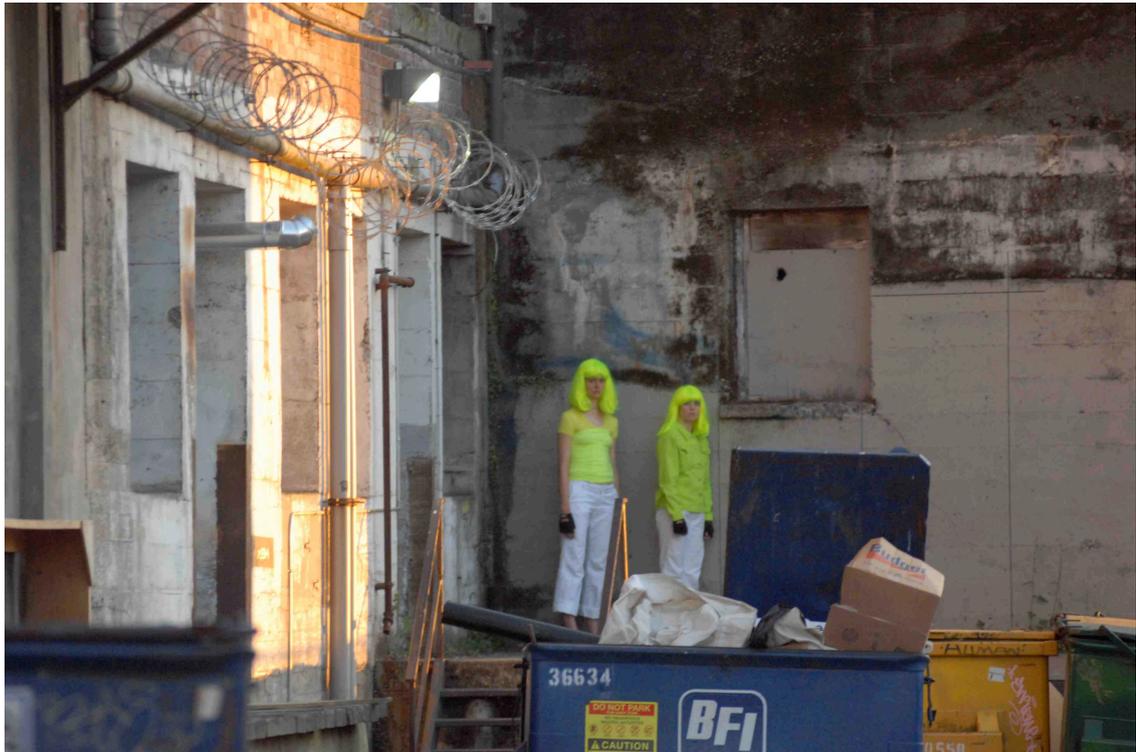
She claims that “wildness is resolute for life: it cannot be otherwise for it will die in captivity. It is elemental: pure freedom, pure passion, pure hunger. It is its own manifesto”. She asserts that we (humans) are inextricably also ‘elemental’ (Griffiths 2008: 1). Ultimately, her wild land is ‘self-willed land’ (Griffiths 2007). Griffiths’ urgent language seeks to bring forth the essential vitality of the world and thereby remedy a situation where that vitality feels perpetually constrained, held down, and suppressed. In contrast, Gary Snyder writes of the wild as something that can never be suppressed, and further, calls into question the possibility of a human-caused epoch: “Wild is process, as it happens outside of human agency. As far as science can reach, it will never get to the bottom of it, because mind, imagination, digestion, breathing, dreaming, loving, and both birth and death are all part of the wild. There will never be an Anthropocene” (quoted in Wuerthner et al 2014: iix).

This elemental quality of ‘wildness’ is an important one in trying to define the vitality present in urbanwild assemblages. Ingold describes the exchange of vitality as understood in animist cultures: “hunting effects the circulation of vital force between humans and animals and thus contributes directly to the regeneration of the lifeworld of which both are part” (Ingold 2000: 114). Such cultures operate with an assumption of equilibrium of reciprocal exchange between humans and nonhumans, whereas like the linear time of the urban, urban vitality might seem to be more discontinuous or fragmented. It is perhaps a nostalgia or longing to redress that fragmentation or suppressed awareness of vitality that has led some humans to rely increasingly on films, television nature programmes, and other image-based reconstructions to provide them with their ‘wild’ reference points. As David Kidner articulates, these “images of nature reinforce the comforting illusion that the wild world continues to flourish . . . [and] . . . we are encouraged to accept that everything, including wilderness, is an artifact of the human world, because we define it, represent it, and communicate about it” (in Wuerthner et al 2014: 10-11). Such representations of the wild are never experienced in real space and time, are always perfectly constructed using high production value sound and image and bypass the multi-sensory experience of actually engaging with wildness. How can the everyday urbanwild possibly compete? Is nature or the wild only to be found in far-off jungles, seas, or deserts? This is a real challenge for sirencrossing when engaging audiences through devised experiences in the urbanwild. How the work tunes and focuses audience attention is critical, as will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

This research project does not refer to a surrounding and separate ‘nature’ but rather to a situation incorporating a hybrid complication of anthropos and other self-willed systems and

entities. Hence the affinity with Gavin Van Horn's 'wild continuum' mentioned earlier (2017: 4). Numerous authors have sought to construct new theories to replace old understandings of a human-nature binary and of human relations with the more-than-human world. By variously declaring the end of nature (Morton 2007 and 2010), our kinship with the nonhuman (Morton 2017, Haraway 2016), and the vitality of matter (Bennett 2010), the dominance by or perceived separateness of the human is extensively challenged. Relatively new fields such as biosemiotics articulate the interconnectedness of everything through being "concerned with studying the sign-character of the processes that take place inside or between living systems (from the single cell to full organisms and further to populational or ecological systems)" (Hoffmeyer 2008: 4). Similarly, Paul Adams develops the notion of 'enviro-organism' in order to emphasise multi-scale, interrelationship through communication. By communication Adams means a whole host of chemical, physical, and sensory biosemiotics: "[with] overlaps between human language and non-human signalling mechanisms" (Adams 2015). My question is: to what extent are urban humans ordinarily (even subconsciously) affected by (perhaps engaged in) this multi-scale, networked field of communication? This question and proposed model of reality have been directly relevant for this research project employing audience experience as a research practice – especially with its emphasis on "communication-laden *encounters* between objects, creatures and environments" (ibid, emphasis added). We will return to a more in-depth consideration of these concepts in Chapter 2.

Drawing together many of the threads articulated in the preceding pages, the following section offers a case study of sirencrossing's 2006 Vancouver (CAN) production of *city:skinned* which was a project employing site-based audience experience to investigate notions of the city as a site of wildness. This production, although completely different in its final outcomes, built on the approach and performances of an earlier *city:skinned* in 2002 (London, UK). The two works shared a premise of peeling away the 'skin' of the urban in order to reveal the 'wild' underneath, but were otherwise very different pieces, each determined by the specifics of the sites and cities involved. Although I wasn't aware of the concept of the Anthropocene at the time, this notion of the wild as a layer of ancient forest beneath the contemporary city invited a perspective approaching that of geologically deep time. The 2006 production of *city:skinned* also cultivated an awareness of the more than 10,000-year history of indigenous peoples in a location which had only recently become the city of Vancouver.



## CASE STUDY

### city:skinned VANCOUVER

**6-15 July 2006 (22 performances, including previews on 5 July)**

***Dancing on the Edge* festival, Vancouver, Canada**

A sirencrossing performance project in Vancouver, Canada, *city:skinned* (2006) posited nature or the wild as an often hidden or unseen subcutaneous potential beneath the ‘skin’ of the city. In that notion, there is a degree of bifurcation between the urban and the wild, but the work developed several methods that are worth highlighting in order to begin to explore how audience experience can reveal insight into urbanwild assemblages. At the time, my practice was probably more binary in its approach to urban and wild – over several years, it was through the practice itself that my understanding began to shift towards seeing these instead as ends of a spectrum. This case study will employ photographs and elements of poetic writing in an attempt to bring forth some of the tacit and ineffable insights from the practice as well as the layering of meaning that the audience experience provided. In the writing, in addition to the main text, three different voices will serve to take the reader both inside the experience as well as provide glimpses into the research insights that informed the

**Figure 1 (above):** *city:skinned* (Vancouver). Performers: Tanya Marquardt, Catherine Andersen. Photo: Chris Randle.

final work. The intention is to help the reader who did not experience the piece to arrive at a more visceral and multi-layered understanding. Further, employing this range of perspectives facilitates an examination of how the research methods and outcomes of the piece might be understood as moving towards becoming practice as research. Each of the three extra voices will offer a slightly different perspective and in each case the text is formatted differently from the main text: in regular black font (not italic) and indented is an initial piece of text that was performed during the opening scene of the piece; in larger *black italic* are the interior thoughts and impressions of the collaborators devising the work (*we*); in larger *blue italic* the point of view of the 'audience' is represented through one actual audience quote and some imagined audience thoughts (*they*). The latter were inspired by actual audience comments overheard after performances.

*city:skinned* was developed over a four-month period examining Vancouver's connection to its natural setting on the former site of an ancient old growth forest. It sought to peel away the city, contrasting the colonial European notion of this being an 'empty wilderness', with the 10,000-year-long connection to this place for local indigenous peoples. The research culminated in performances of a 90-minute piece for audiences of 20 people at a time, during which they encountered fragments of performance, sound, video and installation by journeying on foot and by bus through a series of diverse interior and exterior locations in downtown Vancouver, arriving finally at a large urban forest (Stanley Park) where the piece concluded. Stanley Park preserves a fragment of the vast old growth forest that was cut down some 150 years ago to build what became the city of Vancouver. The work posited the urban built environment as a 'devastated landscape' in ecological terms, described by restoration ecologist Robert Seaton in the following (a text that was performed during the opening of the piece):

It is of course true that this city was once a forest . . . and the same could be said of lots of places such as London or Berlin. . . Being who I am, the real question would seem to be what sort of a forest, with what sort of natural diversity/disturbance, dynamic/human value/unwritten natural history. The nature of the current politic on both sides of the environmental divide appears to tend to mistake the forest for the trees. But the forest is so much more.

So perhaps what is coming to mind for me is that if you are interested in the places where decay and dereliction open up the possibility of sensing again the green beneath the concrete, then perhaps the truest representatives of this reality are those species which emerge in such places. In restoration ecology, we often think of

places that have been severely impacted (mined landscapes, tailings piles, parking lots) in terms of how similar they are to landscapes immediately after glaciation. And in fact, it is those species that first colonize post-glacial landscapes, which also first colonize after the 'human glacier' – red alder and willow, and then ferns and alpine grasses.

– Robert Seaton in an email to Carolyn Deby

A key element in the piece focused the audience's sensory experience by requiring them to wear earplugs for part of the time. This had the effect of strategically altering their everyday experience of the city, preventing them from chatting to each other, and attuning their sensory attention particularly to the visual – all crucial to their reception of the work. Much in the way that listening to music through headphones somewhat removes the individual from their context, having muffled hearing made the audience more aware of themselves as observers. An audience member explains how this affected her:

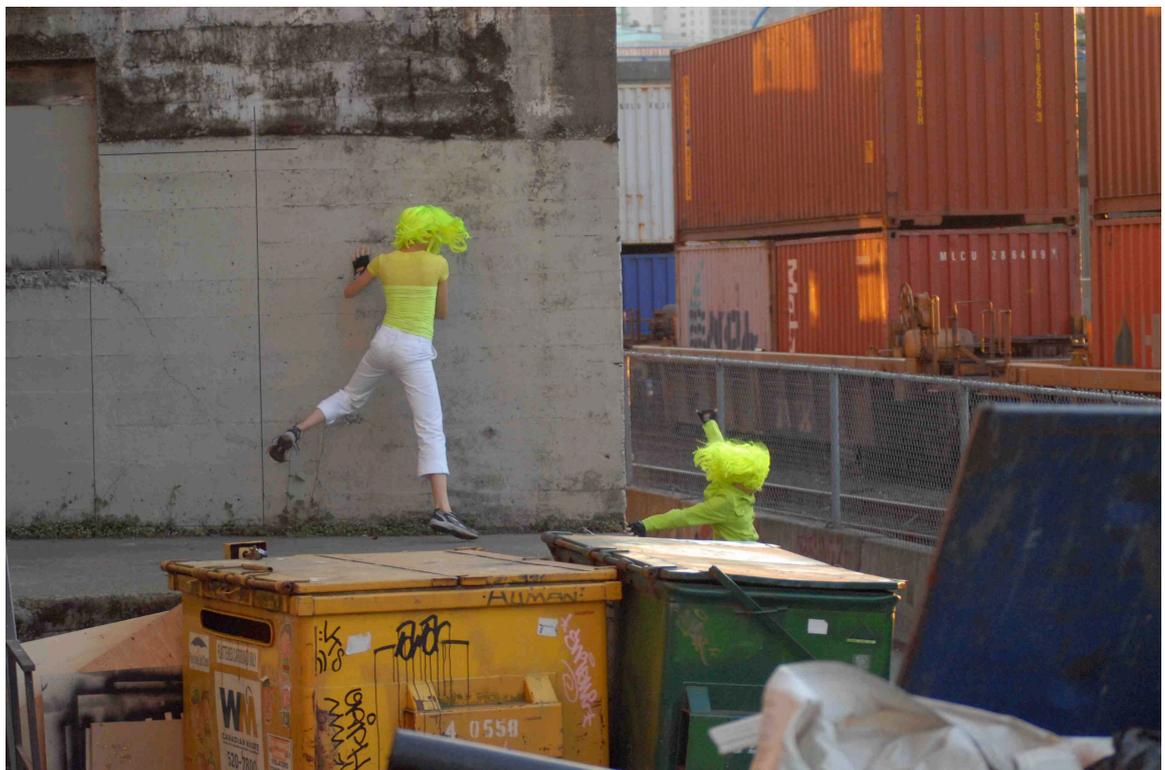
*The earplugs that we were asked to wear were an essential part of this event. When the lights go down in a theatre there is a moment when my reality changes slightly. This is what the earplugs did for me. Perhaps that is one of the reasons that I am usually not fond of site-specific work. There is nothing right off the top to take me to that other place. It is very easy to slip out of that heightened state of open-minded, ready for anything anticipation if the performers and the choreography don't keep me there. In this situation, even though the performers came and went and there were several stretches of walking or bus riding (or waiting for the bus) without seeing any choreography, I rarely left this state . . . everything and everyone I saw became a part of the performance.*

**D-Anne Trepanier**

Both actions – of putting in, and later, taking out the earplugs – were woven into the audience experience at key moments in the work. A silent video of an old man performing alone in the old growth forest was seen projected onto a wall in a funeral chapel garage, after which instructions for audience to put the ear plugs in was performed live, with gestures modelled on the way that flight attendants demonstrate putting on seatbelts and explaining safety features in an airplane before the flight. In *city:skinned* this 'safety demonstration' was immediately prior to rolling up the garage door in the disused funeral chapel, to reveal the cityscape with its backdrop of mountains. That moment became also a slightly tongue-in-cheek 'lifting of the curtain' on the performance of the city. By making reference to the safety

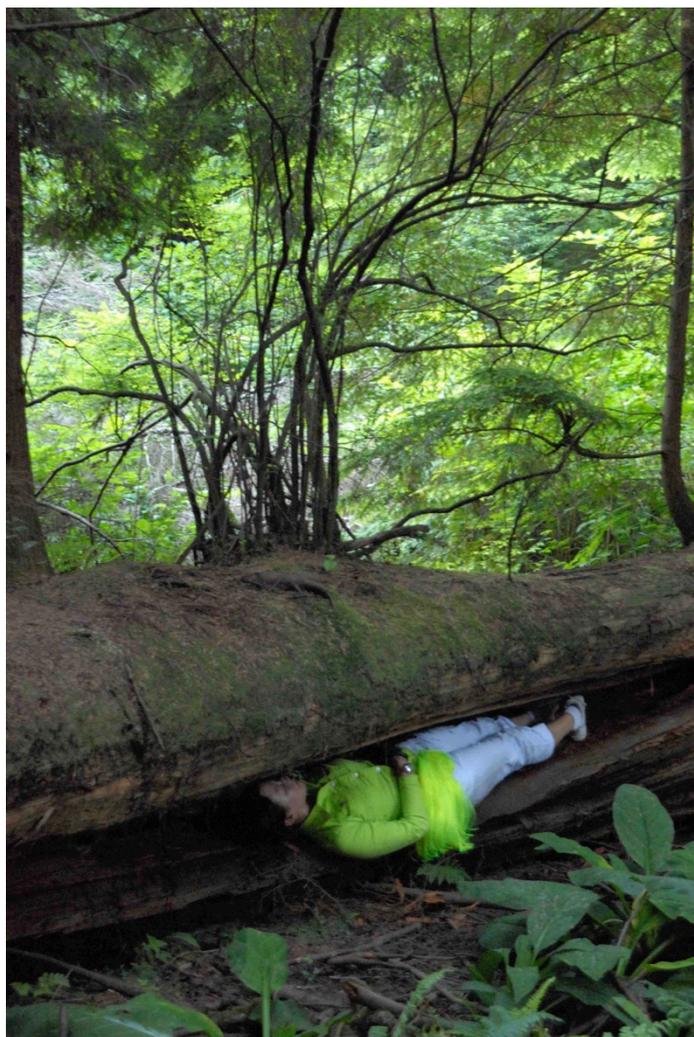
precautions preceding an airplane journey the action created an ironic expectation that this group experience might be risky. Various forest materials installed in the funeral chapel, along with the video of the old man in the forest, also provided clues that this 'dangerous' journey was about more than the urban landscape revealed as the 'curtain' was raised. It suggested the death of the forest whose detritus filled the funeral chapel. It proposed that protection was required before re-entering the city. As the audience members shifted their focus into the newly revealed outside landscape their eyes were drawn to a fluorescent green figure moving on a rooftop in the distance, framed against the mountains. Moments later, in the foreground streetscape, other performers ran out and away from the audience, scribbling fleeting bodily shapes against the buildings nearby before disappearing up the street in the direction of the rooftop event.

At the outset of the piece the audience had been told to follow the performers – this was the main device for enticing them along the route. The instruction to 'follow the performers' kept the audience alert, even slightly worried that they would lose the piece. Performed events were fragmentary, usually no more than a few seconds, or minutes. *The performance was always disappearing*, making it necessary for the audience to pay close attention and to follow, passing through the on-going, everyday life of the city, which as a result became imbued with new associations. The perpetually disappearing performance functioned as a device to keep the audience attention engaged but also to induce them to notice everything



**Figure 2 (above):** *city:skinned* (Vancouver). Performers: Tanya Marquardt, Catherine Andersen. Photo: Chris Randle.

else that was incidentally going on (they were never sure what exactly they were meant to notice). Bright colour was used deliberately to focus audience attention, making it possible to see the performers against a busy urban backdrop, particularly as events took place at a variety of scales – from the intimate (in close proximity) – to events just visible in the distance (such as on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor rooftop, almost part of the skyline). Specifically, the performers wore white jeans, with fluorescent green tops and had attached to their belts (or sometimes wore) long hair fluorescent green wigs. In the city, this bright colour made them instantly visible at a distance, whereas, by contrast, in the final forested scene, the same fluorescent green perfectly matched the colour of the surrounding temperate rainforest foliage. Thus, the choice of costume colour also highlighted a separation of human performers within the urban, and then later, a merging of those humans with the forest. This dichotomy intended to make more obvious the relative lack of green in the downtown environment and hence the degree to which the original forest had been eradicated. Conversely, it was hoped that green would become a thing to notice and that any foliage visible in the urban environment would be instantly highlighted, even if only subliminally. The locations used, and the route taken by the piece, were determined through a combination of factors during the devising process, including: intuitive wanderings through the city (not dissimilar to the methods of a psychogeographic *derivé*); historical research into the development of the City of Vancouver in the area; and meetings and workshops with local people to invite their impressions of the ‘forest beneath the city.’ The investigations quickly focused the work on an area of Vancouver known as the Downtown Eastside – an area of huge deprivation, but also the site where the small settlement that



**Figure 3 (above):** *city:skinned* (Vancouver). Performer: Cara Siu. Photo: Chris Randle.

would become Vancouver was first built. The route taken by the audience transited across area boundaries that are unmarked but implicitly understood, connecting distinct zones or territories that are not ordinarily traversed by the same people. Homeless and other socially marginalised populations rarely stray from the few miserable blocks of the Downtown Eastside. Tourists remain in Gastown or the adjacent shopping areas. A couple of nearby streets feature local designer shops attracting a well-heeled clientele. These territories could perhaps also be seen to mark areas of differing degrees of wildness in the urban landscape, with many of the local 'street people' (with whom we ran creative workshops) being more inherently 'wild' and willing to transgress the order of the other urban zones. Chronically disadvantaged due to systemic racism and historic cultural genocide, a large majority of the 'street people' appeared to be of indigenous descent (see Fenelon 2019). Significantly, Vancouver sits on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations – a fact now formally acknowledged by the city (Meiszner 2014).

Integral then to developing content relevant to the site were the creative workshops with local people in association with several community centres, during which individuals were invited to influence the final shape and content of *city:skinned*, working with sirencrossing over three months using movement, video, writing, and photography in personal response to the theme of the work. This period of development also gave a chance for the presence of sirencrossing's urban-sited actions to become a recognised and accepted part of the local everyday. Two of the sirencrossing team (myself and another performer) were temporarily living in the area and therefore it also became our neighbourhood. As well as developing material in response to this urban area and the old growth forest of Stanley Park, the collaborators also spent time in the relative wild of Vancouver's north shore mountain forests. The latter are second-growth forests on the edge of residential areas but are nevertheless directly adjacent to wilderness areas beyond the city. Therefore, these forests served as imagination spaces to help us to tune into the perhaps never quite disappeared 'forest beneath the city.'

*As collaborators we all experienced fear in the forest. Initially, when we began to work in the streets of the city's Downtown Eastside, our "odd" behaviour attracted the attention of those living and surviving on the streets. In a funny way they recognised us as being like them. We didn't experience aggression, just interest and camaraderie. Of course, many aspects of street life on the Downtown Eastside are bleak. There are clearly areas where we would not risk dancing. Not least, because it would have*

*seemed completely inappropriate. And, there was another surprise – much of the ‘street life’ had permeated Stanley Park as well. The giant trees are still there, and the forest is lush and impressive. But stray off of the main pathways and one discovers that the city has infected the forest. The basic forest form over millennia is unchanged, but the detail in surfaces shows habitual invasion. From graffiti-scarred trees to underpants, syringes, and condoms in the undergrowth, to improvised beds for the homeless – this was no space for romantic illusion.*

Geographically the piece encompassed a very large part of the city of Vancouver – starting in a disused, eastside funeral chapel and ending in Stanley Park (4.5 miles away). For the first time we moved an audience not only by enticing them to walk, but also by incorporating a surprise bus journey into the piece. The bus experience included a recorded soundscape that began surreptitiously with what seemed to be normal traffic sounds, gradually becoming louder and more surreal with sounds of automobile crashes, boat horns, crowds of children laughing and playing; a tree being chopped down; and then nothing but the sound of a river bubbling just as the bus arrived at Stanley Park. The sound score was played through hidden speakers inside the bus, at a volume audible to the earplug-wearing audience. At first, the sounds were sparse and could be assumed to be coming from outside the bus, but as the mix became more and more surreal, the audience realised it was part of the piece. What might have been a time to passively ‘zone out’ while being transported to a mysterious destination, became instead a heightened experience, with the passing city streets, beaches, harbour, and then Stanley Park, coloured by another layer of associations. This technique of mutating the everyday through surreal exaggeration is one of the methods used to heighten the audience’s perception and understanding of their relations to the systems and sites passed through; in other words, to ‘make strange’ and therefore highlight the ordinary as being extra-ordinary.

With a similar intent, elements of video, performance and/or installation were planted in several other places along the route, including an apartment building, a furniture shop, a workers’ café, a stylish bar/restaurant, an independent designer’s clothing store, a garden in Chinatown, and in the Stanley Park forest. In every case, the encounter with something surreal was juxtaposed with the ordinary, suggesting a sort of magical potential percolating under the normal surface of the city – and something that perhaps only they (the audience) were completely aware of. Incidental and accidental audiences (people going about their daily lives) would regularly encounter fragments of the piece, but as it kept on disappearing, it was only the paying audience who managed to follow it through to the end.

Live performance fragments also manifested this idea of disrupting and 'making strange'. In another example, two performers running away from the audience suddenly switched into a super-slow-motion way of walking, just as they began to cross a busy four lane road as the 'walk' light turned green, moving parallel to each other at a glacial pace on opposite sides of the intersection, perpendicular to the traffic flow, and in extreme contrast to the machine speeds normal to that site. When the walk light went red and the traffic became anxious to get going again, the performers held their nerve and the super-slow pace for as long as possible, usually resulting in honking horns and shouts from drivers. When the performers had held the situation as long as they felt safe, they could choose to run again. This was always stressful and yet strangely powerful; the normal speed of the city being forced to accommodate a much more drawn out feeling of duration. This part of the piece was a favourite too of the street people who hung out on the corner nearby. On one occasion a man in a wheelchair spun himself out into the traffic to hold it up so that the dancers could finish their slow crossing against the red light – an action for which I thanked him but begged him not to repeat!

The events and interventions of *city:skinned* attempted to help the audience notice where the forest or wildness might be leaking out in the city: back alleys, broken pavements, or empty lots offered glimpses of nonhuman life reasserting itself; homeless people often appeared unexpectedly in back alleys, foraging for discarded food in bins or pushing shopping trolleys filled with bottles (to be cashed-in for bottle deposit money); a coffin in the funeral chapel sprouted tree seedlings; the main funeral chapel area was alive with an installed cacophony of trees and bushes growing up from the floor and down from the ceiling. Partway through the piece, a small trendy designer clothing shop called 'Hunt & Gather' became the site of a brief solo performance of female wild energy (watched from outside through the shop windows) and hosted a large tree installed amongst the racks of expensive clothing. Much of the dancers' movement vocabulary in the streets was on all fours or rolling, making an animal connection to the ground that belied its unyielding concrete or tarmac 'skin' – and in defiance of the frequent presence of broken glass, hypodermic needles, and other debris (one of the necessary tasks for this piece was to walk the route before every performance or rehearsal and clear away anything dangerous found on the sites where performance would take place). The elements of misplaced or resurgent 'nature' also served to suggest a decentring of the human within the anthropocentric hegemony of the urban interior spaces.

It has been sirencrossing's observation that audience experiences sited in everyday locations require an opening section during which the audience is primed for what is about to take

place. As is the case for any sort of performance or art exhibition, the audience will arrive cluttered with the stress and events of their day, distracted by all manner of concerns, and therefore need to be brought into the focus-space and suspended time of the thing that is about to happen. When the audience experience takes place outside the neutral 'black box' there is even more reason to ensure that their perception is focused and shifted, since the 'stage' will be all around them, filled with numerous potential distractions. The audience 'contract' may be confusing in this situation and therefore what is expected of them must be clearly communicated. That communication can begin long before they arrive, coded into the publicity images and texts, but will also reside powerfully in everything that happens to them from the box office to the starting location of the work. Often, making fine adjustments to what is said to, and done with them, can make a huge difference to how they perceive the work.

*The wait in the theatre foyer is over. The instruction is to walk one block and knock at the door of an old funeral chapel. They are excited. The door opens silently into a narrow hallway, one long wall messy with hand-written texts and Polaroid photos. Snaps of pavement and green. Organ music is playing faintly in some distant room. The air is dead and still. They wait. Through a doorway they can just see into a small room. There, an open coffin...bursting with life. Pine tree seedlings...growing out of it. There is another pause. Then the hallway silence is cracked...a sudden opening and shutting of doors, women rushing in and out...and a fragmented story of glaciers and parking lots...before, sudden silence. Then, they are on the move again, as the space opens unexpectedly out and through into a room full of fantastical forest green...*

Without knowing Vancouver, it is difficult to appreciate the extreme contrasts in cultural and socio-economic territories that were traversed during the piece. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where the piece began, has been referred to as "the poorest postal code in Canada" (Linden et al. 2013: 559). A 2017 local newspaper article titled "Welcome to Hell: A Walk Through the Downtown Eastside" makes for grim reading but confirms the impression we had in making and performing *city:skinned*. As did the journalist, we regularly encountered people openly injecting drugs, and saw scenes of the utmost tragedy and human need being played out in the streets and alleyways (see Shore 2017). On the fringes of the Downtown Eastside are artists' studios and 'edgy' designer shops. It lies immediately adjacent to the tourist destination of Gastown, then Chinatown, and next to that the business district, and main shopping areas. Beyond these to the northwest is Stanley Park, situated on the harbour.

The behaviour of the performers appeared to transgress societal norms for public space, particularly making an impression on the homeless, addicted, displaced, or mentally ill people living on the streets of the Downtown Eastside. In fact, the 'street people' would often join in, or applaud the performers' actions. After a month of on-site creation, and then 10 days of twice-nightly performances, the 'street people' knew exactly what was coming when, and where to go to see it. It was the ticket-buying audiences who sometimes felt themselves on alien territory and possibly on display. Countless audience members commented afterwards that the experience had completely changed their perceptions of their city. By 'performing' the act of moving through the city, noticing how they and the performance were continually disrupting the passage of ordinary life, the ticketed audiences were made highly aware of their own presence in the work. They experienced a hyperawareness of themselves in relation to a repetition of contrasting of green and urban, the unruly territories and humans that they encountered, and the dissonance of their own silent watching as outsiders, amid the busy ordinary. Incidental audiences (passersby) were witness to all of this, with some of them experiencing it on several occasions. With two performances nightly, the performance route through the city was repeatedly activated by the passage of audience and performance interventions. Although there was an interlude of about two hours during which the various locations might settle back to normal, the possible effects of such repetition on the everyday 'normal' was something that I confess to having not entirely thought through at the time. Certainly, it was clear that the people 'living on the streets' were ready for and eagerly anticipating this novel series of interruptions to their home territory.

By transgressing several unmarked boundaries between different, yet closely clustered urban zones, the audience journey stitched together an almost forbidden transect of socio-economic and political difference. These are zones policed predominantly through local



**Figure 4 (above):** *city:skinned* (Vancouver). Performers: Cara Siu, Carolyn Chan. Photo: Chris Randle.

knowledge; an unspoken agreement that keeps the street people in one small area, the tourists in another, the young trendies in another, and so on. A more visible form of control exists in the private security guards who are ubiquitous, standing outside all of the tourist and designer shops. And, as mentioned in Shore's article (ibid), a regular police presence in the Downtown Eastside attempts to ensure that 'undesirables' don't stray far out of their miserable urban zone. The old growth forest can seem a million miles away.

*They feel altered, strangely out of body...SILENT...climbing out of the bus and into the forest where the woman in bright green has just disappeared. The light is fading. The woman flickers into, then out of sight, leaving only scent of cedar, the thickness of moss...suddenly then, there is someone lying inside a dead tree trunk. They sense rather than hear her breath...slowing, countering, that speedier machine pulse from before. Just. Now. They are on the threshold of the feeling of everything that has come before. The feeling disappears even as they try to remember. They arrive at a clearing, circled with huge trees. In the centre, at the base of a tree there is another woman. She moves restlessly in a way that is painful to watch. They want to look away, but she compels them to remain. The darkness is deepening. Her movements are twitching and compulsive. Relentless. The forest holds breathless witness, a deep green womb. They stand motionless, realising now that all through this watching, they are being surrounded. Dimly seen figures are gathering from all directions moving...with...the...speed...of...stones.*

*The figures turn invisibly, arriving at last to face them.  
A final gesture...remove the earplugs.*

*They'd forgotten about that.*

*Okay.*

*Suddenly clear...birdsong.*

*And sounds of traffic.*

*It is over.*



**Figure 5 (above):** *city:skinned* (Vancouver). Performer: Catherine Andersen.  
Photo: Chris Randle.

### **In summary – *city:skinned***

Several specific strategies for creating audience experience to investigate urbanwild entanglement with the more-than-human are demonstrated in *city:skinned*. Importantly, the audience perspective is not static or framed by a proscenium; rather the audience are in motion in order to stay with the piece, making a physical journey through the urbanwild. The enlivened state of being that results is connected to the physical act of moving, but also to a framing of the experience in a different more productive way, which is *in motion in relation to the world*. This is not unlike Tim Ingold's description of acquiring knowledge through movement: "For the wayfarer, movement is not ancillary to knowing – not merely a means of getting from point to point in order to collect the raw data of sensation for subsequent modelling in the mind. Rather, moving *is* knowing. *The wayfarer knows as he goes along*" (in Marchand 2010: 128). As a way of moving through the world, walking is important to the audience experience but is not the sole manner in which audiences might 'know through moving'. In *city:skinned* the audience also move by taking a bus journey; other sirencrossing works have utilised boats, trams, trains, and subway systems. There is some danger that non-active methods of moving might allow the audience to settle into passivity: in this case, *city:skinned* employed a sound score on the bus which served to activate the experience and suggest another layer of meaning to the journey.

As was the case for *city:skinned*, audience experience is always sited directly in the everyday spaces of the city, both indoors and outdoors, with no attempt to draw a separation between the audience and the elements of the work, or from the everyday occurrences in those spaces. The audience journey in *city:skinned* intersected various systems and territories, suggesting unusual (perhaps even alarming) entanglements, such as the transgressing of normally discreet urban zones in Vancouver's downtown. Audiences were forced to move through areas that they might ordinarily not notice or connect to their daily lives. And although audiences have a natural tendency to cluster around acts of 'performance' and therefore begin to reinstate an audience/performer boundary, *city:skinned* kept them moving by delivering only fragmentary moments of performance and incidental sites of installation (material, sound, video) that were always disappearing or dissolving back into the everyday activities of the site(s). Hence, the audience were not static: audience movement was predominantly induced through visual or other clues (they were not led) and by giving them an initial instruction to 'follow the performers.' The audiences' sensory focus was also directed within the cacophony of the city by having them wear earplugs for a long section of the work: this focused their attention on the visual and created a heightened awareness of

the internal sounds of their own bodies and footsteps. It also allowed for a powerful moment at the end when the earplugs were removed, of bringing their awareness back to the sounds of the surrounding forest and adjacent city.

*city:skinned* employed a strategy of using brightly coloured costumes in order to distinguish them from the 'visual noise' of the urban environment (the specific shade of green also creating meaningful philosophical connections within the work, highlighting difference and connection between the forest and the urban). Sensitising the audience to colour created compositional clarity throughout the experience, tuning them into a particular way of seeing. 'Audience tuning' actually began much earlier and was accomplished through several methods: importantly there was a preparatory opening section during which the audience was primed for the experience to come, including sensate, pacing, symbolic, and textual forms of information, as well as giving a focus-space for them to drop their day's concerns. As mentioned earlier, not taking place in a neutral 'black box' it is doubly crucial that audience perception during the experience is focused and shifted, since the 'stage' will be all around them, filled with numerous potential distractions. The audience 'contract' was clearly communicated, beginning long before they arrived, coded into the publicity images and texts, but also lying powerfully in everything that happened to them from the box office to the starting location of the work. Making fine adjustments to what was said to, and done with audience, seemed to make a huge difference to how the work was perceived.

*city:skinned* also developed another method; that of using surreal elements (performance, sound, installation, and video) in juxtaposition to the everyday urbanwild to create rupture and thereby shift perceptions and understandings. These surreal elements often caused a 'double-take' reaction in audiences, and certainly in casual passers-by, with examples including animal-like rolling or moving on all fours in the streets, trees or foliage inside buildings, slow-motion humans crossing fast-moving lanes of traffic, a sound score of car crashes, boat horns, trees falling and children laughing played inside the bus. In some cases, these interventions served to decentre the human by exaggerating and/or highlighting how the wild has infiltrated the anthropos-dominated spaces of the urban. Vancouver is a hyper-modernist city, featuring many glass towers and a high cost of living, and it normally seeks to hide or eradicate its seedy, mouldering Downtown Eastside. *city:skinned* refused to obey that imperative, bringing the glossy lifestyle city into direct contact with its wild messy heart and history. Although the Anthropocene was not evoked directly, this exploration of the tension between an ancient forest's still-present vitality and the contemporary city, contrasted an awareness of deep time with the more recent devastations of the 'human' glacier.



The reader is now encouraged to watch the following *city:skinned* video documentation:

***city:skinned* (2006)**

6-15 July 2006 (22 performances, including previews on 5 July)

Dancing on the Edge, Vancouver, Canada

*city:skinned* examined Vancouver's connection to its natural setting on the site of a former old growth forest, contrasting the European notion of 'empty wilderness', with the 10,000-year connection to place understood amongst local First Nations peoples. The work also posited the urban built environment as a 'devastated landscape' in ecological terms, as described by a restoration ecologist. The research culminated in two performances nightly of a 90-minute piece for audiences of 20 people at a time. The audience encountered fragments of performance, sound, video and installation by journeying on foot and by bus through a series of diverse interior and exterior locations in downtown Vancouver, arriving finally at a large urban forest (Stanley Park) where the piece concluded. Requiring audience to wear earplugs during certain parts of the work served to modulate/edit their sensory experience.

The video shows 4:32 of excerpts from the 1.5 hr piece.

<https://vimeo.com/58986026>

### 1.3. On being permeable: hybrid networked bodies

It is not only the urban and its various degrees of 'wildness', in a time of Anthropogenic affects, that needs to be considered, but also the very nature of bodies. The idealised and stable (white, male) body representing the cultural ideal of Man, has been extensively critiqued and decentred, notably by Rosie Braidotti in *The Posthuman* (2013), and by other post-colonial and feminist writers. Katherine Hayles traces a history of the erasure of the body and embodiment by theorists starting with Michel Foucault (Hayles 1999).

Posthumanism as articulated by Hayles seeks to challenge this position, to reintegrate the body and embodiment into concepts of the 'virtual' (ibid). Meanwhile, recent and currently emerging understandings from the sciences are recasting previous assumptions that entities (alive and not) can be said to end at the skin boundary of their matter. Just as the boundary between urban and 'not-urban' is difficult to determine due to interpenetration in both directions, so bodies too are blended and porous. As set out in *Biosocial Becomings*, Tim Ingold proposes:

we can no longer think of the organism, human or otherwise, as a discrete, bounded entity, set over against an environment. It is rather a locus of growth within a field of relations traced out in flows of materials. As such, it has no 'inside' or 'outside'. It is perhaps better imagined topologically, as a knot or tangle of interwoven lines, each of which reaches onward to where it will tangle with other knots

(Ingold and Palsson 2013: 10)

*Biosocial Becomings* argues that this field of relations is both biological and social/cultural. Ingold further points out that there can be no surrounding 'environment' in a situation where we cannot define an inside or outside (ibid). Meanwhile, bodies have always been enmeshed into the larger Earth systems such as the global circulations of the hydrosphere (water), lithosphere (outer geologic crust of the Earth) and so on. New developments in biological sciences open up, to an even greater degree, an understanding that urbanwild entanglements continue down to the cellular and even the molecular levels. This porousness remakes conception of bodies in ways that science is just beginning to understand, beyond the neo-Darwinian explanations of evolutionary mutation and genomic inheritances. At the same time, bodies are also becoming technologically hybrid, as they network out into and become entangled with the processes, energies, and materials of the wider technosphere, are reconfigured through bioengineering, or incorporate within them the manufactured materials of the Anthropocene.

### ***Permeability and symbiosis: a sympoietic world***

*Relations* between bodies on earth take place at the tiniest, most elementary scales and upwards, and historically since the first emergence of life (bacteria and archaea) or near life (such as viruses). These relations matter and likely define our everyday subjectivity and ontology to a far greater extent than many humans tend to acknowledge (see McFall-Ngai et al 2013). Donna Haraway describes this:

Irresistible attraction toward enfolding each other is the vital motor of living and dying on earth. Critters interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms, and ecological assemblages.

(in Tsing et al 2017: M25)

The biological sciences have much left to discover in terms of exactly how interpenetrations between simple life forms might have been the intermediate step to the establishment of more complex life. Controversial in her lifetime, Lynn Margulis was at the forefront of such understandings in microbiology about the interpenetrating and co-producing nature of life, as well as formulating radical new stories about life's development through Earth's history – recent scholarship supporting her theses has now “finally reached a tipping point” (McFall-Ngai et al 2013: 3234). As Margulis and Dorion Sagan put it:

In a very real sense, life is bacteria and their progeny . . . Life is also the strange new fruit of individuals evolved by symbiosis. Different kinds of bacteria merged to make protocists<sup>4</sup>. . . Multicellular assemblages become animal, plant, and fungal individuals. Life is thus not all divergence and discord but also the coming together of disparate entities into new beings. Nor did life stop at complex cells and multicellular beings. It went on, forging societies and communities and the living biosphere itself.

(2010: 340)

Thus, bodies within bodies and with bodies co-produce and collaborate to create life in all its many forms and on multiple scales. Assemblages of symbiotic entities are called holobionts or holobiomes (depending on the scale). As Scott Gilbert explains “there is no individuality in

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<sup>4</sup> **Protocista:** A kingdom consisting of unicellular or simple multicellular organisms that possess nuclei and cannot be classified as animals, plants, or fungi. Protocists include the protozoa, algae, Dinomastigota, Oomycota, and slime moulds. See also Protista. From: "Protocista." *A Dictionary of Biology*. Retrieved April 16, 2018 from Encyclopedia.com: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/science/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/protocista-3>

the classical biological sense” – for example by far the majority of cells in a human body are not human cells, but microbial cells, and “we are joined in a co-metabolism with our microbes . . . the microbes help build our guts and our immune systems” (in Tsing et al 2017: M82-83). Genetic individuality is also a fallacy: “we have more than 150 genomes in our bodies beside our eukaryotic [human] inheritance, and these bacteria collectively have many more different genes than we have as human eukaryotes. We are multilineage organisms” (ibid). Gene inheritances can occur in a variety of ways beyond the classic one of passing from parents to progeny. Humans share genes in processes not directly to do with procreation through sex: for example, human to human cell transfers between mother and baby take place via microchimerism “which occurs when cells from a foetus pass through the placenta and take up residence in the mother’s body, and vice versa”. Microchimerism also means that the foetus will receive cells of the mother’s mother, as well as those of any older siblings the mother may have already born (McFall-Ngai in Tsing et al 2017: M52). Margaret McFall-Ngai outlines the huge role played by microbes with their propensity for horizontal gene transfer, which is described as “the lateral movement of genetic traits, even among very distantly related organisms from different domains . . . [therefore] genetic material from bacteria sometimes ends up in the bodies of beetles, that of fungi in aphids, and that of humans in malaria protozoa. For bacteria, at least, such transfers are not the stuff of science fiction but of everyday evolution” (ibid: M55). Because we are holobionts in mutual coexistence with other beings “human bodies can no longer be seen as fortresses to defend against microbial onslaught but must be reenvisioned as nested ecosystems” (ibid: M65). Indeed, McFall-Ngai points out that rapid evolution capable of surviving the extreme earth changes now taking place can perhaps only be achieved by employing horizontal gene transfer since it can enact changes within one generation rather than several. “In the era of the Anthropocene, noticing microbial worlds seems more important than ever. Simply put, sustaining life requires sustaining symbioses” (ibid: M66-67). Gilbert and McFall-Ngai each highlight several of the ways that symbiosis on all scales is necessary to life. [For example] “Rhizomal bacteria interact with legumes, allowing nitrogen fixation, the basis of terrestrial life. The coral reef ecosystem and the tidal sea grass ecosystem depend on the symbionts of corals and clams” (Gilbert, ibid: M84). In these examples, signals between symbionts in the holobiome are profoundly determining each other’s survival and development.

What does this have to do with us, and everyday life? Quite a bit it turns out. Neuroscientists are beginning to discover to what extent human brain functions, emotions, and other processes are affected or even directed by the microbiota in the human gut (see for example Cryan and Dinan 2012, Foster and McVey Neufeld 2013). The ongoing communications

enacted through such symbioses are aspects of biosemiotics and the ‘enviro-organism’ (see section 1.2 and Chapter 2, this thesis) – a field of communications in which humans and nonhumans are integrally involved. On the level of everyday life, in the pervasive field of the urbanwild, it is likely that such chemical, hormonal, and synaptic semiotics impact humans regularly and profoundly. For this doctoral research project, with its interest in revealing sympoietic entanglement in the Anthropocene everyday, the implications of such an ‘enviro-organism’ field of communications, prompts an important question: how can audience experience become attuned to this biosemiotic symphony? Chapter 2 will address this question directly.

Rather than being dominated by competition as was asserted by Charles Darwin, life is in fact equally characterised by the mutually beneficial relations enacted through symbioses. In *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Haraway takes this one step further, developing the word ‘sympoiesis’ from Beth Dempster in reference “to a process of ‘making with’ – i.e. it does not refer to a self that makes itself, but rather a form of self-making that can only happen collectively and collaboratively” (Buchanan 2018: no page number). For this project it is a useful term that helps to clarify what this thesis’ title ‘entanglement in the Anthropocene everyday’ might actually imply. Entanglement here is referring to the many ‘making with’ relationships that are ongoing as humans and nonhumans move through their lives. It is a productive situation of many simultaneously unfolding relations that together make possible a co-production of selves.

As we shall see, the concept of audience experience as I utilise it for the purposes of devising performance work aims to incorporate not only the mutually interpenetrating realms of urban and wild, but also the mucky symbiotic processes of sympoiesis that permeate all of life. If we stop at the level of the large objects of bodies, the urban, and the wild, we continue to reinforce ideas of inside and outside on the level of beings. And thus, there can be no inside/outside divide. Morton recognises this, proposing that white, Global North humans have suffered something he calls ‘The Severing’: “A foundational, traumatic fissure between . . . *reality* (the human-correlated world) and *the real* (ecological symbiosis of human and nonhuman parts of the biosphere)” (Morton 2017: 13). He further suggests that this severing has had real “physical and psychic effects” which I have suggested should be linked back to the notion of ecological grief (see section 1.1 in this thesis). The idea of a fissure between humans and the biosphere describes a situation of ontological self-harm, pointing to an impossible situation that is in denial of the ‘real’ of which we are intimately a part. This ‘real’ is not only defined by symbiosis, since bodies are permeable in other ways: oxygen, water,

minerals, nutrients, and so on are being ingested and exchanged with the 'environment' and other beings all the time. These circulations are more than local, with molecules often transiting the globe through bodies, geographies, and atmospheres. sirencrossing's series of *rivercities* projects (CAN, SWE, UK), which will be discussed in a case study at the end of this chapter, approached this by specifically following the flows of rivers through cities, bodies, and across the planet. Of particular interest in this regard will be *rivercities.flux* (2012) and *rivercities.dry* (2013), but also #urbanflowevent (*rivercities*) in 2014.

Some bodies are more obviously messy and unbounded than others; slugs, for example, glide across surfaces on a slime trail excreted from their pedal mucus gland, giving the appearance of leaving something of their bodies wherever they go. Human bodies also leak fluids, shed skin cells and hairs, expel carbon dioxide, and eliminate solid and liquid wastes. Dead bodies decompose, melt away and transmute into other matter, consumed by scavengers, insects, and microbes. These messy attributes of bodies, as they refuse to be contained, are antithetical to the smooth, wireless ideals of the technosphere or the neo-Futurist ambitions of the Ecomodernists, who claim humans are now decoupled from nature (Asafu-Adjaye et al 2015). In general, urban humans in the global north prefer not to be reminded that bodies fall apart, and therefore death is hidden away as far as possible. Acknowledging human entanglement with other bodies, especially if those bodies are obviously messy, unbounded, and permeable reminds us of our own permeability and mortality. As Morton puts it: "Ecological politics is bound up with what to do with pollution, miasma, slime: things that glisten, schlup, and decay" (Morton 2007: 159).

In an attempt to bring this relationality into the frame of my practice, I have on two separate occasions incorporated nonhuman performers into audience experiences, specifically: garden slugs and a snail in a solo performance-lecture, *flow, convergence, and being: choreographing the urbanwild*, July 2017, C-Dare, Coventry University (UK); and maggots in *urbanflows (you were here)*, October 2017, Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art. In each of these cases, the creatures were incorporated into the experience as themselves, with an attempt to bring them into close relationship with the audience. In both instances, the experience for me as the artist – 'caring' for them and preparing them for the piece – proved to be a far more powerful experience than was their actual presence in the work, although there was some meaningful impact on audiences. For example, during the performance-lecture *flow, convergence, and being: choreographing the urbanwild*, the slugs and snail were introduced to the audience partway through and passed around from person to person (in an open plastic container) as the lecture continued. The up-close liveness and extreme otherness of

these nonhumans was experienced by the audience in relation to a spoken text setting out the blended situation of the urbanwild, especially as it extended into the lecture room itself, and the hybrid nature of the bodies in the audience. Meanwhile, a recorded soundscore surreptitiously introduced the hum of air-conditioning, which gradually mutated into a mixture of outdoor sounds, and then suddenly ruptured the presentation with a loud machine-sound. At this moment the lights in the room went out, a pile of dirt and plant cuttings appeared on the lectern, and a large video projection appeared on the wall behind the lectern showing a woman's face; at first her lips pursed tightly, then opened to allow a stream of water to pulse endlessly out of her gaping mouth. The face disappeared, blurring into a waterfall, then returned with its open mouth and perpetual outflow of water. Meanwhile, the spoken text went into ever-greater detail about the situation in the room, and quoting Morton, described a scene illustrating the apparent disconnection and yet utter entanglement of humans and other life and non-life during the time of the Anthropocene (Morton 2013: 58). The slugs continued to slowly shift and rearrange themselves in their plastic container as it was passed along the rows of audience. The snail, moving at a somewhat faster pace, achieved the lip of the container and was jauntily seeking a way off and over onto the surfaces beyond. Being displaced from their usual context, the slugs and snail made obvious the constructed and artificial nature of the window-less lecture theatre in which the performance-lecture took place. Their liveliness made an unusual emotional connection with some audience members and, along with the dirt, plants, video, and sound score, caused a disturbance in what might be considered 'normal' for such an event. The performance delivered a thick onslaught of spoken theory at the same time as it caused a rupture in the embodied experience of the humans in the room – a bifurcation that both underlined and tested the gaps between cognitive and felt ways of knowing.

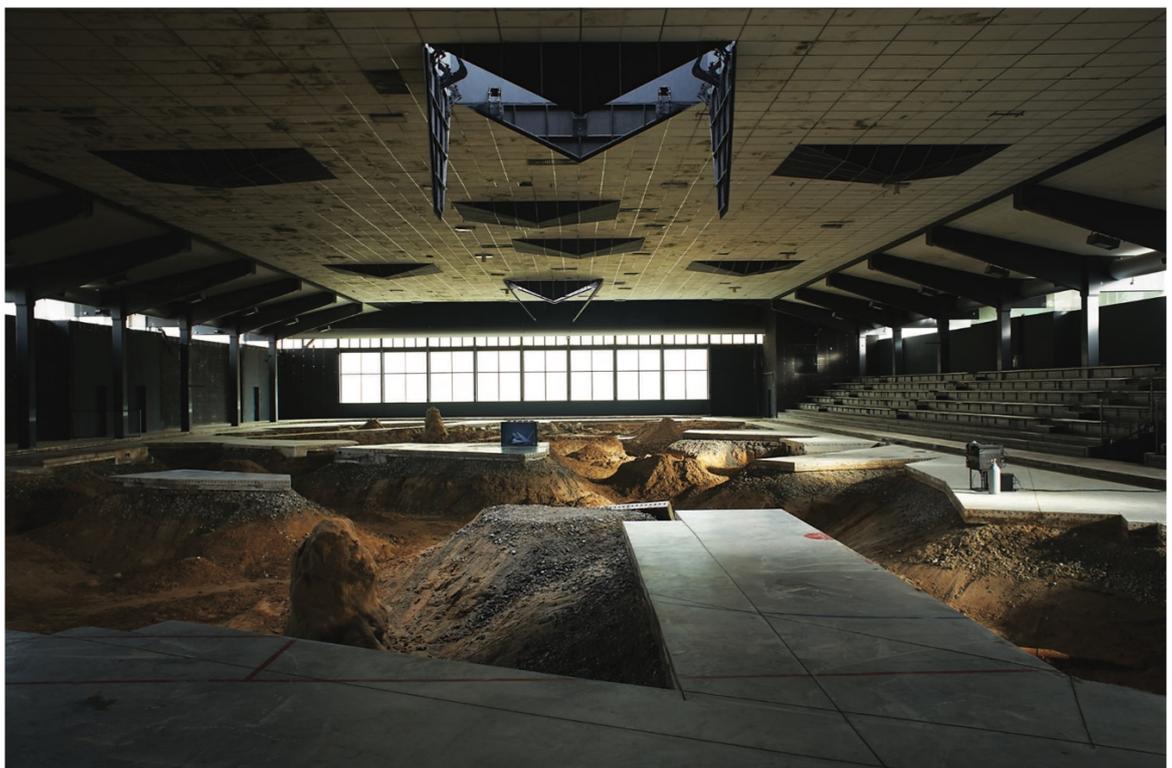
### ***Posthumans, superhumanity, and hybrid creatures***

Developed in a time of growing acceptance of the body's symbiotic nature, the emergence of something called the Posthuman, was in part a decentring of anthropos, but also a recalibration of the human (Man) to include all bodies, genders, races, cultures (see Braidotti 2013, and Hayles 1999). In 1991, Haraway produced her 'Cyborg Manifesto' declaring an end to pervasive notions of dualism in Western traditions that served to oppress 'other' bodies such as those of women, animals, workers, non-whites, etc. She pointed out also that the borders between human and machine are no longer easy to unpick, that technologies are literally changing the nature of bodies, and called into question the notion of the individual, with new meanings and understandings in flux as technological processes continue to develop and mutate (Haraway 1991). Her manifesto signalled an enlivened idea of

technology just at the moment when humans themselves might now be “frighteningly inert” (ibid: 152), as machines make many lives increasingly sedentary [the] “cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities” (ibid: 154). The increasing invisibility or immateriality of the energy- and information-based machines of the Anthropocene marks a point of seemingly no return, and we don’t yet understand how humans might be changing in the process (see Donath 2014, and Iaconesi and Persico 2017).

Margulis and Sagan propose that a trans version of humanity, something they call ‘superhumanity’, has now emerged. It seems to bear some resemblance to Haff’s technosphere, as they articulate: “It is composed not only of people but of material transport systems, energy transport systems, information transport systems, global markets, scientific instruments. Superhumanity ingests not only food but also coal, oil, iron, silicon” (Margulis and Sagan 2010: 349). Whichever concept is used (cyborg, posthuman, superhumanity, technosphere) to describe these mutating circumstances and bodies, the situation calls for radical understandings of more-than-human assemblages, and sympoietic processes that are constantly flowing and reforming.

Various artistic enquiries and practices have engaged in provocative ways with the possible worlds proliferating in the Anthropocene. A particularly ambitious example is Pierre Huyghe’s



**Figure 6 (above):** Pierre Huyghe’s *After ALife Ahead*, 2017, concrete ice-rink floor, sand, clay, phreatic water, bacteria, algae, bees, chimera peacocks, aquarium, black switchable glass, textile cone, incubator, human cancer cells, genetic algorithm, augmented-reality program, automated ceiling structure, rain, ammoniac, logic game. Installation view. Photo: Ola Rindal.

piece, *After ALife Ahead* (2017, Skulptur Projekte Münster, Germany) where he created what Art Historian Benjamin Buchloh has described as a “fundamentally dystopian, if not apocalyptic, archaeology”, a massive engineered environment combining “interconnected social, biological, and physical systems” set within the cavernous space of a former ice-skating facility (Buchloh 2017: 285). The work incorporated the structure of the building and underlying layers of clay, soil, sand, and groundwater, with a posthuman ecology of bees, human cancer cells, fish, peacocks, weather interruptions, human observers, mobile phones, and virtual geometric forms. By carving deeply into the ground beneath the building, Huyghe evoked the deep time of geology, contrasted to the human timescale of the structure itself. The system, although designed and built by humans, was moment-to-moment determined by the interactions of all of its human and nonhuman actors. Buchloh describes in more detail how it worked:

Digging deeply underneath cuts into the rink’s floor while leaving other segments of the surface intact, the sculpted space revealed layers of groundwater, sand, and clay, some of them even traceable to the geologic deposits of the last prehistoric movements of glaciers in this Westphalian region. Several mounds of earth and clay were subsequently formed into towerlike structures to house two populations of bees, which also contain sensors recording the movements and activities of the bee population itself. As in a common surveillance system, information is collected about the biosphere’s interlocking living and material elements; the sensors are connected by buried cables to a cancer-cell incubator, an obdurate form that appeared like an uncanny refrigeration unit resting on the banks of the massive pit. The data is processed using a set of algorithms that can accelerate or slow the multiplication of the cancer cells. These, in turn, trigger an app that spectators can download, displaying on one’s phone screen mysterious geometric forms that move in response to the activity of the cancer cells. Another natural pattern likewise determines the opening of massive apertures in the roof, mechanized geometric panels that automatically open and close without any apparent logic. In this way, an entire universe of the microscopic and macroscopic, mechanical and organic, real and virtual, shifts according to the frequencies of bodily movements and vital signs emerging from the setting at large, as if to compel spectators’ insight into the utter interdependence and continuous exchange between the normal and the pathological forms of contemporary everyday life.

(ibid: 285-286)

Although highly artificial and dependent on human maintenance, Huyghe's work here sets in motion a complex situation of interacting flows and reciprocal affects that grows and complicates beyond the initial set-up and beyond his direct control. In an interview in 2004, Huyghe articulates his approach as being essentially time-based rather than merely spatial, and I would suggest, it is importantly *experiential*, encompassing the human spectators in its complexity:

My work would be precisely *in-between* the city and nature, *in-between* this place of meetings, signs, and corporations, which is the city, and nature. . . I simply wanted the work to be neither in nature nor in the city, and ultimately to base my action not on the production of a physical form but on an event.

(Baker 2004: 82)

In another example of posthuman hybridity, visual artist and academic Pinar Yoldas' project *Ecosystem of Excess* creates a science fiction imaginary by proposing how new life might evolve in the plastic soup of Earth's oceans during the Anthropocene (Yoldas 2014, see also Eco-Visionaries 2019). For the exhibition, positing an Earth system named the Plastisphere, Yoldas developed a range of fictional hybrid plastic-biological creatures that she proposes might evolve in response to the plastic-filled seas, as well as new internal 'organs' that can



**Figures 7-8 (above and right):** Elements from Pinar Yoldas' *An Ecosystem of Excess* displayed in 2019 at *Eco-Visionaries: Confronting a planet in a state of emergency*, Royal Academy of Arts, London (UK). Photos: Carolyn Deby.

process plastics. The fictional creatures (Plastivores) and internal organs were meticulously rendered and displayed in lit glass cases in a darkened gallery. The seductive and wholly realistic presentation added impact to a horror show, undermining any notion that Anthropos is in charge, suggesting that life will not disappear on a human-altered planet (though humans might), but will rather evolve different strategies to embrace the new ecological situation. This notion is not far-fetched: already new microbes have been discovered that apparently can digest plastics (see Austin et al 2018), and life on earth has always adapted to extreme events. We are said to be currently in the Sixth Great Extinction (see Kolbert 2014) but the earth has been here before: pre-dating all of Earth's five named great extinctions, the Great Oxygenation Event (GOE) occurred some 2.7 billion years ago and wiped out the majority of life on earth. The GOE crisis occurred at a point when the majority of life was in the seas and anaerobic. The development of photosynthetic forms of life such as cyanobacteria, meant that a previously unavailable gas (oxygen) was now being given off into the atmosphere as a waste product (see Plait 2014, and Wiese and Reitner 2011: 294-296), dramatically killing off most of the anaerobic bacteria, but also cooling the planet as oxygen combined with methane converting it to the less effective greenhouse gas of CO<sup>2</sup>. A subsequent development and flourishing of multicellular life (including eventually, humans) was directly made possible by this dramatic change to Earth's atmosphere as it opened up new ecological niches (Schirrmeister et al 2013).

My own practice research then takes as its stage a situation and time on earth characterised by multiple system crises, extinction, sympoiesis, and rupture, in which all bodies are intimately implicated. In the following case study, I will discuss sirencrossing's *rivercities* (2010-2014) in order to articulate that project's approach to considering the body as permeable and intimately entangled in a complexity of flows (especially hydrological ones) on scales ranging from metabolic processes to individuals to local ecosystems to Earth systems. Unlike the *city:skinned* discussion which profiled only one production, this *rivercities* case study will make reference to several different productions. Hence, the reader will only be able to grasp an overview sketched out through key scenes and developments across the five-year project. As will be demonstrated, the project evolved from a focus on the hydrosphere, to a recognition that bodily interactions with other urbanwild flows more widely might also be explored through the practice of sirencrossing's audience experience.



## CASE STUDY

### rivercities

***What does the river mean to you? What do you mean to the river? What is the river's relationship to the fluids flowing through your body? How is this circulation connected to the flows in your daily life?***

A project that was developed over five years (2010-2014), *rivercities* involved activities in three different countries: Canada, Sweden, and England. The theme *rivercities* offered a model for thinking about urbanwild flows as being globally, locally, *and* bodily networked. As in the discussion of *city:skinned* (section 1.2) this section will employ some limited elements of poetic writing involving two different voices: my interior thoughts during *rivercities* research in larger black italic (*she*); and the imagined perspective of the audience in larger blue italic (*they*).

*rivercities* was a site-specific choreographic project focussing on rivers and human settlements on rivers. Rivers form one aspect of Earth's hydrosphere: the continuous global circulation of water — from glaciers, rivers, oceans, clouds, groundwater, and through the cells/circulation systems of living things. *Rivers are literally flowing through us.* In the project, rivers were also framed as a metaphor for the interchange between all life and Earth's systems, from the cellular to the global. *rivercities*



**Figures 9 (top of page) and 10 (above):** *rivercities* (River Lea, London, UK). Photos: Carolyn Deby.

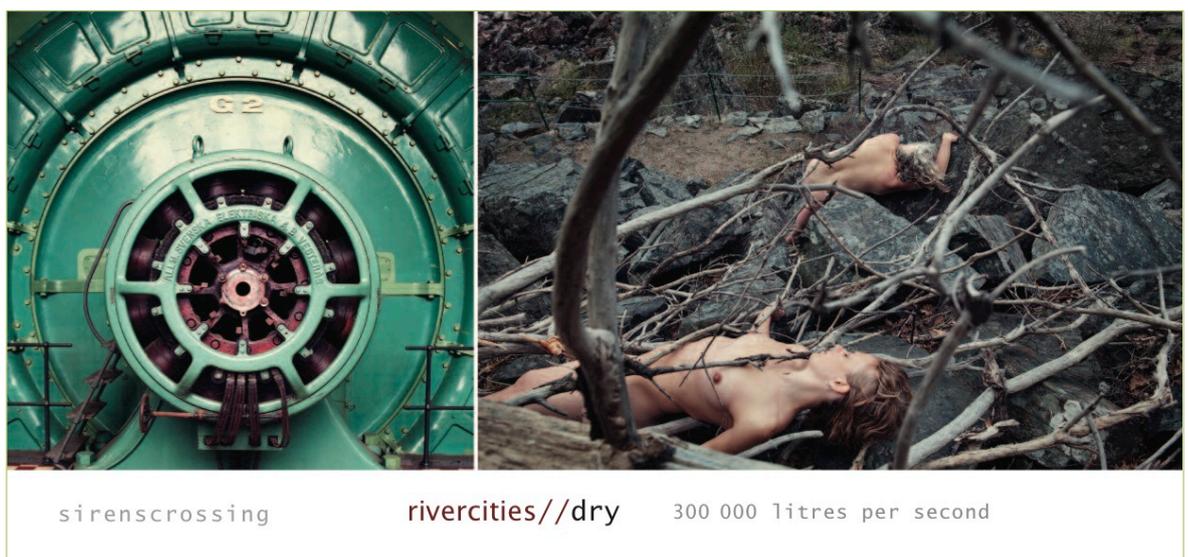
examined in parallel the circulation and flow systems of the city, and those of the bodies in the city – and considered the interacting and reciprocal flows between these. Scientific, kinetic, and poetic ideas were given equal importance: there were ‘interacting and reciprocal flows’ between multiple ways of ‘knowing’.

In 2010, *rivercities* research took place in London (UK), Vancouver (BC, Canada), and Dawson City (Yukon, Canada), and in subsequent years, in Göteborg and Trollhättan (Sweden) and Luton to London (UK). Activities included delivering public workshops and presenting several ‘audience experiences’: *rivercities/freeze* (2011); *rivercities.flux* (2012); *rivercities//dry* (2013); *#urbanflowevent (rivercities)* (2014). The international scope of the project was important in grasping the implications of river flow through bodies and cities in relation to the global circulations of the hydrosphere. Themes of both convergence and difference emerged across the five different cities considered.

### **“If you are not close to the river you are lost”**

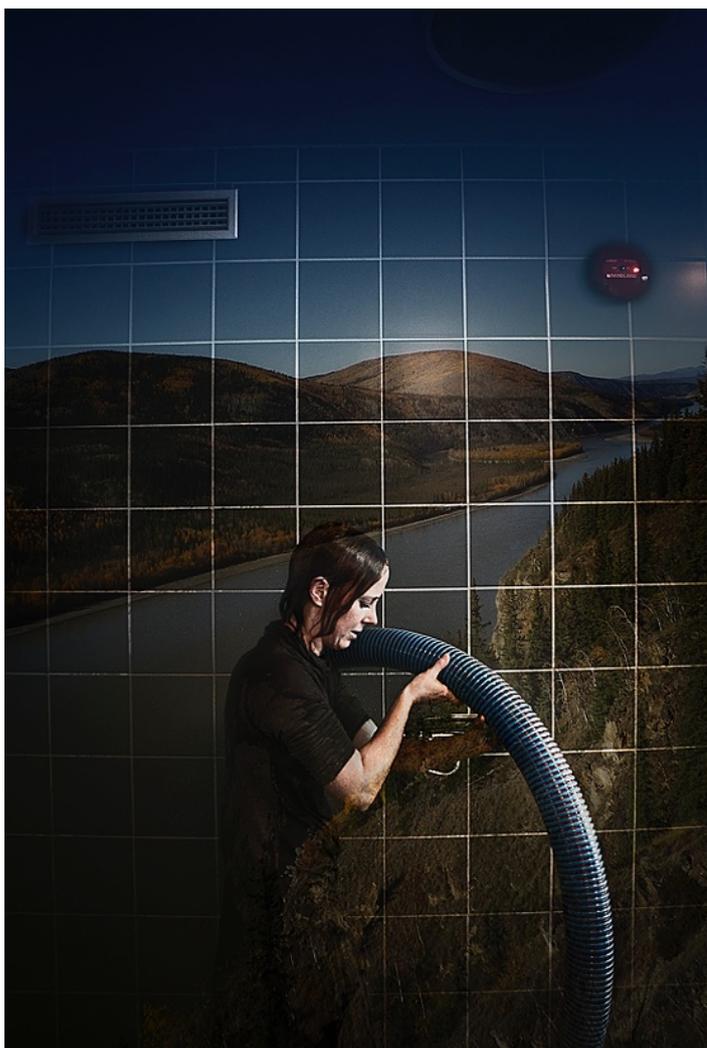
From a Parks Canada display in Dawson City, Yukon, Canada  
(Yupik Elder, Mary Anne Immamak of Emmonak, Alaska)

In each ‘river city’ the work was developed in collaboration with local people – both artists and ordinary citizens, children and adults – imaginatively considering networks of human waste/sewage, water supply, body water at cellular and body systems levels, and everyday human activities within the complex territory of urbanwild flows. Each place offered potential for new meanings. The *rivercities* projects in Göteborg and Trollhättan gave an opportunity to work in two cities that lie at different points along the same major river (Göta Alv) highlighting that, for example, the people of the downstream city of Göteborg were drinking



**Figure 11 (above):** *rivercities//dry* (Göta Alv, Trollhättan, Sweden). Performers: Pia Nordin, Carolyn Deby.  
Composite photo: AnnaCarin Isaksson.

the cleaned-up effluent from Trollhättan. The city of Trollhättan is also the site of two hydro power stations that control the river's flow in order to create electricity, which then forms a different sort of flow to be distributed across the country. Trollhättan's *rivercities//dry* was performed in and around a section of river canyon largely left dry because the flow of the river is redirected through the power stations. An original sound score by Dag Rosenqvist, partly composed of machine sounds from a hydro power station, accompanied the performance. Twenty-eight performers arrived from dispersed points in the surrounding landscape, trickling into and through the audience of approximately 600 people each night who were themselves converging onto a bridge over the dry canyon. The performers at the beginning wore elaborate and very tall headpieces constructed from grasses, branches, plants, and other natural materials found in the area. These served to make them visible while moving at ground level through the crowds and made direct reference to the flora of the urbanwild context. Performance fragments occurred on the bridge, in the crowds, on the rocks of the dry canyon, on the grassy edge of the canyon next to the power station, and on

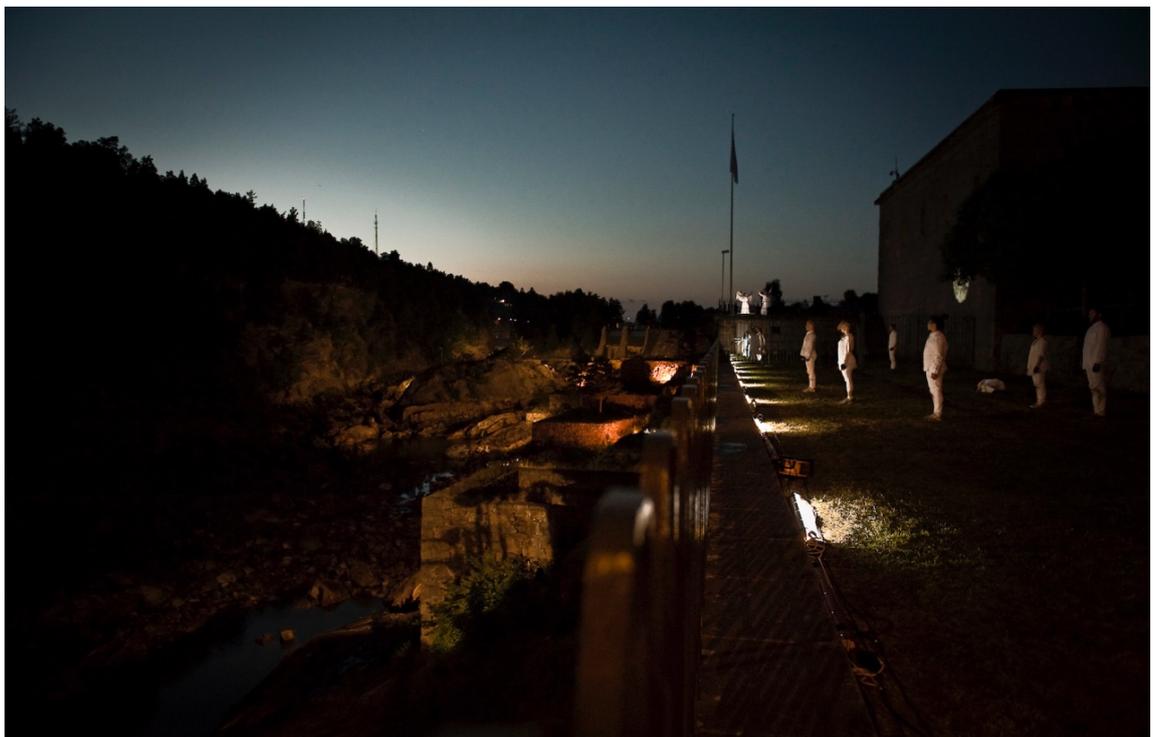


the rocky cliff opposite. Video and still images, which were projected onto the rock walls of the canyon and onto the structure of the power station, made visual references to the hidden machinery of hydro power creation and to the human body's involvement in controlling, consuming, and recirculating the water's flow. Water from large clear boxes was ritually dashed against the walls of the power station and spilled from the cliff edges into the canyon. Flows of white-clad performers foamed and retreated, creating human waves that hinted at the finale's water

**Figure 12 (above):** *rivercities.flux* (Göta Alv, Göteborg, Sweden). Performer: Pia Nordin. Photo: AnnaCarin Isaksson (composite image: Göteborg sewage treatment plant interior and Yukon River, Canada).

surge. At the end of the performance, the force of the river's water, usually diverted through the power station, was released into the dry canyon, flowing in a spectacular surge at 300,000 litres per second towards the audience, under the bridge, and beyond. The spectacular nature of this piece was very different to most of sirencrossing's work and, given the size of the audience, their experience was much more one of being observers rather than involved participants. Nevertheless, there was some success in creating a spectacle during the annual Fallensdagen (Days of the Falls) festival that provoked reflection on the local rupture of the river's flow and the city's participation in an industrialisation of the wild.

In sharp contrast, Dawson City in the Canadian sub-arctic offered a unique settlement dissected by the wide Yukon River and still profoundly tied to its seasons (in winter the river is crossed via an ice highway on its frozen surface; in summer there is a 24-hour car ferry; for 4-6 weeks of the year, during the dramatic spring break-up and autumn freeze-up, Dawson City is cut in half because the river is un-crossable). Therefore, the humans in Dawson City were very much tuned to their river and the local wild, describing their own bodies slowing as the river froze in the autumn, and then bodily excitement speeding up as the river came closer and closer to breaking-up in the spring. In London, the River Lea has been heavily industrialised and divided: its numerous locks and channels almost extinguishing any flow or appearance of life; its still surface serving as a water feature for stylish new blocks of flats; its shallow murkiness a handy repository for stolen motorbikes and shopping trolleys. However, both Göta Alv and the River Lea provide drinking water for their respective river



**Figure 13 (above):** *rivercities//dry* (Göta Alv, Trollhättan, Sweden). Dry canyon on the left; view towards the place where the surge of water will soon burst forth. Photo: AnnaCarin Isaksson.

cities, a fact that was directly referenced through specific audience and performer actions in both places, performing the watery nature of bodies and therefore the direct connection to each local river. As pointed out by Canadian scientist David Suzuki, the water molecules that make up a majority of our human bodily substance are constantly being replaced, their molecules literally circulating around the globe and through us: “Every person in the world is at least 60 per cent water by weight . . . We are part of the hydrologic process. Every drink we take has water molecules that evaporated from the canopies of every forest in the world, from all of the oceans and plains” (Suzuki 2007: 76).

### **“Luton’s pee is London’s tea”**

Quoted by a member of Lea Rowing Club, London (2014) – the source of the River Lea is at Luton

*rivercities* considered integral aspects of each city watershed and local water cycle including water treatment facilities, the (glacial or spring-fed) source of the rivers, sewage treatment plants, and more. In various ways, the invisible infrastructure that joins these up was made apparent – the ‘city as cyborg’ with its circulations, forbidden zones, and reconstituted nature (see Gandy 2005, also Swyngedouw 1996 and 2006). The bodies of citizens were understood to be in direct relationship with the body of the city, and in turn, through the river’s watershed, networked into the larger surrounding regional and global landscape.

As was the case for *city:skinned*, the *rivercities* audience experiences employed an audience-journey-based format in every case but one (not for *rivercities//dry*), and these utilised a



mixture of installation, video, interior/exterior sites, fragmentary and longer performance events, audience clues, maps, instructions, audience decision-making or actions, sound, scent, images, and text. Although audience journey had been a feature in sirencrossing works prior to *rivercities*, now it took on an added significance in also suggesting a flow of audience bodies that mirrored the water flows into/through/and beyond the city. During *rivercities//f r e e z e* (Göteborg, 2011) the audience were active participants in creating a temporary, ad hoc water circulation system in

**Figure 14 (above):** #urbanflowevent (*rivercities*) ‘Love the Lea’ festival Body Water Booth: a man posing alongside his own volume of body water (River Lea, London, UK). Photo: AnnaCarin Isaksson.

one of the buildings passed through: transporting water from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor to the ground floor (and back up again) via an improvised assembly of plastic tubing, drinking glasses, and the building lift. This was one small section of a 90-minute audience experience which took the audience from a city bar, onto a tram, to a rock tunnel, onto a boat across the river, to a former ship-building site, and finally to an area of overgrown wasteland. At the start, in the bar, the audience were each given a glass of ice, which they carried with them throughout the entire experience before being invited to contribute their melted ice-water to creation of the 'water circulation system' just before the end of the piece. A different audience action with water was developed for *rivercities.flux* (Göteborg, 2012) – an action which was also employed in numerous community workshops (Sweden/UK), and became part of performances of *#urbanflowevent (rivercities)* (London, 2014). The action involved variations on having audience fill (or otherwise manipulate) large plastic boxes *containing the equivalent volume of water found in an average adult human body*. This related directly to other repeated actions during *rivercities.flux* – with performers variously spilling, refilling, and transferring water – actions which made reference to the continual processes of exchange between body water and environmental water.

In London, as part of *#urbanflowevent (rivercities)* audience members were each weighed, and their personal body water volume calculated (humans are usually between 60% and 90% water, depending on age, weight, and gender). They each then filled a clear plastic box with their own volume of water, resulting in an installation of many clear boxes, in aggregate representing the water bodies of the entire audience. This action took place outdoors, next to a large artificial lake, a reservoir of water from the River Lea, which was in fact drinking water in waiting, managed by the local water authority. The boxes of body water remained in the site as the audience moved on to experience the rest of the piece, implying that the individuals had somehow left some replica of themselves (their water shape) behind. Thus, an action initially developed in Sweden became part of an audience experience in London.

*They had been told to travel to an address near Järntorget and ask a question of the woman at the bar. The space was small, busy with after work drinkers. It wasn't at all clear who they should approach...and then they noticed. A small blonde woman, sitting at the bar near the back wall. She was dressed for a night out . . . and dripping wet, from her hair through all of her clothes. A puddle was forming.*

*The question was asked: "Where is the river?" She looked up, and with a piercing gaze said "You can take it with you," handing them a small glass of ice. That was it then.*

*They politely took the glass and moved away from the bar to watch and wait for what would come next.*

During immersive research in each river city we gathered sounds, impressions, actions, stories, images, and video, and then, reflecting the global nature of the water cycle, and the global impacts of human societies, discoveries from one place could be transferred to other places. For example, we used video of the spring breakup of the frozen Yukon River during a performance on the river Göta älv (Göteborg, Sweden). Or the sound of the river Göta älv during a rainstorm at Vänersborg (Sweden) might find its way into a performance on the Yukon River, Canada. On another occasion, a story from the Fraser River in Canada might be told by a man in Göteborg. The following personal story from initial *rivercities* research became a text performed in Swedish during *rivercities.flux* in Göteborg (2012):

*She arrived just in time to witness the shock of his irreversible decline. He was impossibly thin. It had reached the point where they could do nothing more for him. No more treatments. He drank virtually no fluids for almost two weeks, yet as he shrank away into death, his moisture continued to be steadily excreted. The nurse said that dehydration didn't kill him, but somehow before their wet eyes he dried and shrivelled.*

*A person  
organs liquefying  
light and brittle as spent ash  
by the time  
his breath quietly . . .  
stopped.*

-----

*They came up the last set of stairs and entered the car park on level C. A woman was waiting for them. After a pause, she spoke: "Maybe you already know that the human body is mostly water. The water in you is inside your cells . . . and only a little in the blood and other fluids. For someone my size – 50 kg – my total water is 30 litres."*

[she holds up a large bag of water] “THIS is 30 litres . . .” [PAUSES — then suddenly spills it all onto the concrete]

Shocked, they hesitate . . . then follow her across the spreading wet stain towards the far edge of the car park where strange sounds are getting louder. Just visible in the street below, another woman casually tears open a large bag of water and lets it drain into the gutter as she walks. Even further away, beyond the end of the road, a third woman empties a large bag of water into the canal.

They are still holding their glasses of ice.

As the *rivercities* project developed, the notion of *intersecting* flows in river cities began to encompass more than just watery flows and urban water infrastructure. Increasingly, it also tried to draw audience attention to other sorts of natural and urban flows, other sorts of urban systems that could be similarly understood as interacting at bodily, local, and global scales. For example, audiences might be expected to take public transport, navigating that specific system of urban/body flows during their journey, *noticing themselves* joining it, and then leaving again, in a more conscious manner than they might during normal commuting. *Intersections* between systems or flows became particularly meaningful, highlighted especially in *#urbanflowevent (rivercities)*, where the audience journey performed crossings between public transport and urban water supply infrastructures, or with the river itself; where the audience walking across an urbanwild landscape in parallel with the River Lea



Figure 15 (above): *rivercities.flux* (Göta Alv, Göteborg, Sweden). Performer: Cara Siu. Photo: AnnaCarin Isaksson

came gradually into step with a converging flow of performers speaking in five different human languages (cultural flows); at another point, schools of fishes seen in the river were juxtaposed to the sound of adjacent heavy traffic flows; in another, the wilder, tidal sections of the river were experienced directly in relation to heavy industrial development along its banks; and mid-journey, while audience waited for a bus, performers were seen alternately racing and positioning themselves in a game where bodies traded energetic trajectories alongside and with the speeding and stopping traffic. For the audience, the effort of following the route – informed by performer movements, direct instructions, and clues – kept them also ‘in flow’ throughout the experience. There were lulls and moments of relative stillness, especially when sitting on public transport or on the boat at the end. The epic length of the journey (covering some eight miles from start to finish), and the multiple and hugely varying nature of territories and intersections that it encompassed, left audience members quietly thoughtful at the end. Only one of the four performances featured a boat journey (it was too expensive to be possible every time) but that seemed by far the most affecting of the two versions. The boat took the audience along the last winding tidal section to the mouth of the Lea where it joins the River Thames. Later, in a candle-lit cafe overlooking the mouth of the Lea, the audience and performers together shared their impressions and thoughts. This chance to stay with the final location, and to look back on the experience was an essential part of its subsequent resonance – perhaps equal in power to the preparatory scenes that began the piece.



**Figure 16 (above):** #urbanflowevent (rivercities) Performers: Jenna Broas, Erwin Semler (River Lea, London, UK). Photo: Matthew Gandy.

The name *#urbanflowevent (rivercities)*, which is in part a social media ‘hashtag’, was devised with an intention to employ extensive social media posts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram during research, preparation, and performances in order to enact and entangle the work with that particular and potent form of urban flow. The hashtag itself was used to highlight instances of intersection between different urbanwild flows, naming these intersections ‘urbanflowevents’. However, the attempt was naïve and failed to ‘go viral’ meaning that sirencrossing has yet to achieve the critical mass of posts, to build the number of its followers and therefore influence on social media; all of these necessary in order for the project hashtag to be taken up by many other people. I am not naturally drawn to the idea of continually posting public comments, but rather prefer a longer, more contemplative pace of public sharing.<sup>5</sup>

*rivercities* directly gave birth to sirencrossing’s 2016-2020 project *urbanflows*, by revealing that many other flows might be considered alongside rivers and water infrastructure, such as road networks, prevailing winds, distribution of nonhumans, online posts and conversations, waste disposal and recycling networks, seasonal patterns of plant growth and changes, bird or insect migration patterns, and many others.



**Figure 17 (above):** *#urbanflowevent (rivercities)* Screenshot of sirencrossing Twitter post (River Lea, London, UK). Photo: Carolyn Deby.

<sup>5</sup> The urban flow of social media is still however relevant to this research project and therefore I will likely look to engaging some more media-savvy collaborators in order to develop that aspect in future.

## **In summary – *rivercities***

The most significant development in the methodology of audience experience emerging from the various *rivercities* iterations, was the extension of the experience inwards *into* bodies, and outwards beyond the local urbanwild, towards the global. These were developed in several ways: audience actions within the experiences became more involving, engaging the individuals' sense of their 'in here' by making audience members less observers and more lively actors in the work (carrying, pouring, transporting water; being obliged to speak to performers; being given maps or other clues that demanded more independent thought and active engagement; having to navigate existing urban infrastructure such as public transport – rather than being 'picked-up' with a bus; weighing themselves and then calculating their own volume of body water, etc). The fact that the project was developed during residencies in five different cities, in three different countries, meant that the global flows of the hydrosphere could be evoked through a parallel exchange of human stories, video, images, actions, and impressions between the different places (among the various elements which travelled beyond their origins were the story of a man dying from cancer in Canada; a video of the Yukon River spring ice break-up; photos of the sewage treatment facilities in Göteborg; a video showing a conveyor belt carrying human excrement extracted from sewage in that same Göteborg facility; the hydro power plant in Trollättan reconceived in another city as a lightbox showing two photos of the river canyon – one full of water, and the other dry – with an invitation to the audience to 'turn me on, turn me off' by sliding a cover over one or the other image); in London, where sewage is regularly released into the River Lea, audiences were invited to eat soft chocolate 'cookies' that looked suspiciously like faeces. The various audience and performer actions of pouring, carrying, spilling, or measuring water were initially developed during the extensive community workshops undertaken during *rivercities*. Although local workshops were a feature of *city:skinned*, and in that case resulted in images, texts, and video being contributed to the piece by local participants, in most instances of *rivercities* some local people were also live performers, appearing alongside the professional performers. In London, *#urbanflowevent (rivercities)* included a series of public 'body water booth' events, during Thames21's *Love the Lea Festival* and as a pop-up on the river towpath during the project research, where members of the public could be weighed and photographed with their body water volume in a container next to them. An Instagram feed displaying river people's stories and portraits was started by the *rivercities* photographer AnnaCarin Isaksson (<https://www.instagram.com/sirencrossing/>) although there are many more images that were taken but sadly not posted (see previous note about my social media failure). Audience bodies experienced the various flows through their physical proximity and

active encounters, through imaginative suggestion, sound or noise vibrations and silences, through task-based interactions with systems and materials, via performed and written texts, and through rhythmic repetitions or convergences.

It was the fact that the work was situated in the everyday spaces of each city which also drew attention to the various intersections of systemic and infrastructural flows, beyond just hydro flows. In navigating across systems and territories, with the focus of rivers and flows in mind, it was natural to extrapolate this idea to other systems. And having begun to evoke the porosity of bodies in relation to rivers and water, this too seemed important to explore more extensively in how it might be relevant to thinking of urban flows more widely. In the following chapter, the multi-layered elements that comprise audience experience will be unpacked in relation to theories of affective atmospheres, rhythm, theatre/performance, and psychogeography, making a case for the biosemiotic nature of lived experience and the significance of the 'distracted body' as it navigates hybrid screen/virtual and embodied spaces. The discussion will draw on the case study of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*, presented in Coventry in 2019, which was submitted as the practice as research half of this doctoral research project. As such, *urbanflows* represents a step-change in the development of the PaR methods of sirencrossing's 'audience experience'.



The reader is now encouraged to watch the following sample of *rivercities* video documentation:

***rivercities.flux* (2012)**

4-16 September 2012 (12 performances)

Producentbyrån and 3e Vningen, Göteborg, Sweden

*rivercities.flux* reflected on the fluid nature of human bodies...the way in which our wateriness is in constant flow with Earth's entire hydrosphere: rivers are literally flowing through us. On a poetic level it pondered the body's inevitable transformation from liquid to vapour, contemplating the fluidity of life as it changes from birth through to death. In relation to the energetic, transport, water, sewage, and retail flows of the city, how can you measure a single life? Performance actions included filling, carrying, and spilling containers filled with the equivalent water volume of a human body. Audience members carried a glass of ice/water throughout the piece, adding these to the final water transfer actions near the end. Over 90 minutes the audience travelled through a sequence of secret Göteborg locations: from a bar in the centre, to a parking garage, through a large shopping mall, to a transport hub near the river, by tram to a rock cave at Klippan, and finally to a former sugar factory building near to where the river joins the sea. Audiences received an SMS text message on the day of the performance, instructing them as to the starting location in central Göteborg.

The following video shows 8:33 of excerpts from the 1.5 hr piece.

<https://vimeo.com/58959863>



## 2. Sensing relations: *urbanflows* in Coventry

Drawing on the PaR findings of sirencrossing's *urbanflows* project, which was commissioned by *Sensing the City*<sup>6</sup>, this chapter will go into more detail about audience experience as a form that attempts to create a heightened version of the everyday where multiple processes (sensed, felt, cognitive, unconscious) are in flux – constantly coexisting or combining and recombining. In particular, it will expand on the significance of biosemiotics (introduced briefly at the end of Section 1.2 of this thesis) and Jakob von Uexküll's concepts of *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt* in order to further tease out the multiple ways of knowing that are taking place in the everyday urbanwild. Audience experience is necessarily devised in relation to various understandings of rhythm and time. The devised experience utilises a palette of situations ranging from the incidental and ordinary to the surreal. These, alongside concepts such as affect, atmospheres, and porous immersion will be employed to describe some of the considerations. Combining the multiple layers created by different ways of knowing, experience is proposed as a nuanced interplay between the felt, the sensory, the intellectual, the unconscious, the remembered, and the intuitive – as something that is enacted in co-movement in and with the world (see Manning and Massumi 2014, Nöe 2004). Relevant theories of theatre and performance will be considered such as Machon's (syn)aesthetics (2011), immersive theatre (White 2012, Alston 2016), walking practices and understandings of psychogeography (Smith 2010, Hancox 2012, Wrights and Sites 2006). In articulating the methodology of *urbanflows*, theoretical notions discussed in Chapter 1 will also be key, including those of the urbanwild, hybrid nature, the Anthropocene, and human/nonhuman/multispecies entanglements. The chapter will conclude with a case study of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*, which took place in Coventry in September 2019 (submitted for assessment as the practice research component of this doctoral project). The production was informed by earlier prototypical iterations of *urbanflows* in 2016, 2017, and 2018.<sup>7</sup> The chapter overall will incorporate comments from

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<sup>6</sup> *Sensing the City* (2017-2020) was a practice-based research project in Coventry (UK) funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and led by Principal Investigator Professor Nicolas Whybrow (University of Warwick). For further information see: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/scapvc/theatre/research/impact/sensing>

<sup>7</sup> The *urbanflows (immersed in worlds)* micro-project, commissioned by *Sensing the City*, had two main performance outcomes which both took place in Coventry. The first was *urbanflows (you were here)*, presented in October 2017 by Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art. The second was *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* which was presented in September 2019 as a warm-up to the Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art. The project benefited from two other related research periods: a pilot project in 2016, featuring interviews with local people, a blog, video, photos, and a performance, funded by Warwick Creative Exchange, University of Warwick; and *urbanflows (an experiment:1)* a live skype video performance on mobile phones linking three world cities, presented at the 2018 Performance Studies International conference (PSi#24), in Daegu, South Korea – funded by Conservatoire of Dance & Drama, University of Warwick, and a Glynne

audience in order to provide a window into some of the experiential impacts of the work. A transcript of comments from audiences for *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* is available in the appendix following the conclusion to this thesis. Within the chapter, in-text citations for quoted audience comments are in reference to the appendix.

## 2.1. Ways of knowing, patterns of interpretation

Just as biological evolution grows, at least in part, on the basis of the repetition and difference of patterns and forms, so, too, does the semiotic evolution which enfolds it and guides it. Natural metaphors and natural stories gradually evolve into cultural metaphors and cultural stories. Far from being like a machine, life is, in fact, much closer to poetry and song. . . [an] ecological intertwining of flesh, sign and world – an evolutionary ontology of sign relations which characterises the biological and cultural, aesthetic and technological, ecologies which biosemiotics reveals

(Wheeler 2016: 4)

*I really felt the way the city was wild and human at the same time; or rather (better) that there was no distinction; that the human was still part of the wild, and the waters and lives that we might sometimes think we have excluded are still present, and not part of some realm at odds from our own.*

(Appendix: 20)

*urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* was a performance project created in Coventry in 2019 under the collaborative umbrella of sirencrossing. The project immersed audiences in the “ecological intertwining of flesh, sign and world” that Wheeler describes, thereby inducing audiences to experience “biological and cultural, aesthetic and technological ecologies” as coextensive and intertwined aspects of their lived experience. In concert with the *Sensing the City* research project overall, with its emphasis on sensate human bodies as the mode for data gathering, this chapter will articulate a practice-based approach where human bodies are understood to be in constant interaction with a field of other bodies, agents, and sign relations. Moreover, I will argue, it is through the sensate body

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Wickham scholarship. In January 2020, an installation with ‘live document’ performances (*urbanflows: redux*) revisited and re-performed aspects of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* as part of *Sensing the City, An Urban Room* at Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry. A book about the *Sensing the City* project, entitled *Urban Sensographies*, including a chapter by C. Deby on *urbanflows*, will be published by Routledge in early 2021.

that humans and nonhumans are able to discern and read the world as a “repetition and difference of patterns and forms” and thus engage in multiple ways of apprehending meaning. *urbanflows* contends that the already poetic, sign-rich condition of the lived spaces of the urbanwild is always available to be noticed and activated through the practice of site sensitive ‘audience experience’ as I will articulate it in this chapter. As Wendy Wheeler asserts, human culture and sign systems have evolved from and are continuous with biological ones. In essence, the project sought to enliven audience ‘noticing’, to propose that all bodies (human and nonhuman), whether audience, performer, or passer-by, are integrally co-performing. It sought to reveal the city as a complex, hybrid, semiotic ecosystem, a dense convergence of flows and mutual entanglements that form the everyday situation for all of the city’s bodies – for example encompassing technology systems, weather circulations, consumption and excretion, urban and bodily metabolisms, photosynthesis and decay, pigeons, weeds, foxes, mobile phones, internal combustion engines, virtual spaces, and shopping.

The 2019 performances of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* took audiences of 15-20 people on a 2.5 hour ‘audience experience’ which began on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor of a building (Eaton House) overlooking Coventry city centre and its inner ring-road tangle of motorways. The audience then walked a route through a variety of sites, which were intermittently animated by the presence of ever-disappearing performers, their fragments of text, sound, or movement coexisting with the ongoing life of the city. At times, the audience were also asked to use their mobile phones while walking, engaging therefore simultaneously with both screen and embodied worlds. The piece passed by rewilded urban wastelands, under and over the ring-road, entered an IKEA store, returned onto the streets, roamed along alleys and through parking lots, shopping malls and residential areas, past homeless people and their makeshift beds, shoppers and café customers, through an industrial estate, finally to arrive at an overgrown, gated area of allotments along the Sherbourne River. The piece concluded in a portion of the allotments managed by Coventry’s The Pod/Food Union.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Pod and Food Union are Coventry City Council funded socially activist mental health initiatives that among other things, manage Coventry’s Sherbourne Valley Allotments. According to Christine Eade (Manager, The Pod): “The Pod as both a statutory mental health resource and cultural/social activism hub has a multi-faceted remit; a common strand is that all facets either implicitly or explicitly aim to build individual/organisational and/or societal capacity for creativity, innovation and resilience. The Pod is committed to a human centred and rights-based approach to secondary mental health practice which is delivered/achieved through an innovative & unique personalised social brokerage model” (07/10/2019: email to C. Deby). Further information is available on: [https://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/238/the\\_pod/3210/the\\_pod\\_-\\_food\\_union](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/238/the_pod/3210/the_pod_-_food_union)

Some of the elements encountered along the audience journey would typically be categorised as ‘urban’ or human-made and therefore ‘unnatural’, while others might be considered to be ‘wild’ or part of a nonhuman ‘nature’. However, as set out in Chapter 1, this project contends that various shades of urban or wild are all part of the same continuum, that it is misleading to partition the world using such binary categories. Hence, I refer to the ‘urbanwild’, conjoining two concepts seemingly at odds with each other. In fact, ‘wild’ and ‘wilderness’ are European (colonial) inventions, historically employed to intensify the otherness of landscapes, indigenous peoples, and lifeforms that have not yet been domesticated by Judeo-Christian, European civilisation. In contrast, as articulated by indigenous scholar Enrique Salmón the word ‘wild’ does not exist in indigenous languages of the Americas. To illustrate this, Salmón describes his own cultural perspective:

A Rarámuri worldview does not differentiate or separate ontological spaces beyond and between the human and nonhuman worlds. We feel that we are directly related to everything around us. The trees are us; we are the trees. I am rain; rain is me. The rain is all around me; it aligns inside me.

(2017: 25)

For European colonial explorers, the assumed fate of a new-found territory was that its wildness would be conquered, that the territory was a ‘void’ or absence awaiting (civilised and European) human influence (Jorgensen 2012: 2). Against this, the urban would seem to be a flipside of wildness, something like the post-war vision for a rebuilt *Future Coventry* (Corporation of Coventry 1945) – an idealised, engineered and shiny city dream which will do away with the mess and ‘self-willed-ness’ of the wild, the pagan, the other. Conjoining ‘urban’ and ‘wild’ is an act that hopes to undo them both. In proposing a hybrid situation, the urbanwild does not refer simply to apparently ‘wild’ elements found within the ‘urban’. Rather, it could be more usefully likened to Almo Farina’s characterisation of ‘hybrid nature’ (2020), where human influence and technologies now leave virtually no instances of ‘pure nature’ – in other words, no form of nature untouched by human influence. It has to be noted that this is, of course, emphatically a human-centric assertion; it is likely that similarly, from the perspective of bacteria, for instance, there is no aspect of the non-bacterial world that is ‘pure’ from bacterial influence – although not all lifeforms can be said to have the influence or global reach of either humans or bacteria.

### ***Life worlds: Umwelt and Innenwelt***

To articulate the practice-based methodologies employed by sirencrossing in Coventry it is necessary, then, to understand the 'city' (or any specific territory) as one saturated with a network of relations. Further, rather than considering 'environment' as something lying *outside* bodies, the project attended to the flows within and between *Umwelt* and *Innenwelt* – together comprising a semiotic field active both *inside* and *between* biological organisms, and in *dynamic relation with non-life* (human-devised circulations and substances as well as the circulations and substances of rock, sky, air, flame, and so on). *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt* are terms developed by Jakob von Uexküll in the early twentieth century to describe, respectively, the inner and outer subjective worlds of an organism. Uexküll recognised that nonhuman organisms must also have their own *Umwelten*, which Barbieri characterises as “the combination of its *perceptual* world with its *operational, or motor* world” (2008: 104). The concept was subsequently important within the articulation of biosemiotics (ibid). Biosemiosis (the biological interpretation of sensory signs) has evolved in living organisms over eons, from the basic codes of genetic inheritance in DNA, to the chemical inter- and intra-cellular signalling required to coordinate living processes as life developed from single into multicellular organisms, to the need for more complex signalling within populations of organisms (for example to find a mate, to find food, to coordinate 'hive-mind' activities and so on), to the necessity of interpreting signs related to survival within particular ecosystem niches and, finally, to the more complex representations of language. Jesper Hoffmeyer offers the following clarification, highlighting the role of the senses in apprehending signs within the *Umwelt* (which is the reason for articulating this notion in relation to the practical research informing *urbanflows*):

the *umwelt* theory tells us that it is not only genes, individuals, and species that survive, but also—and perhaps rather—patterns of interpretation. A creature's *umwelt* can be seen as the conquest of vital aspects of events and phenomena in the world around it, inasmuch as these aspects are continually being turned—by way of the senses—into an integral part of the creature. The *umwelt* is the representation of the surrounding world within the creature.

(Hoffmeyer 1996: 58)

As in Hoffmeyer's assertion, the *Umwelt* theory describes an ongoing perceptual patterning that vibrates *across* the *Umwelt* (outside) and *Innenwelt* (inside) continuum, where *Innenwelt* is processing a swarm of sensory signs to maintain a perceptual model of the organism's life world or *Umwelt* and conversely the patterning of the internal systems of the *Innenwelt*

impact on behaviours and interactions that are perceived as part of the life world or *Umwelt*. The remainder of this chapter will therefore refer to *Umwelt(en)* with the understanding that it always involves *Innenwelt(en)*. As Gregory Bateson stated, “the unit of survival is organism plus environment” (Bateson 2000: 489); he went on to suggest that this basic unit of survival was also the basic unit of *mind* (ibid). Building on this understanding of entanglement between organism and environment as integral to mind and meaning, this chapter will assert that sirencrossing’s methodology of immersing audiences in particular configurations of the world (life plus nonlife), through attending to a phenomenological awareness, can produce shifts in mind and meaning for those audiences. *urbanflows* in Coventry sought to activate for audiences an enlivened experience of their own *Umwelten* through strategic actions, interventions, and choreographic shaping – devices which intended to open up and alter their imaginative sensing capacities.

### ***Constantly mutually unfolding***

Importantly, *urbanflows* approached the city of Coventry as a *situation*; a phenomenon beyond the ‘hard stuff’ of the built environment. ‘What is happening in the in-between?’ was one of the questions it implicitly posed. Bodies and machines, liminal, overlooked or forgotten territories, restless energies shifting, reconfiguring, collapsing and morphing: so much of what is going on in the city (including within bodies in the city) is unseen. There are machine hums underlying the everyday. Within bodies, vast colonies of gut bacteria processing consumed nutrients, colouring in turn mood and mind.<sup>9</sup> Imperceptibly, trees everywhere are slowly and steadily communicating with each other and other organisms in their networks.<sup>10</sup> Beyond bodies there are massive human-built systems of circulation to regularly supply utilities, goods, essentials, and non-essentials. On the flip side are systems of disposal to clear away the evidence of consumption, of death and decay – all of this taking place on a planet shaped by the immensely longer, slower movements of geology, by the circulations of air, water, soil, and energy, over nonhuman scales of time.

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<sup>9</sup> As mentioned in Section 1.3 of this thesis, neuroscientists are discovering to what extent human brain functions, emotions, and other processes are affected or even directed by the microbiota in the human gut (see for example Cryan and Dinan 2012, and Foster and McVey Neufeld 2013). In fact, bacterial cells in the human body far outnumber actual human cells (Gilbert in Tsing et al 2017: M75). Hoffmeyer characterises this in terms of the biosemiosis taking place: “One quadrillion bacteria, in the form of ten trillion cells, collaborate on the job of being a human. Like an astronomical swarm of swarms all of these cells stream together through one single, solitary brain-body as it makes its way along the path of life toward all those unknown futures that will eventually become just one single life story” (1996: 124).

<sup>10</sup> It is now widely accepted that trees communicate with each other and with other organisms or species with whom they interact. Such communication takes place via electrical signals such as through the ‘wood wide web’ (fungal networks intertwined with a forest’s root mass); via air borne scent compounds; and via chemical signals such as in the leaves (see Wohlleben 2017: 31-43).

In general, these systems are *hyperobjects* (Morton 2013); lying beyond the reach of the individual's perceptual *Umwelt*; they are incomprehensible and unknowable. Nevertheless, humans, through science and the abstract thought that language allows, can potentially extend our imaginative awareness to incorporate such vast cosmologies. However, in doing so, we travel further and further from the embodied knowing that grounds us in our own *Umwelt*. Our fictions risk collapse as they teeter too far and away from any connection with that grounding. For example, in a capitalist culture that has atomised community by emphasising the individual, humans can persist with an illusion that it is possible to be dynamically mobile, untethered and free flowing – seemingly without relations (as long as one can participate in the circulation of capital). Have credit card, can go anywhere. At the same time, a continuous news cycle forces many humans into daily relation with global collapse. Is this infotainment or destabilising tragedy? Can my 'everyday' encompass in any real sense, floods in Yorkshire, or the melting Antarctic, or bee colony collapse in America? How do a thousand burning Koalas have meaning alongside my hurried shower this morning? This all seems impossible, and yet, as long as I have an income, I can still just about manage to survive. I and the world, constantly, mutually unfolding.<sup>11</sup>

In my native Canada, indigenous peoples refer to 'all my relations', evoking a cosmology that recognises equal importance in all beings, whether stone, tree, maggot, or human. Not only that, this world view asserts a subject position that is in constant dynamic relation over *time*: that persists in relation to ancestors both human and nonhuman, as well as to those in future generations. Interconnection and reciprocal respect are woven into existence, as several authors have shown (King 2004, Cameron et al. 2014, Wilson 2001, de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). For humans alive today, the ethical proposal to notice and live respectfully with 'all our relations' might just be a timely one. Our unnoticed relations offer clues that we urgently need to decipher. As is currently being articulated in biological, philosophical, multispecies, and posthuman scholarship, *the world thrives on kinship*, rather than competition as was proposed by Charles Darwin (Morton 2017, Haraway 2016, Gilbert in Tsing et al 2017, McFall-Ngai et al 2013, Margulis and Sagan 2010, van Dooren et al 2016).

Immersion in a richness of relations seems essential to human and nonhuman well-being as demonstrated by numerous studies into the benefits of 'nature'. But, as exemplified by the city of Coventry, much of western urban life is, by design, simplified into human engineered

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<sup>11</sup> As previously noted, at the time of writing, the world is convulsed with the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic. It is too soon to know whether or how human societies will be altered in future, and whether capitalism will continue to be so dominant.

spaces where multispecies relations are constrained and/or kept to a minimum. As geologist Ivar Puura articulates:

By wholesale replacement of primeval nature with artificial environments, it is not only nature in the biological sense that is lost. At the hands of humans, millions of stories with billions of relations and variations perish. The rich signscape of nature is replaced by something much poorer. It is not exaggeration to call this process semicide.

(2013: 152)

In other words, immersion in a rich semioscape of relations is lost when artificial contexts or simplified (monocultural) natures are the norm for organisms (not least, for humans). Importantly, the idea that 'nature' can be characterised as a semioscape is based on the understanding that semiosis (sign actions) – the ongoing interpretation of “the total sensory input in which the organism is immersed at any given movement” (Hoffmeyer 1996: 120) – is ubiquitous for all life forms, no matter how simple or complex. Therefore, the usual understanding of 'sign' as a linguistic meaning carrier conceived by humans, describes only a very tiny aspect of the semiotic range being discussed here. Jesper Hoffmeyer and Frederik Stjernfelt explain how semiosis operates across different scales of organisms:

Signs in simple organisms typically cover a narrow range of important environmental and inner situations only, and are thus far simpler than full-fledged perception in organisms with central nervous systems (CNS) and the integration of information from various broad-spectered perceptual organs able to perceive a wide range of environment situations. . . . A web of sign processes, semiosis, is underlying all kinds of cognitive activity in the world from human imagination and down to the lowest level as exhibited by bacteria.

(2016: 9-10)

The myriad signs being interpreted across all scales of life are apprehended through the senses and include “sounds, odors, movements, colors, electric fields, waves of any kind, chemical signals, touch, etc” (Hoffmeyer 2008a: 153). Echoing Puura’s characterisation of the ‘semicide’ in human-impacted environments, Farina similarly identifies a much-reduced semiotic complexity for species and ecosystems due to human influence: “In hybrid nature that results from a random mix of technological infrastructures and natural ecosystems, environmental fundamentals (spatial patterns and resources, complexity, uncertainty, information, and meaning) are modified producing dramatic effects on the semiosis of several species” (Farina 2020: 1).

## 2.2. Audience experience: sirencrossing's urbanwild practice

*urbanflows* focused specifically on the lived experience of humans in the city of Coventry, situating the practice directly within its landscape and the everyday. It sought to reveal the urban in Coventry as in fact an aspect of a 'wild continuum' (Van Horne and Hausdoerffer 2017: 4), akin to Sarah Whatmore's characterisation of 'hybrid geographies' (2002), a place of animal and elemental movement; and, equally, urban space as social space and technologically reconstructed nature. As suggested earlier, the urbanwild forms a field of converging flows and energies active across each organism's *Umwelt*, a sign-rich situation which is in constant dialogue with the unfolding of each individual's lived experience.

The title of sirencrossing's 2019 production in Coventry – *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* – was inspired by Tim Ingold's reference to "following the grain of the world's becoming" in his essay "The Textility of Making" (2011: 210-19). In it, he draws on Deleuze and Guattari and writings by the visual artist Paul Klee to propose that skilled making is a process of co-creation between the maker as wanderer or wayfarer and the grain (forces and currents) of the material with which the maker works. In extrapolating this notion from 'material' to 'the world', Ingold seeks to overturn Aristotle's hylomorphic model of making (form imposed on matter) to one of collaboration with existing flows and forces. *urbanflows* implicitly proposed that Ingold's description of making as a collaboration with existing flows could be likened to Guy Debord's situationist exploration of the urban using his practice of the 'drift' or *dérive* (1956). Both Ingold and Debord suggest actions that notice and collaborate with what is already in play, yet often overlooked, rather than imposing a shape or direction that is conceived in advance. In devising the audience experience, *urbanflows* employed a form of drift process in order to try and discern the usual flows and energies of each particular context, and to subsequently propose to the audience a particular route through that existing 'field' during the course of the piece. The drift is repeatedly tested and open to adjustment during the devising and rehearsals. Even during the actual performances, the work remains open to improvisational changes as the collaborators respond to the changing flows and energies of each context. Both human and nonhuman 'actors' are significant within the scope of the work, as is the intermingling of conscious, unconscious, cognitive, felt, and *sensed* ways of knowing. In this research practice, the human is understood to be porous and unbounded, as, indeed, are nonhumans. The nonhuman 'actors' may include other forms of life, elemental conditions, technologies and other objects, systems or flows. In Coventry, as a prototypical urban context, the urban manifests a particularly potent nexus of *human and technological* entanglement. However, this

concentration of the urban is increasingly to be found across much of the Earth. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the Anthropocene Working Group, has already determined that human impacts on Earth systems can be demonstrated to be ubiquitous across the globe (see Zalasiewicz et al 2015, and Crutzen and Steffen 2003). For the purposes of *urbanflows*, the Anthropocene is understood as a concept framing the current moment, where human impacts can be said to be catastrophically altering Earth systems. It is not, however, accepted as a term that proposes anthropos as somehow inherently superior or dominant. Instead, as Thom van Dooren et al observe: “[T]he contours of human lived experience are shaped through diverse and consequential entanglements. There is no human in isolation, no form of human life that has not arisen in dialogue with a wider world” (2016: 14).

Biosemiotics, arising from insights in biology and Peircean semiotics, articulates the interconnectedness of everything through being “concerned with studying the sign-character of the processes that take place inside or between living systems (from the single cell to full organisms and further to populational or ecological systems)” (Hoffmeyer 2008b: 4). The triadic semiotic system developed by Charles Sanders Peirce has been foundational for biosemiotics, contending that there are always three aspects involved in semiosis: the ‘sign’ (e.g. seeing smoke), the object to which the sign points (a fire), and the interpretant (a reaction to the sign in the organism perceiving it). Therefore, in this example, “a sign is an action: smoke provokes the formation of an interpretant in the animal, causing it to flee. The animal is seized by alarm” (Hoffmeyer 2012: presentation slide at 38:36). And, as Wheeler asserts, “[t]he interpretation, which Peirce called the ‘interpretant’, is not simply a mental event as it often is for humans, but is the change or difference brought about by the organism as a result of its involvement in the sign relation” (Wheeler 2016: 9). Conscious thought does not have to take place for a sign relation to occur; the resultant change or difference may not be as dramatic as fleeing from a fire, but every sign relation will nevertheless result in some sort of reaction. Semiotic activity in an organism’s lifeworld is multi-layered, simultaneously occurring on numerous scales and levels at any moment in time. Hoffmeyer offers a potent picture of this:

Every second, all of our hundreds or thousands of brain modules are busily engaged in processing millions upon millions of sensory data, linguistic and otherwise, received from outside or from within. At the same time, a multitude of signs is being exchanged at a furious pace between the brain modules themselves and with muscles and tissues out in the body itself, as “clusters of signs” are hauled in and out

of files, i.e., memory banks, which are themselves connected in semiotic loops to all the muscles and glands in the body.

(1996: 120)

Hoffmeyer's description assumes that the body-mind is one integrated system: "In saying that the body interprets our *umwelt* while generating a constant stream of consciousness, I am thinking of course of the body as one swarming entity, the semiotic brain-body system as a whole" (ibid: 121).

Scaling up from the single organism and its *Umwelt*, sign relations can be studied across ecosystems: "ecosemiotics is in the broadest sense, a branch of semiotics that studies sign processes as responsible for ecological phenomena (relations between species, population patterns, and structures)" (Maran and Kull 2014: 41). Similarly, Paul C. Adams has developed biosemiotics using the notion of 'enviro-organism' in order to emphasise multi-scale, interrelationships through communication in geographical space (potentially encompassing several ecosystems) – a sympoietic reality in which humans are enmeshed, and which is essential to our embodied co-creation of both 'being' and meaning. By communication Adams means a whole host of chemical, physical, and sensory biosemiotics: "[with] overlaps between human language and non-human signalling mechanisms" (2015: 55). Teresa Brennan (2004) connects these chemical, physical, and sensory signals to the transmission of *affect* amongst humans, contending that humans are resoundingly engaged in this multi-scale, networked field of biosemiotic communication, while Hoffmeyer (1996) proposes the 'semiosphere' as encompassing all forms of semiotic activity on Earth. The *urbanflows* audience experience, such as it was conceived, evolves from and plays out across the potentialities for understanding offered by this model of reality – especially with its emphasis on "meaningful, communication-laden *encounters* between objects, creatures and environments" (Adams 2015: 55, emphasis added).

With a parallel screen-based existence in public as well as private space becoming increasingly commonplace for urban humans, the phase shifts required as our attention flickers between physical and virtual are significant for a project concerned with everyday life today (in a city such as Coventry) and therefore formed an important aspect of *urbanflows*. Ingrid Richardson, in her detailed analysis of the corporeal implications of screens as they evolved from television to cinema to computers to mobile devices, states: "The mobile media device . . . presents a significant shift in the relational ontology of body and technology" in particular, characterising the shift to mobile screens as producing "the distracted, discontinuous, motile, peripatetic and tangible nature of mobile media engagement" (2010).

As Richardson articulates, the bodily relation to screens that are *mobile* and *perceived in the world*, becomes different to that of a body relation to the static screen. Further, it has been my contention that the bodily, sensorial relation to the physical world also changes when a mobile screen world is added. Both productions of *urbanflows* (its prototype in 2017 and its evolved iteration in 2019) asked audience members to involve their smart phones during and in the run up to the piece. It was significant that they used their *own* smart phones, with which they would already have developed some sort of relationship. *urbanflows* asked them to rely on the smart phone in order to find the location(s) where the piece(s) would begin, as well as to listen to spoken text or watch video as they walked. Thus, the screen space was repeatedly imposed as necessary within a simultaneously embodied experience, setting up a situation where the focus for audience individuals was at times split across a hybrid (screen-based and embodied) *Umwelt*, such as is frequently the case currently for humans in their everyday lives. Overall, the audience experience sought to become a heightened version of everyday lived experience, enfolding circumstances both intentional and accidental, immersed in the ongoing sign processes of embodied life. It proposed a method that was tested 'in the world', risking the uncontrolled and the unexpected. Both audience and performer were challenged by this instability: an audience experience that is *alive and in the world*, demands a degree of active participation and improvisation from all taking part. To illustrate how this heightened experience of the everyday can work in practice, the following imagined impression from the self-reflexive, second-person point of view of an immersed audience member plunges us into a short section of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*. Inspired by actual audience comments, it is nevertheless an imagined reflection.

*In the absence echo after momentary encounter you are below ground, aware of your own breath and steady footfall. Passing along the liminal zone tunnel of a pedestrian underpass you notice where concrete has been blackened by fire (what happened here?) . . . then mid-tunnel, a bed and someone's personal effects that you must have passed by before but now cannot ignore. A memory shadow. The air is cold and mouldy, lacking movement. You are relieved the bed isn't occupied. The woman who lured you down here with her crouched signalling, has run ahead and out of sight. As you follow (with the others), you emerge again into open night and a slurry of traffic noise. The path is on the motorway edge, with no barrier to separate you from the stream of vehicles. People's homes adjoin the path to your right. It feels like a war zone. Then you're being asked to open a video link on your phone and to watch it as you*

*continue to walk. With a bump your perception plunges into two places: on the screen an edgy, fox-height run along pathways in the city and the forest, hurling across roadways. You are distracted and a bit irritated. Suddenly, the unprotected whoosh of traffic at your left elbow feels doubly risky . . . your body vibrating between the machine energy crashing past (too close) and the shaky animal run through danger, your own bipedal progress faltering a little. The screen flashes briefly on a startled woman's face, stained with red . . . she has been gorging on something raw. A moment and then gone, the edgy run returns. Ahead you realise the other half of audience are converging with your group. Flicker of two women running away. Something else has just happened. The screen goes black. Ahead, the path curves past green and road into a quieter zone. An empty children's swing under trees; sarcastic comments from some bus stop people (they think your group is hilarious). Then, your pulse of walking slows towards the unexpected extravagant scent of lavender . . . another encounter.*

### ***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 travel, and the general absence of traffic calming measures ensures that bodies (human and nonhuman) are restricted to special zones or narrow alleys and passageways. The homeless humans of Coventry are particularly marginalised, eking out bare survival – alongside nonhumans (such as weeds, rats, maggots), they shelter and make a life in the fissures and disused corners of the city. Much of central Coventry's ground is covered thickly with paving stones or concrete but, even so, it has the capacity to support all sorts of lifeforms and in surprising places. The local situation in Coventry sits within the wider macro-contexts of Britain and the world, where the current political and ecological moment is such that this everyday micro-context comes potentially saturated with instabilities. The work of *urbanflows* contends that the cascading global crises of the Anthropocene make more urgent the need to find a way of everyday becoming that recognises and integrates human entanglement in multiple Earth system relations<sup>12</sup>, and to challenge the idea of superiority

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<sup>12</sup> Earth systems science recognises the planet as a thermodynamic system composed of interacting subsystems: atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, biosphere (Shikazono 2012). For the purposes of this thesis it is important to note the general principle that Earth's circulations include and are affected by the interactions of air, water,

and dominance by, or a perceived separateness of humans. In its quest to reveal such entanglement, *urbanflows* embraced what Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose call 'ecological animism' which begins from an awareness of biological entanglement:

Ecological animism responds to a world in which all life—from the smallest cell to the largest redwood—is involved in diverse forms of adaptive, generative, responsiveness. This responsiveness may happen in the immediacy of the moment (as two albatrosses sing and dance to form a pair bond), it may happen through drawn out developmental processes (as a plant slowly grows towards the sun), or perhaps even over evolutionary time frames that remake entwined morphological and behavioural forms to better inhabit their worlds. However it happens though, life is saturated in diverse forms of purposeful attentiveness and responsiveness. In paying attention to these processes, ecological animism is grounded in *recognition* as a mode of encounter.

(2017: 258)

By encouraging attentiveness to the particulars of site and situation, *urbanflows* sought to provoke various productive encounters to generate embodied, tacit, and ineffable insight into the lived experience of humans in Coventry. The project considered the body as process, as immersed in situations where acts of becoming, reflection, memory, and habit move between the material/immaterial, the human/nonhuman, the incidental and the intentional. As such, repeated over several evenings, the audience experience occurred under slightly differing circumstances with each iteration, featuring, for example, unique one-off encounters with passers-by, variable weather conditions, interruption by the transit of a large construction vehicle and so on. Because the experience remained open to the ongoing events and tendencies in the city, these in turn set the conditions to produce differing experiences for individual audience members. It is true that in fact *any* performance event will produce a subjective response; a personal understanding and meaning will inevitably emerge for each audience member. Chance, personal histories, and the idiosyncratic personal present will make the same performance slightly different for each individual. However, for the *urbanflows* 'audience experience' the potential for subjective response is heightened by its immersion in the always already performing situations within which the experience unfolds. Individuals notice slightly different things, attend to slightly different sensory signs and

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minerals, and life. Beyond the scope of this chapter are texts that, for example, offer detailed technical analysis of Earth systems specifically in relation to the Anthropocene (Frank et al 2017), propose human impacts as 'the anthroposphere' (Cornell et al 2012), articulate the newly emerged human-made Earth system named the 'technosphere' (Haff 2014), and so on. See also 'The Anthropocene and the Everyday', Chapter 1, this thesis.

affects because their attention is less directed, more able to roam. Although, the approach has grown out of various *performance* traditions (including contemporary dance, theatre, live art), the fact that the entire context becomes a part of the work (performers being only one aspect), means the 'audience experience' offers a naturally variable situation. Set in real urbanwild spaces, both indoors and outdoors, public and private, the audience experience intentionally embraces what is best described as the '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, and so on) but do not completely erase or control whatever else is there. The existing rhythms, lighting, sounds, incidents and actions of the site are embraced and considered in the devising of the experience in a manner that could be characterised as psychogeographic. While the piece is not a drift *per se*, it is devised using a psychogeographic approach in order to seek attunement and be responsive to the ongoing tendencies and currents of the contexts passed through. The term psychogeography has been widely used and abused since first defined by the Situationists. Here, I would concur with Merlin Coverley (2018) who claims a central role for walking as a method of psychogeographic discovery. As Paula Serafini describes, in relation to the psychogeographic approach of Manchester's LRM art collective: "[it] is the embodied nature of walking, the element of play, and the transgression of spatial norms as tools that facilitate creative and politicised experiences, which result in a re-signification of specific public spaces" (2018: 111). sirencrossing embraces the playful, transgressive, and embodied approach that psychogeography suggests.

### ***Framing and shaping in time and rhythm***

Choreographers and theatre or performance practitioners are familiar with the potential of shaping audience perception by devising performance material rhythmically and with an awareness of time. The time-based essence of performance is central to its ethereal, always disappearing nature. Performances (such as dance) made in close collaboration with musical scores enter into a very particular sort of relation with time and rhythm, traditionally working in unison with and/or counterpoint to a musical composition. However, rather than adhering to a musical score in a controlled theatre context, sirencrossing's work unfolds in rhythmic relation with the everyday world. As such, Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Regulier's system of rhythmanalysis offers a potent theoretical frame (see Lefebvre 2004, Goonewardena et al. 2008). As described by Stuart Elden in his introduction to Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, "[i]n the analysis of rhythms – biological, psychological and social – Lefebvre shows the interrelation of understandings of space and time in the comprehension of everyday life" (2004: vii). Lefebvre's ambition was to articulate a science of the analysis of

rhythms as a means of apprehending what was particular to the life of any one city (ibid: 3). For sirencrossing, noticing and re-performing visual, energetic, movement-based and aural rhythms as they combine and recombine in the urbanwild field, offers an ever-changing compositional proposition. Complicating this, the positioning of audience experience in relation to the Anthropocene invites awareness of ‘deep time’, at the inconceivable scale of geologic change over billions of years, where for example, ancient carbon lifeforms being burnt for energy now, are producing impacts on the planet that will last millennia. As David Farrier muses “in the Anthropocene, distant pasts and futures flow through the present in all manner of sometimes surprising ways” (Farrier 2019: 2). Rhythmanalysis can also suggest an acute awareness of deep (Earth) scales of time, developed here by Kurt Meyer:

Nothing is motionless in the eyes of the rhythmanalyst. He hears wind, rain, thunderstorm. In observing a pebble, a wall or a tree trunk, he perceives the slowness of movement of these objects. Their movement is slow only in proportion to our time, our bodies, our rhythms. Even an apparently immobile object—say, a forest—is moving. Such movement is connected to the forest soil, the earth, and the sun; to the atoms and the molecules of which it is composed. A forest is exposed to innumerable aggressions that are resisted by it. The rhythmanalyst strives to rehabilitate sensory perception. He pays attention to breathing, the heartbeat, the words. He is careful to avoid giving priority to any one act of sense perception.

(2008: 149)

The challenge then, for the practice of developing audience experience, is in how to induce audiences to respond to site and event *as rhythmanalysts*. The sense of deep time, of forests moving, will be experienced simultaneously to the polyrhythmic time of the human body’s many internal systems (*Innenwelten*). In the urbanwild context, these rhythms are then further distorted by or coexistent with the machine rhythms of the urban, such as traffic, industry, buildings or devices. In sirencrossing’s work, audience routes are often chosen for the specific rhythmic situations that they might offer. Performers and audiences may travel or move through urbanwild spaces at speeds that contrast with existent everyday speeds and rhythms perceived to be in operation. For example, at one point during *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*, the performers, walking with the audience, initiated an extreme slow-motion pace just as the group passed by a water fountain, heading down a ramp into a covered shopping mall (Lower Precinct). The sound accompanying this unexpected slowing down faded from the loud waterfall of the fountain into an echoing, empty, electric hum in the mall. As the group entered the mall, the performers *began quietly humming along with the air-conditioning and machine sounds of the mall*. The hum then

began to increase in volume and cross uncomfortably into slight disharmonies. At first, many audience members weren't sure where the sound was coming from. The effect of this slow-motion walking pace, along with the choral hum coming into 'tune' with the built environment, later prompted comments from audience members using words such as 'dystopian', 'scary', or 'uncomfortable' to describe their experience (thus articulating an aspect of their remembered *Umwelt*). This event reveals the sort of powerful opportunities available in allowing the existing energies and configurations of a site to affect a devised series of actions that traverse it. Other choreographers have made similar claims. Carol Brown makes a case for performance that "disrupts the real" when she writes: "I suggest that ambulatory performances that reimagine the city as a journey through time operate horizontally, crossing boundaries, creating new folds and intersections, making tears and ruptures in the psychogeography of the city and the sense of the real" (Brown 2015: 211).

Revealing and highlighting various rhythmic systems and intersections in sirencrossing's work is often accomplished through the actions of performers, though not always. Performers trained in contemporary dance, improvisation, and other somatic practices are particularly proficient in devising and working with rhythm across the body-site continuum. Such training and improvisational experience also facilitates the performer's readiness to respond to the energetic and sensorial offerings that might be present in what might be termed the 'ongoing co-becoming of site and self'. The flows and stillnesses, situations and events of the urban world are experienced and amplified or transmuted into gesture or voice, actions or other movements. The alchemy of improvisational movement offers a filter and an instant mode of collaborative composing. The idea of structuring a composition rhythmically connects it to the essentially pulsed condition of being alive: the polyrhythms of bodies – of heartbeat, breath, digestion, nerve energy, brain synapses; the ambulatory rhythms of bodies – of walking, crawling, flying, squirming, swimming. Such body rhythms are always felt in relation to contexts: as Lefebvre states "everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm" (2004: 32). Thus, the composition of audience experience is ordered in meaningful relation to the rhythmic field in play, acknowledging that field's patterning as a key aspect of audience *Umwelten*.

sirencrossing's research method always involves an initial embodied, ethnographic immersion in the places where the work will be performed. In an essay articulating movement and choreography as methods for revealing the city of Hong Kong, drawing on both Pierre Bourdieu and José Gil, SanSan Kwan explains a similar process:

Gil describes the space of the body as a kind of 'secretion' or 'reversal' of the inner body to the outer. It is a space that extends the body beyond itself into virtuality and, what's more, into potentiality. The idea that a body and space mutually become one another helps me to argue for the kind of auto-ethnographic choreography I practise as a way of studying space. In other words, by moving through a particular space I engage in a dialogic relationship where I ingest that space as it enfolds me—dancing becomes a way of knowing geography, even if we must acknowledge that that geography is immediately made subjective the moment we enter it.

(Lepecki and Joy 2009: 19)

Kwan also describes dancers' ability to 'feel each other' – in other words, to move in relation to other dancers not in view of each other and not guided by the pulse of a shared musical score, but rather by attending to a shared energetic awareness. My contention is that dancer-performers can productively utilise this ability in order to tune into the energetic field of the everyday urbanwild, encompassing not only bodies but other rhythms, affordances, networks, and movements. An audience member may recognise and *feel* meaning from the performed rhythmic structures without consciously understanding in the present moment what is being transmitted. A kinaesthetic communication takes place that resonates beyond the 'now' (see Foster 2011). As Lepecki points out, quoting Michael Taussig: "[D]ancers and audiences all produce, and are produced by, a shared bio- and necropolitical "nervous system" that . . . informs the very physical and affective conditions of contemporary spectatorship and performing" (Lepecki 2016: 2).

### ***Choreographing 'experience' and the in-between***

Creating audience experience within a dynamic of social relations and time/rhythms, reveals a need to rupture or reconstitute the temporal space of 'complexity and chaos' in order to perform it – for it to be noticed in a new way. Memory and habit, preconceived ideas and remembered modes of coping mean that individuals often automatically simplify any context in order to navigate through it more efficiently, and this is an essential strategy in day-to-day life. However, this can also mean that they miss things: that their experience (as remembered) becomes a repetition of or variation on what they already know. In the enacted present moment of moving through space/time/relations their awareness is engaged dynamically, but what they subsequently recall may be quite different. Erin Manning and Brian Massumi offer a potent example of this, describing a person making their way through a moving crowd of people along a sidewalk (pavement) as 'surfing' the field effects of the crowd. The authors suggest that the individual will later remember the material sidewalk,

but not the immaterial manner in which they navigated through the temporary openings and closings in the flow of bodies:

The experience is then all movement-texture, complexly patterned, full of change and transition, teemingly differentiated. You're surfing the crowd even as the crowd is surfing you . . . you were thinking, with your movement. Your every movement was a performed analysis of the field's composition from the angle of its affordance for getting-ahead . . . You entered a mode of environmental awareness in which to perceive is to enact thought, and thought is directly relational . . .

(Manning and Massumi 2014: 10)

This account could also describe how a dancer responds *in* the moment, *from* moment to moment, in an improvisation with other performers. An improvisation is not a cerebral affair. As one of my teachers used to say, we use our 'cat brain' while improvising. This allows us to respond to a changing field of affects and affordances, in a mode simultaneously intuitive, expressive, and physical. By 'cat brain' he meant the pre-verbal, instinctual sensorimotor cortex, which is wired directly between perception and action, without a need for conscious mind to conceptually interpret or name (see also Nöe 2004). Improvisational dancers train to be able to remember the enacted dance, to draw on improvisation as a tool from which to craft performance material that can be re-performed.

From my experience with audiences and improvisational situations, precisely what is remembered (the sidewalk, or the movement through the crowd) depends on the individual's focus at the outset. If the individual is focussed largely on 'getting-ahead', it will be the sidewalk that is remembered. If the destination is not so important (or is unknown), then the individual might instead become exhilarated by (and remember) the 'in-the-moment' rush of navigating a field of body–movement–affordances. 'Not knowing' the destination can free people up to just experiencing the moment. Thus, I have learned that how the audience is prepared for the experience – what is transmitted to them in the way of instructions or other text, the circumstances of the starting location, what they understand about their destination – are all crucial to how the experience will be received, and later, understood. Several audience members for *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* commented on how it affected them, not being aware of their destination:

*[T]here were particular moments that were truly transformative, and the experience of the work as a whole has lingered in a kind-of trippy way; looking back, to walk the city with such unexpected guides was like being absolved of the responsibility*

*of knowing precisely where one was; we could relax into the city in a way that is not usually possible.*

(Appendix: 20)

Manning and Massumi highlight differing attention capabilities for individuals depending where they lie along the neurodiverse spectrum, ranging from various degrees of autism, to those who are neurotypical (2014: 10-11). The comparison offers insight into how neurotypical humans subconsciously edit their experience as it is being experienced, while conversely, the autistic is paralysed by their perception of a reality where everything appears to have equal (demanding) importance. This perception literally overwhelms the autistic's ability to discern a way through: "The autistic becomes the field, integrally co-compositional with it. For the neurotypical, the field comes already saturated with affordances the field proposes" (ibid). However, according to Manning and Massumi, the gap between present action/perception and remembered past remains the same for all humans. Given this tendency for many neurotypical people to automatically 'pre-subtract' from their experience, audiences can be induced to discover new meanings, new connections between things, and between themselves and place, by inviting them to move through space on unfamiliar routes through the familiar; by suggesting new ideas, relationships, and questions; by requiring them to make decisions or to exercise volition; by offering unexpected sensory propositions. These strategies serve to switch off pre-subtraction thereby encouraging a greater awareness of their own mind-body-world entanglements.

Do audiences actually *perform* rather than merely 'experience'? In sirencrossing's work this will depend on specific aspects of their experience, including audience actions, choices, and movements. At times they might feel conscious of themselves as a visible group moving through the city together, but for the most part, if they are 'performing', it is largely for themselves – an essential reflexive self-awareness that contributes to the synthesis of everything that is experienced. They might 'perform' in the sense of behaving a certain way in order to fit in with the group (such as the example given earlier of slow walking accompanied by performer humming in the mall). During *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* some audience members were uncomfortable about being an obvious 'group' moving silently together, especially when they were confronted by other large groups of the public, such as people sitting outside cafés or inside IKEA. At those moments, there was a distinct tension regarding who exactly was 'performing' and who exactly was the 'audience'. Many times, in the chance encounters with other humans or nonhumans going

about their everyday lives, the audience was forced to consider their own role in the cityscape:

*My experience was that it made the city strange to me. It allowed me to see stuff that I don't ordinarily see. And also, my other key thought was . . . that sense of not really knowing who the performers were . . . were we the performers? Were the people performing for us the performers? Or sometimes, were the other people in the city performing for us? Those were my over-riding feelings.*

(Appendix: 22)

Shifting the familiar, shocking audience, creating rupture – similar concepts in art and performance have been proposed by Brecht, Benjamin, and others (see Whybrow 2005). According to Simon O'Sullivan, an encounter with art has the possibility to produce a complex convergence that juxtaposes both rupture (generating the new) and representation (invoking the familiar): "Our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted. We are forced to thought. The encounter then operates as a rupture in our habitual modes of being and thus in our habitual subjectivities" (2006: 1).

As Massumi asserts: "[O]ur experiences aren't objects. They're us, they're what we're made of. We *are* our situations, we *are* our moving through them" (2002a: 11). Does this mean that human consciousness is constantly 'on' and continuously, actively, sifting through the multiplicity of experience, dynamically processing and extracting meaning? I think it is clear that the answer is no. Philosopher Barry Dainton describes this discontinuity in consciousness:

For the most part we go about our business in a non-self-conscious way, and our stream of conscious thought is fragmented, taking one detour after another; this all takes place against the continuous presence of the phenomenal background. On occasion, we pause, draw back from whatever was previously occupying us, and introspect – we find ourselves paying attention to what we are currently perceiving, feeling or thinking. The effect is often quite dramatic . . . it can seem as though we are suddenly becoming aware of what we were previously not experiencing at all.

(2000: 119)

This fits too with Wheeler's articulation (drawing on Gregory Bateson) of the patterned processes of biosemiotic meaning-making, where repetition (habit) and difference (rupture) are equally necessary and introduce the potential for metaphoric thinking, shedding new light on what was previously mundane or unnoticed. As Wheeler puts it: "Metaphor is based

on *similarity* plus sufficient *difference* to allow, in the abduction which is the carrying over of meaning from one place to another, some *new* aspect of the original icon to show up” (2016: 165). The degree of difference/rupture can of course introduce shifts in perception ranging from mild to extreme, but only with some degree of difference can new, often poetic understandings be generated. “One important difference between ordinary language and poetic language is that the latter emphasises its ambiguity and plays on many levels. Ordinary language (and the dead metaphors that stock it) is the thus often clichéd language of habit” (Wheeler 2016: 163). By describing the sites of a sirencrossing audience experience as spaces of semiosis, the notion of ‘language’ is assumed to include *all* biosemiotic processes, not only those of human-devised dialects. Ambiguity can equally characterise situations and events; these therefore also produce potentially new and poetic meanings.

When devising audience experience, an awareness of the fragmented, discontinuous nature of consciousness is essential, not least as it will characterise the intermittent and imperfect ‘reading’ of the sensory signs encountered. Fragmented attention is not a thing to be controlled but rather offers a suggested approach in terms of pacing and rhythm. There are dips and troughs of intensity in the ongoing passage of our lives. We hear something, we drift, something else draws us to a sharp point of attention, an idea might crystallise in a related image, sound, or scent. There might be a difference between our memory retention or focus when we are ‘doing’ something, as opposed to when we are passively ‘not doing’ anything. Thus, the audience experience appears to meander across place and time while allowing an accumulation that feels heightened and yet recognisable. It will not be the same for every individual, but it is possible to arrive at an experience with approximately predictable impacts; that is, acknowledging and welcoming a range of responses within a certain spectrum of expectation. Therefore, the choreographer does not control the situation but rather makes a calculation as to the likely audience impacts based on her long experience with site/situation-specific immersions. Here, to illustrate, is a further imagined meander through a sequence of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*.

*This moment feels an immeasurable distance from your rush to arrive, to get to this building on time. Yesterday’s email instructions were clear but gave no clue about what might happen. Now you are seated with the others in a room high up, open windows spanning the breadth of a panoramic view . . . cool air, wind, city sounds spilling in. It is dusk, the sky magnificent with boiling black against orange and yellow. The city sparkles, vehicles stream by on the roads below. All of this reflected in the tilted glass of*

*the open windows, in the mirrored surfaces of nearby buildings. Suddenly, you realise the windows are being closed . . . clunk . . . clunk . . . clunk. Each closure deadening a little more the city sounds and movement of air, until you are left with only cottony silence and the ticking of a clock. Then it starts. You hadn't noticed before the mobile phone standing like a person in front of you (mounted on a tripod-stick), waiting, against the backdrop of the city. Now the screen is alive with a close-up of a disembodied and gender-less human mouth which is speaking. Its name is Kitsune. The voice flat, machine-like. Later you will remember, as you leave the building, the mouth's description of the city as a dangerous and heartless place, but also full of life and beauty. You leave the building the way you entered it and yet now the feeling colour has shifted completely. Before you lies a scene of contrasts: three women walking in extreme slow motion, circling a disregarded patch of scrubland (a large traffic island) directly across from you and surrounded by speeding vehicles. The walking pattern shifts slowly, hypnotically, through enmeshed circles of walking, jogging, or running. The pattern, seen against the relentless stop-start of encircling rush-hour traffic, suggests an expanded sense of time and duration. A bird soars distantly in an arc above. You drift. You notice passing drivers leaning over to stare. The sky is darkening in a moment stretched thin and long. You feel the slow patterning of the women as a loop, holding you here on this ugly spot. This is not a place to linger. Then, you realise that two of the women are running, darting across a busy slip road. The third is beckoning from a distant scrubland edge to show you something. Unexpectedly, the site condenses, draws focus onto tiny details. There are edible, medicinal herbs here . . . many in fact. This useless patch of ground has transmuted into witch's secrets. Seed heads sway as we crouch to hear more. The traffic stops and starts and flows. There is rain in that wind. It is time to move on.*

In the audience experience it might be that being physically active in space has the effect of inducing the audience to feel more alive in their bodies, beyond simply responding to the sensory situations encountered. Importantly, moving through the world with others, but in silence (i.e. not talking to each other) has proven to be an essential aspect of audience experiences developed by sirencrossing. In some pieces this was accomplished by asking audience members to wear earplugs (see Chapter 1: *city:skinned* case study), but in others (such as *urbanflows*) they were simply asked to remain silent and to “open up all their

senses". Thus, in silence and without the option of chatting with fellow audience members, the audience's heightened sensory noticing continues in between 'performance fragments'. It is hoped that the audience's perception of the noisy, visually busy, turbulent city feels contiguous with the various artistic interventions that punctuate it. Distraction is therefore intentionally part of the audience experience and ensured via its vital porosity to the city's urbanwild.

The 'audience experience' seeks to be both ordinary, and extraordinary. In other words, there is a flow that feels familiar (from everyday life) but that avoids complacency. This could be what John Dewey means when he articulates the distinction between experience and having 'an experience' (1934: 35-57). He maintains, "[a]n experience has pattern and structure, because it is not just doing and undergoing in alternation, but consists of them in relationship" (ibid: 44). This seems to confirm the contention that to be meaningful, to stand out from the ordinary within the context of the urbanwild, 'an experience' (and therefore an 'audience experience') combines moving (or action) with receiving in a phenomenal and semiotic sense. In trying to define what makes experience become meaningful, it is worth also considering Walter Benjamin's articulation of 'experience', described here by Ben Highmore:

[F]or Benjamin the investigation of experience plays on the nuanced distinction between experience as that which is simply lived-through (*Erlebnis*) and experience as something that can be accumulated, reflected upon and communicated (*Erfahrung*). If *Erlebnis* is immediate, it also tends towards being inchoate (it is pre-language, pre-reflection). *Erfahrung* on the other hand is what makes *Erlebnis* socially meaningful; it is the point at which experience is examined and evaluated.

(2002: 66-67)

For the purposes of 'audience experience', attending to the immediate, lived-through and pre-language *Erlebnis* is essential. Human language gives us a tool to communicate our lived experience to others but *Erfahrung*, if arrived at too immediately, short-circuits the introspective process of transforming *Erlebnis* into *Erfahrung*. In other words, primary experience needs to be noticed (not immediately categorised). This distinction reminds us of the value in inter-rupting any habits of automatic naming. If it can be calibrated effectively, is 'an experience' therefore the same thing as a rupture or encounter? How do we (or do we) consolidate, process, or assimilate the ongoing stream of our aliveness? Since it is continuously in process, can we divide experience into component parts – such as events or ideas or signifiers – and can we define these as either significant or not significant? Is our

awareness not more subtle and complex in its temporality, in its embodiment, in its thinking, feeling, noticing, and forgetting? Experience is emphatically not isolated in events, although they might punctuate it. There is a continuity of exchange, accumulation, and consolidation in experience that I would argue is always a part of any performance or 'audience experience.' Again, the following imagined impression of an experience of part of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* evokes some of this interplay between thinking, feeling, noticing and forgetting during an audience experience:

*Without warning, you are split from before and resisting. Voluptuous lavender scent and open-air expanse suddenly replaced by enclosure. The sky is gone. Unexpectedly inside, you are walking differently, on tiles not concrete. The previous volume of air rising above is replaced by compression in the ceilinged box of this building. Even as you resist, your animal body is rearranging itself into a familiar, more contained way of being. You know the rules. Inexplicably you are in IKEA. But this retail desire space doesn't fit the story coming from the woman who has brought you here. She is still talking about The Great Abundance, evoking a rapturous situation of scent and green and growth and running water. Her body is somewhere else. Dissonance, both tragic and funny. The light is flat, bright, uniform . . . space divided into product displays and the pathways between them. In the lift, she notes the call of a buzzard (a human voice announcing the floors). You smell and see plastic: she describes herbs and flowers. The split deepens. Now customers, staff, IKEA restaurant loiterers are noticing, making comments. You feel exposed, out of place. You (and the group) somehow disrupting the pattern here, interjecting an energy that makes this context into spectacle. Then, a jolt of recognition . . . the woman gorging on red berries is seated at a table. That previous glimpsed video image . . . she is now here, improbably here. The other woman has brought you to the windows, inviting your gaze to plunge out and down to the street. While you've been inside, two figures run incessantly below, signalling with beams of light against a fence bordering a wild patch of ground. It is time to leave. Much later, after an exhaustion of journeying, you walk softly along a night-time pathway through forest and into candle-lit green and it hits you. This is the Great Abundance. With a ripple, your memory space leaps across miles and time to connect this moment backwards to that more distant one. Rapid fire reconfiguration of perception, like a shuffle of playing cards. The split heals.*

John Dewey suggests in *Art as Experience* that: “Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living” (1934: 35). Thus, the audience experience seeks to replicate this feeling of ‘the process of living’ to the extent that it is no longer clear what is formally ‘devised’ and what was already there. Significant to devising this feeling of the lived moment is the element of rhythm, described here by Dewey: “Experiencing like breathing is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings. Their succession is punctuated and made a rhythm by the existence of intervals, periods in which one phase is ceasing and the other is inchoate and preparing” (ibid: 56). This rhythm of breathing, of rise and fall, of passing from one interval to the next could also describe the delicate process of working with the grain of the urbanwild situation when devising and producing an audience experience.

In the early 20th century, James Gibson was developing a radical new ecological psychology, rejecting the prevailing behaviourist, cognitive approach that describes perception as a function of the brain. His writing influenced many, including Tim Ingold (2011: 117). In the Introduction to the classic edition of Gibson’s *An Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, William Mace writes that for Gibson:

Perceiving is an achievement of the individual, not an experience in the theatre of consciousness. It is a keeping-in-touch with the world, an experiencing of things rather than a having of experiences . . . The continuous act of perceiving involves the co-perceiving of the self.

(Gibson 2015: xxii-xxiii)

Following from this, I suggest that the audience experience is one that aims for an immersive ‘keeping-in-touch with the world’ with the express hope that a ‘coperceiving of the self’ will be one of the outcomes – an immersion in the totality of *Umwelt*.

I should say at this point that I have consciously avoided using the term ‘immersive theatre’ to describe my work. The audience experience certainly immerses audiences in situations, but the immersion is also porous. Its success is dependent on creating and maintaining audience focus, alongside productive distraction, rather than on isolating them in an enclosed and compelling alternate reality. As articulated by Gareth White (2012), ‘immersive theatre’ usually refers to audience experience within a highly constructed performance container. While immersive theatre might engage multiple senses, he contends that the experience remains distinct from the interiority of the individual audience members. Adam Alston

proposes the term 'experience machine' (from philosopher Robert Nozick) to describe the constructed and all-encompassing immersive theatre experience:

Experience machines are enclosed and other-worldly spaces in which all the various cogs and pulleys of performance – scenography, choreography, dramaturgy, and so on – coalesce around a central aim: to place audience members in a thematically cohesive environment that resources their sensuous, imaginative and explorative capabilities as productive and involving aspects of a theatre aesthetic.

(Alston 2016: 2)

Alston pinpoints in particular the neoliberal tendencies of the form, where audience members are expected "to produce and receive as a productive participant whose immaterial and enterprising productivity is valued, celebrated and incorporated as an expectation" (2016: 12). In Alston's terms, the audience member is turned back into themselves as they 'co-produce' the aesthetic experience. He points out that this is part of a wider trend towards the objectification of experience, both in art and in marketing: the so-called 'experience economy' as developed by P. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore (1999), where goods and services are no longer as important as commoditising consumer experience. Alston compares the immersive theatre of a company like Punchdrunk, where the entrepreneurial, independent initiative of free-roaming audience members is encouraged, to the immersive theatre of Shunt or Theatre Delicatessen, where the form is more subversive, seeking to "frustrate the appeal and romanticism of affective and physically productive participation as an assigned condition for participating effectively" (Alston 2016: 223). I would claim aspects of both strategies as useful, with predominant emphasis on being subversive; not seeking to commoditise experience but rather to play between individual and group actions. There are instances within sirencrossing's work where audiences are induced to cooperate with each other, and others where the individual is nudged to take individual action and/or to self-reflect. What is clear is that the work cannot operate in isolation from the biopolitics of its time and that there are therefore opportunities to trouble and subvert societal trends and currents.

According to White, the immersive theatrical experience maintains an 'outside'. As he states: "The term 'immersive', however, maintains a subject-object divide, as it implies (and structures our thinking about the experience towards) a subject inside the object, not interpenetrated by it" (ibid: 228). By contrast, a sirencrossing audience experience is deliberately leaky to the everyday world, and in fact welcomes a blend of the devised and the accidental or incidental, immersing the audience in circumstances that are an

interpenetrating mixture of these. A sirencrossing audience experience aspires to be something more akin to Josephine Machon's 'visceral performance' as defined in her discussion of (syn)aesthetics (2011). As White says of Machon: "One of the key propositions of her '(syn)aesthetics' is that the 'fusing of sense (semantic "meaning making") with sense (feeling, both sensation and emotion) establishes a double-edged rendering of making-sense/sense making'" (White 2012: 228). sirencrossing has largely sought to employ a minimum of theatricality, and to rather invite audience members to notice themselves moving through certain configurations of what exists in the world – to have a heightened experience of the 'everyday' – where their *Umwelt* is shifted, and where different levels of knowing, sensorimotor, and phenomenological inputs combine to reveal new understandings. Theatrical interventions can be introduced as a way to strategically highlight and exaggerate using the surreal and the hyper-real. Thus, 'sense making' is accomplished on multiple levels of knowing and being. In referring to multiple levels of knowing, this work maintains that cognition is not divorced from knowing through the senses. The interplay between levels of mind (conscious, unconscious, felt, sensed) is available and implicit in any sense- or meaning-making that might take place. Bateson articulates this interplay thus: "The word "know" is not merely ambiguous in covering both *connaître* (to know through the senses, to recognize or perceive) and *savoir* (to know in the mind) . . . That which we know through the senses can *become* knowledge in the mind" (2000: 143).

There is a continuity of exchange, accumulation, and consolidation in the ongoing flow of our lived experience. Brian Massumi has written extensively about this, saying: "'Affect' is a useful way to talk about this charge of potential – we carry with us memories, habits, tendencies, associations – a constantly shifting capacity to affect or be affected" (2002b: 4). This chimes with sirencrossing's hope that audiences will notice patterns of interaction between human lives, social settings, observed systems of nature, and existent urban flows and energetic states found within specific urbanwild settings. On one level the work asks: how is our human *being-ness* created through the ongoing *becoming* of lived experience? How can performance practice reproduce the way that our everyday existence accumulates sensory impressions, images, ideas, memories, and meaning?

As before, the following textual address-to-the-self imagines one person's affective accumulation during a sequence of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*.

*The thought arrives imperceptibly. You are becoming exhausted, coextensive with this unrelenting rhythm of sense encounter and interruption, pause and pulsed movement.*

*You realise a river is close . . . scent of wet, the growing chill . . . you realise you've known it for a while. Blur of closed shopfronts, more traffic, a distinct move away from the centre. What was that before? A feeling memory washes up. You remember being surrounded by vibration, a slowing hum coming in and out of phase. Some sort of electrical sound . . . or perhaps apocalypse. In that empty mall passage, you resisted the group's slowness, your steps awkward and jumpy. Acceleration. You emerged into the street. A woman on the ground. A walnut tree. Two guys smirking on a park bench. You are walking, you feel two-dimensional. Another emergence: road into tunnel into darker into treelined. Around you, body-voices converge. Suddenly you are in a river of bodies, a flow of murmurs shifting, rising, speaking, whispering. And then gone. The women are running again, disappearing ahead of you. Bats swoop past. A couple embrace on a distant balcony. There is a river close. Under acid bright lights you are walking into darkness. Breath held. Felt heard.*

The *urbanflows* project has found great resonance with Massumi's articulation of affect as a concept describing the elusive *what happens* of everyday lived experience; a thing simultaneously virtual (meaning *potential*), and actual; and coinciding with what Massumi terms as *intensity* (2002a: 29-30). Affect offers a productive way to describe the complex field of interactivity and possibility that is at play in the entanglement of worlds-bodies. "The body doesn't just absorb pulses or discreet stimulations; it infolds contexts, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated. Intensity is asocial, but not pre-social—it includes social elements but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning and combines them according to different logic" (ibid). Affect seems to get to the heart of the in-between-ness of things: the subject is not central, but rather it is the waves of affect as they spill into the in-between; cascades of vibration, of consequence but with no single genesis (see also Massumi 2002b). Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth offer a useful overview of the concept. The significance of affect in relation to the practice of audience experience, finds resonance with their evocation of both intensity and in-between-ness:

Within these mixed capacities of the in-between, as undulations in expansions and contractions of affectability arrive almost simultaneously or in close-enough alternation, something emerges, overflows, exceeds: a form of relation as a rhythm, a fold, a timing, a habit, a contour, or a shape comes to mark the passages of intensities (whether dimming or accentuating) in body-to-body/world-body mutual imbrication.

This description articulates the ongoing concerns of audience experience as it seeks to notice and harness “an inventory of shimmers” (ibid: 1). Furthermore, describing something best experienced rather than translated into words, “affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations” (ibid). The following final textual interlude attempts to evoke the effects of an affective immersion, during a sample sequence from *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*.

*You are watching as the woman stops talking and climbs backwards from fence into scrubland. Her light voice already a memory flutter across the more sustained overhead of darkening sky which has been a slowly developing counterpoint to everything. A part of you has been moving with the expanse of horizon, its invitation and promise, even as the broken chunked up ground has stopped your own progression across space. Dull monotony of traffic sounds has given way to an awareness of shadowy trees and low bush. You hadn’t noticed this before. You are in a space in-between, a pause in the pulsed rhythm of walking, still aware of the others who walk with you, who now shift slightly nearby, also watching; a hesitation of watchfulness, reverberating with potential. This moment (and the next and the next) a culmination of voices, movements, perspectives that have come before; a feeling-colour you haven’t really named yet. A sharp point of someone walking to their car, staring. Slight movements of grasses and flower heads amongst concrete rubble; the scent of rain in a shiver of wind. In the scrubland you realise there is another woman, and then another and another . . . their stillnesses or small shifts just legible, a shared pause with the group, until suddenly the women are running again. A scribble of actions that rearrange part of the field. Furtive glances, meaningful looks, more running and pausing, building and looking. The sky has darkened. The women disappear. You are left in the crashing emptiness of a derelict site, a return to silent walking, the horizon stretching just beyond, inscribing this line of slow progress with a long low note that sings “and more”.*

Affect implies *processes of becoming* rather than any static situation or ‘thingness’.

Attempting to articulate the immaterial from a different perspective, concepts of *atmospheres* could also potentially be seen as significant to this project, related as they are to affect and the tacit subjectivities it describes. Several writers are key to any discussion of

atmospheres, including philosophers such as Gernot Böhme and Martin Heidegger, with urban analysts such as Tim Edensor (2015), Ben Anderson (2009), and Matthew Gandy (2017) weighing in. An examination of atmospheres and their potential to be 'staged' was explored by Mikkel Bille, Peter Bjerregaard and Tim Flohr Sørensen in a special edition of *Emotion, Space and Society*. Despite the difficulty in pinning down this elusive concept, they point out that, in practical terms, atmospheres are frequently manipulated in numerous real-world contexts by designers, architects, artists, urban planners, advertisers, and more (Bille et al 2015: 31-38). Gandy draws on geographer Ben Anderson's definition of 'affective atmospheres' to suggest that this conjunction "moves our focus from the bounded human subject towards more porous forms of urban sentience . . . moving between the single and the multiple, and from the human to other forms of life and materiality" (2017: 369). Anderson himself states: "Affective atmospheres are a class of experience that occur *before* and *alongside* the formation of subjectivity, *across* human and non-human materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions" (2009: 78). Meanwhile, Bille et al point out that while affect and atmospheres are frequently associated and/or conjoined, they would call for the need to focus robustly and analytically on the *materiality* of atmospheres, such as: "architecture, colours, lighting, humidity, sound, odour, the texture of things and their mutual juxtaposition" (2015: 36), therefore emphasising what they perceive as most important for 'staging atmospheres'. As will be discussed in the following case study of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*, devising audience experience demands attention to both material elements and immaterial processes as they are read through the senses and folded back into the *Umwelten* of individuals, in order to evoke particular affective atmospheres in concert with what is already ongoing in the city.

CASE STUDY (PaR submitted for examination September 2019)



Coventry...England...Britain. On the edge of the Atlantic. Not Europe...and not-not Europe. Planet Earth. Burning up. Somewhere in this mess of roads, construction site optimism and hyped-up fast-moving tunes, fast food, slow decline, urban wasteland and screen swipe seduction, retail stupor-uber, zero hours and no time left.

*urbanflows* proposes a hybrid urbanwild ecosystem, highlighting cycles of carbon (in the making of concrete; the burning of fossil fuels; the metabolisms of plants and creatures), and the meshed movements of air, water, mobile phones, machines, and living things...

Commissioned by *Sensing the City*, presented in September 2019 as a warm-up to Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art, *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* was an audience experience that journeyed through the city of Coventry, with elements of performance, installation, sound, video, and words scattered throughout the everyday spaces passed through.

CREATED BY CAROLYN DEBY IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PERFORMERS:

Jia-Yu Corti, Katy Coe, Annalise Cowan, Lauren Jane Sheerman, Raket Ezpeleta, Warren Murray

With audiences of 15-20 people per performance, *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* was a 2.5-hour audience experience, presented in Coventry on seven dates in September 2019. Audiences booked their ticket online and then, on the evening preceding their booked performance, were sent a text and an email with the starting location instructions. The piece began in a room on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor of Eaton House, on the edge of central Coventry. Audience members who had attended an earlier *Sensing the City*-commissioned piece in 2017, *urbanflows (you were here)*, noted that this starting location

**Figure 18 (top of page):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*. Performer: Katy Coe. Promotional image: design, video stills, and central Coventry map drawing by Carolyn Deby.

was the exact place where the 2017 piece ended. The room offered a panoramic overview of central Coventry and the ring-road encircling it, the skyscape particularly dramatic as the piece was timed to begin at sunset into twilight. Once the audience was seated, facing the open windows (fresh air, wind, and city sounds spilling into the room), the windows were closed one by one in a rhythmic sequence, gradually sealing the space from any outdoor



**Figure 19 (above):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry, UK). Mouth performer (on phone screen): Jia-Yu Corti. Photo: Adele Mary Reed.

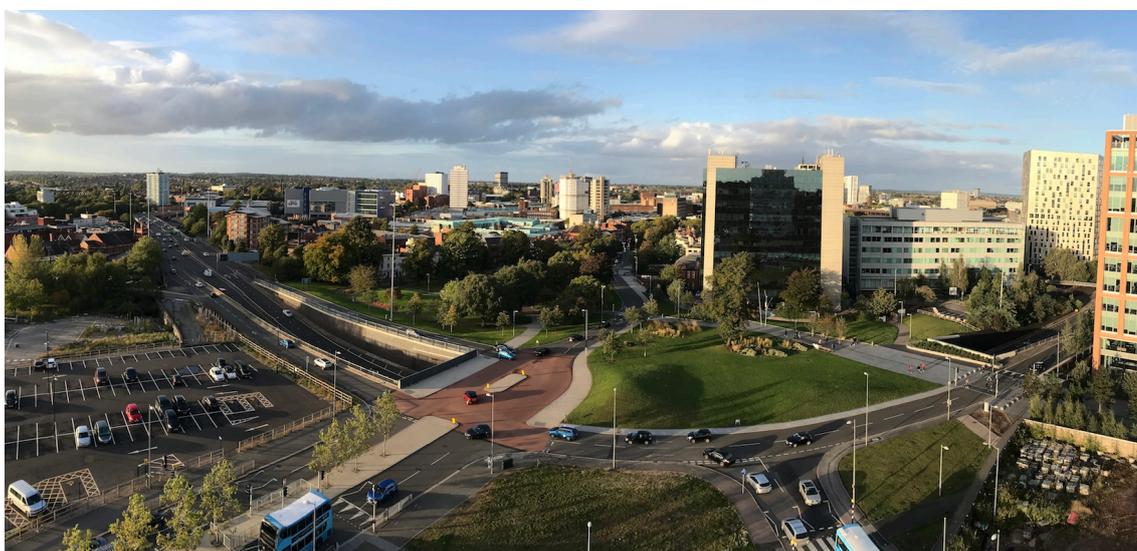
ambiance, leaving at last only the ticking of the wall clock to punctuate the now aurally deadened space. The city continued to glitter and move on the other side of the glass. Then, quietly triggered by one of the audience stewards, a close-up video of a disembodied and gender-less human mouth began speaking from the screen of a smart phone on a selfie-stick-tripod set in front of the audience. This surreal introductory narration set out several key notions: the audience were about to embark on a journey through the city; they were to remain silent throughout the entire experience; the city was described as a dangerous and heartless place, but also full of life and beauty; audience were to stay together as a group; they would be guided by ‘unreliable’ guides and would need to pay attention; the guides were described as a *skulk* (family of foxes) who were the family of the narrator; the narrator called itself ‘Kitsune’ which is Japanese for ‘fox’. In both Chinese and Japanese mythology, the Kitsune is a shapeshifting human/animal trickster that lives for hundreds of years (see Foster 2015: 186-191).<sup>13</sup>

*The opening scene was powerful, immersing us in the poetic, critical text juxtaposed by the visuals of film, it exposed the technology and mechanisms of the city, which were beautifully reflected in the open window behind the phone, where you could see cars navigating the streets below. In the background this sentiment was echoed on the reflective surfaces of the buildings around the ring road and station square. The horizon line was always felt throughout the walk, a feeling of anticipation, being on the precipice of time, architecture, thinking, feeling.*

(Appendix: 18)

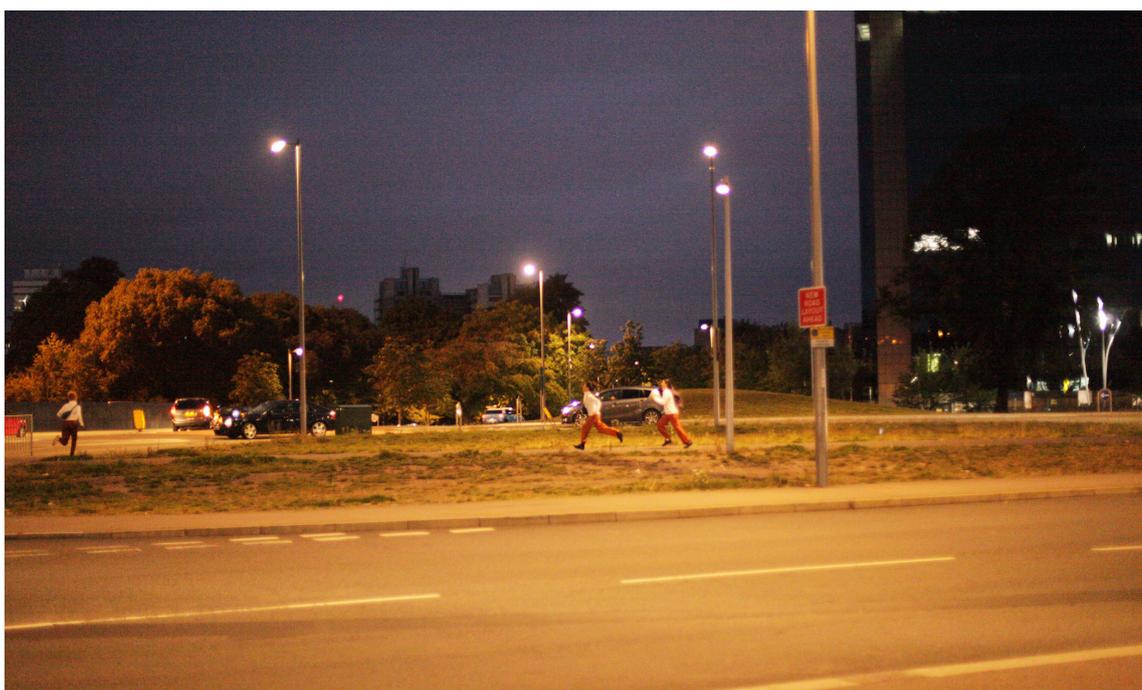
<sup>13</sup> The Kitsune figure also appears in contemporary visual culture and comics such as anime. Further information online at Mythology Wiki (no date) and Mythology.net (2017).

The mouth-video phone introduction was viewed against a backdrop of the city (seen from an omniscient ‘god’ position) with its lights, movements, and sounds. The video voice and image struck a tone of ‘weirdness’, signalling that this was not going to be an ordinary experience. It also playfully implied that the smart phone was a form of authority, and (like its namesake, Kitsune) a shapeshifting, hybrid creature (machine-animal-human). According to one audience member, “. . . *although the screen was small and the voice coming through the lips was like a voice of cyborg or data or a genderless computer it immediately gave a sense of being drawn into another space...a spatio temporal trajectory ‘other’ than that of our everyday lives*” (Appendix: 19). This use of a mobile phone as an authoritative ‘performer’ foreshadowed the role of audience smart phones during the rest of the piece: later, at two different points in time, the audience were asked to open a video link on their phone’s browser and watch it as they continued to walk. Highlighting the ubiquitous everyday use of smart phones by humans in cities such as Coventry, this distracting action intentionally worked *against* the piece’s overall attempt to tune audience members into a deeper noticing of their embodied, sensorial *Umwelt*. A melding of human and nonhuman, embodied and virtual, was made explicit. In the first instance of watching a mobile phone video, the audience did so while separated into two groups, each group starting the video at a different point in time and while walking along opposite sides of the ring road. This meant there was a possibility for each audience half to observe the other half ‘perform’ the mobile-phone-watching-as-they-walked. For some people, the interludes of watching video on their phones as they walked was an abrupt interruption to their overall enhanced sensory awareness. *“I felt irritated by the video on the phone section! I’m always annoyed when people do this, and try not to do it myself, and it made me very aware of how much it gets under my skin”* (Appendix: 13). Others were untroubled by the screen interludes and perceived the content



**Figure 20 (above):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming and urbanflows: redux* (Coventry, UK). Audience view of central Coventry from Floor 11, Eaton House. Photo: Carolyn Deby.

of the videos as meaningful in relation to the locations and energetic landscapes within which they were watched. Anecdotally, those audience members who were more accustomed in their everyday lives to using their mobiles while doing other things, seemed less irritated and more able to navigate the split focus of screen and embodied spaces. The video content on the phones was designed to be compelling, and to further the semiotic content of the piece. The videos, each about two minutes long, featured the following content: the first filmed from the perspective of an edgy, fox-height run along pathways in the city and forest; the second showing a slow scene of a building being demolished, briefly morphing into images of the Amazon forest on fire. Both of these videos were experienced by audiences in tandem with their own bipedal progress through Coventry, therefore blurring differences between real, virtual, remembered, human, nonhuman and past-present-futures. Having had these experiences of using their mobile phones, during the rest of the piece it was significant for audience to witness the ubiquity of distracted members of the public passing by with their attention bent to hand-held devices. For some audience members, a feeling of annoyance at having to use and pay attention to their phones while walking was seemingly increased by the fact that it functioned as a sharp interruption to the heightened state of noticing that they felt themselves to be in. By being difficult (for some people) to concentrate on video content whilst walking in the everyday city, the action created a rupture that “forced them to thought” (O’Sullivan 2006: 1). The two hand-held videos also offered alternate ‘mappings’ of Coventry’s urban space. By pretending to derive from an urban fox’s perspective and pattern of moving through the city, the first video brought the human observer inside a precarious,



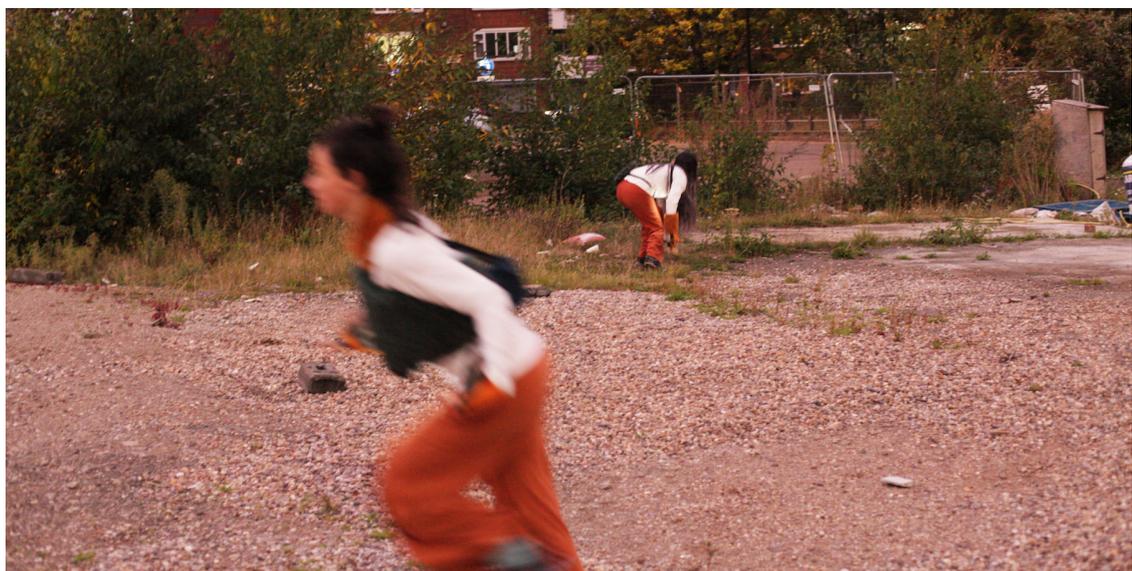
**Figure 21 (above):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry, UK). Performers: Katye Coe, Annalise Cowan, Lauren Jane Sheerman. Photo: Adele Mary Reed.

closer to the ground, nonhuman lived experience. The second video proposed particular processes of destruction (i.e. knocking down of a Coventry building; burning down of a portion of Amazon forest) as everyday urbanwild events, usually displaced from each other in time and location, but brought into direct relation through the virtual space of the screen. The latter video incorporated a brief text at the end “Every death is a complex event” (quoted from Bird Rose 2013: 20). This text implied that both video re-performances of destruction could be understood as ‘deaths’, and further that, like all deaths, they have complex implications. Deborah Bird Rose goes on to explain how her own understanding of the complexity of death was transformed by years of ethnographic work with aboriginals in Australia:

a death narrative binds the living and the dead into an ecological community (not just a historical community), working with multispecies crossovers as well as generational crossovers. When death is embedded within a system of multispecies kinship, animals that die are members of families; they have human kin as well as kin of their own species. In these Aboriginal families there are many deaths, not only because this is how life always ends, but because these people are hunters. Their own lives depend on the food that is the bodies of other animals, and every hunted animal is someone’s family. Death is extremely intimate, and all deaths matter.

(ibid: 20-21)

The handheld video showing death of a Coventry building in connection with death of one of Earth’s great forests proposes then that these forms of death might also have ‘families’ (i.e. are likely entangled with other still-living entities), and also that a forest dying in the Amazon might have relevance to life and death in a city like Coventry. It questions whether these



**Figure 22 (above):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry, UK). Performers: Lauren Jane Sheerman, Annalise Cowan. Photo: Adele Mary Reed.

deaths have meaning or whether they are perhaps meaningless, at the same time as it suggests that they are not isolated occurrences but are rather part of “every death”.

The piece’s opening instructions to remain silent and to pay attention, together with a warning about danger and unreliability, served to tune and heighten audience attention, making them more likely to notice events, details, and signs along the way. As they subsequently headed down to the ground floor and out the front of Eaton House, they arrived upon a scene already in progress: three performers walking in extreme slow motion, circling on the perimeter of a frequently disregarded patch of scrubland (a large traffic island), surrounded by speeding vehicles. The walking pattern shifted slowly through enmeshed circles of walking, jogging, or running described as ‘hypnotic’ by one audience member. The performed pattern, especially seen against the continuous pattern of rush-hour traffic, proposed an expanded sense of time and duration. Then, as two of the performers ran off, the third (Katie) gathered the audience on the scrubland edge to show and explain in detail that, despite being unnoticed by most passers-by, the site featured numerous edible or medicinal wild plants. This intimate moment for the audience, having descended from a panoramic and epic perspective on the city, to a detailed ground-level and overlooked quotidian one, set-up an imaginative and semiotic pattern that would recur during the rest of the piece: the conceptual (naming of edible/medicinal plants) was joined to the sensory



**Figure 23 (above):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry, UK). Performer: Katie Coe. Photo: Adele Mary Reed.

(scent/sounds/movements; visual patterning of sky/machines/plants/human bodies), in this case proposing the lived urbanwild as a place to notice self-willed and edible life.

From this scrubland, during an audience walking journey of almost two-hours, the 'unreliable' performers acted as fleeting guides and provocateurs, often glimpsed only briefly before they inevitably ran away. Their various actions sign-posted locations or ideas to be noticed by the audience, who were then frequently left behind. In the 'no-performance' gaps of the journey, audience were left to perceive the ongoing everyday flow of the city as part of the experience. These incidental intersections, events, and chance encounters were different every night, but because the piece responded flexibly to difference (through improvisation and other adjustments), such encounters were frequently perceived as meaningful by audience. The journey travelled past other urban wastelands, along and under the ring road, into IKEA, past the Coventry Market, through shopping malls and passageways in the city centre, back under the ring road, through a residential area and then an industrial estate, and finally along a disregarded section of the Sherbourne River, into an area of overgrown allotments and self-willed forest. The piece ended inside the candle lit Sherbourne Valley allotments with audience, performers, and crew gathering finally around a bonfire, to share drink and their reflections.

Throughout, the piece maintained a tension between allowing urbanwildness to be freely self-willed – and the need to bring the audience along in one group (rather than, for example, allowing the 'wilder' individuals to wander off completely on their own tangent). Thus, as mentioned previously, there remained a basic audience contract to stay together and to not talk to each other, which was established in the introductory scene. As far as possible the piece was designed to induce/lure/suggest rather than to herd or lead the audience. It was hoped that this might help them to retain a sense of agency and self-discovery within the work, and at the same time, honour the liveliness of an urbanwild experience.

The performers, dressed in street clothes but with bits of fur attached to them in odd configurations, wearing colours (white and reddish brown) reminiscent of foxes, their behaviour by turns nervous and watchful, playful and not-always-human, embodied an *idea* of urbanwildness made strange through reference to the mythic character of Kitsune. That myth, of creatures who are able to nebulously shift their shape between human and animal, suited a piece seeking to reveal a 'wild continuum' (Van Horne and Hausdoerffer 2017: 4) that could not be defined in the binary terms of being either wild or urban. In response to several encounters with real urban foxes during the making of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds*, becoming the company were inspired to incorporate urban foxes' fugitive

presence into the piece. Costume colour/materials, plus performers' physical behaviour or actions, acted as signs that could be read as those of a fox. For example: one performer (Lauren) was seen in IKEA gorging on blackberries – an action that left her face and hands stained with red juice – suggesting an animal gorging on flesh. This image was also glimpsed on the first smartphone video watched by the audience during their journey, before they reached IKEA. The inherent violence of the city, underlying business as usual, the need for living things to eat and be eaten, was brought into relation with the 'semiotically reduced' situation of a global corporate shopping facility. IKEA, as other similar businesses, offers a curated physical setting where human-designed cues urging consumption of commodities are central, while the richness of signs to be found in the external world have largely been eliminated (lacking, for example, birdsong, scents of soil/water/foilage, movements of weather, insects, decay, photosynthesis, and so on). Therefore, in IKEA, the incursion of self-willed performing bodies offered a contrast and poignant frisson to an otherwise highly artificial context.

Throughout the piece, performer bodies drew attention to ways that humans and nonhumans do not always obey the implied rules of the commodity-driven city. Not adhering to the highly separated urban zones for bodies and internal combustion engines, urban foxes are most likely to be killed by vehicles (The Fox Website 2019); this fact is even more significant in a city such as Coventry which is so dominated by motor vehicles. Bodies, then, were perceived as vulnerable. Performers darted across roadways, moved in nonhuman ways on the ground or on pathways (on all fours, prone, or immersed in foliage); they crouched *in* the river, moved in unison with trees, marked out the buried river (the River Sherbourne is submerged in tunnels under the city centre), and drew attention to encounters with nonhuman beings such as pigeons or rats. A repeated action of offering knowledge about foraging and edible wild plants or of pointing out trees that bear fruit or nuts added a cognitive layer to the audience knowing through other sensory accumulations.

The piece twice employed an 'up high' viewpoint perspective: initially during the introduction, with the view out the windows on Floor 11, Eaton House. For many humans in Coventry the cityscape is habitually apprehended at ground level or viewed through the windows of a vehicle. The breadth of horizon and/or views that encompass looking 'up' or 'down' are not as often perceived. Further, the perceptual experience of the 'up high' location engaged the senses differently to the usual perspective. Especially at the top of Eaton House, with the windows open, the audience could hear the city differently, smell and feel its air movements differently, and perceive differently their own body in relation to an

expanded sense of space (proprioception). In Coventry, pedestrian and cyclist points of view are frequently 'under' – as in the many places where they are forced to go *under* the ring road or its many branching interchanges. When not forced *under*, they are alternatively forced *along* narrow alleyways or boxed-in pathways and these hemmed in spaces produce a different, more restricted bodily habit. There are many empty plots of land in central Coventry which are inevitably severed from the surrounding cityscape (and potential intrusion by any wild or self-willed life) by tall, impermeable board fences. These fences served to underline the sense that humans and nonhumans are expected to adhere strictly to the narrow byways thus created. Therefore, the initial (unexpected) overview of the city (into which they were about to journey) gave the audience a shifted perspective (among other things, allowing views into the fenced empty lots) and potentially invited reflection beyond their everyday perceptions. Twenty minutes after leaving Eaton House they found themselves again looking out and down upon the cityscape, this time from the 6<sup>th</sup> floor IKEA restaurant. One audience member commented, *"I was charged with three occasions of different horizon-wide views of the city in one day and reminded that the city is delicate, dangerous, multi-farious and multi-spectacular"* (Appendix: 12). The feeling of privilege and status that such an up-high overview emphasised might have also served to deepen some people's later discomfort at becoming 'voyeurs' as they passed by the numerous homeless people along the route. This discomfort also came about because the piece invited the audience to perceive everything along the way as part of the 'performance'. Even though they might daily walk past those same homeless people and avert their eyes each time, on this occasion, they might have felt compelled to stay engaged with and conscious of them.

The audience journey incorporated the surprise of being led into IKEA by performer Jia-Yu where she offered an imaginative and surreal narrative of messy 'nature' which made some people uncomfortable (feeling embarrassment at what they perceived as the disruption for IKEA customers, or feeling aversion to the 'plastic' retail interior and its emphasis on consumption). For others, this section was a highlight. As the audience followed her past product displays, into the lift, up to the sixth floor, through to the restaurant with its ubiquitous plastic plant decorations, Jia-Yu continued a rapturous running monologue about the 'Great Abundance', commenting on the sound of a buzzard (in the lift's recorded voice announcement), pointing out herbs and vegetables (plastic products and decorative displays), a river (in the stream of ads on a video monitor), trees and flowers (displays of household furniture), and so on. As one person in the audience described:

*Jia-Yu's IKEA tour guide emerges as a witty narrative in the wrong time and place. In effect she is already in the allotment as she points at various herbs and plants and vegetables (not that a first-time audience would know this at that point. The penny drops later). The effect is to point out the inherent inauthenticity of the IKEA aesthetic.*

(Appendix: 21)

Another person commented: *"I thought that was really funny, but also quite scary. It was like she was the only survivor, or she's a member of a small band of survivors and they wander the remnants of our so-called civilisation, post-apocalypse"* (Appendix: 24). It is only much later in the piece, as the audience enter the allotments area, that they realise what the IKEA monologue had been referring to. One person noted: *"I think the part I enjoyed the most was when we were walking along the dark path and I realised that the description we had been told earlier was the same place"* (Appendix: 22). For some people, this delayed comprehension recalibrated the entire journey, forcing a retrospection of how the final destination might comment upon the whole sequence of sites and meanings encountered along the way. The arrival on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of IKEA also facilitated a view through windows overlooking the street below where two performers could be seen using torches to highlight a tall board fence enclosing an area of wild growth, hidden from passers-by at street level. Upon leaving IKEA, the audience were subsequently led directly past this same tall fence, its secret having been revealed to them.

Walking then beside the tall fence, past a rank of waiting taxis (often the same drivers, nightly entertained by this repetition: two performers with torches directing a semaphore of lights on the fence, then running away; a crowd of audience emerging from IKEA to follow the performers), the audience entered into a back alley behind the city market, and through a concrete passageway frequently inhabited by homeless humans. The contrast here to IKEA's managed environment was stark, featuring human excrement, discarded needles, empty cider bottles, discarded vegetables, feral pigeons, and parked cars. A concrete staircase led up and past all this (improbably) to a beauty salon. Someone had tried to 'beautify' the miserable staircase by winding strings of plastic ivy around the bannisters on both sides (the IKEA aesthetic had spilled out into the surrounding cityscape). A performer (Annalise) confronted the audience near the base of this staircase, stopping them silently with her penetrating stare. From stillness, she began to perform a twining motion inspired by the plastic vines on the banister. This 'twining' motion became a motion-thread that 'grew', recurring along the route and offered a sustained counterpoint to solid concrete walls, the

bleak, empty mall, the chatter and curiosity of onlookers seated in front of a Starbucks café, and the relentless onward passage of the audience. It suggested an alternate sort of pathway and an organic becoming that was somehow remarkable for being out of place in the city centre. The naïve longing or imaginative intervention of the person who originally chose to decorate the stairway bannisters with plastic vines was somehow transmuted into a possibility of aliveness that had broken away and organically spread into the cityscape.

The rhythmic pacing of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* played intentionally with a full palette of the everyday city's "psychogeographical contours . . . constant currents, fixed points and vortexes" as articulated by Debord (1956). Being asked to stay together as a group meant that individual audience members might feel their own bodily rhythms or tendencies to be in conflict with the group's pace, as happened when the whole group performed a slow walk through the Lower Precinct mall (described earlier). Two audience stewards walked with the group, asserting a subtle influence on how, when, and where the audience moved. However, they too were somewhat unreliable, at times becoming unexpected performers. From the decorated stairway, the audience followed in the direction to which Annalise had run and immediately came upon a circular paved area surrounded by closed shops, benches, and pedestrian walkways. There, a lone male on a skateboard was wheeling incredibly slowly around the paved perimeter; his pace so slow as to test the limits of his momentum to continue moving. He radiated serenity and signalled a pause in the city's relentless moving on. No one had noticed when one audience steward (Warren) had slipped away earlier, just outside IKEA. Now he had reappeared here on a skateboard, defying the usual skateboarding habit of speed and tricks; instead offering an alternate vision of a slow human on wheels, in the city of cars. His hypnotic circling ended with a piercing glance at the audience before he pushed off, accelerating out, around, and away, disappearing in a burst of speed between shops and past astonished bystanders. The audience were left in the relative emptiness of the after-hours shopping district to resume their own walking rhythm, following in the same direction.

Throughout its duration, the piece rolled and paused, sped up and came to stillnesses; its rhythmic pace of human walking overlaid by the machine speed of passing vehicles, the interjection of occasional birdsong or fluttering/strutting pigeons, the rushing sound of a fountain, the violent incursion of large machinery (a truck backing slowly across the audience path, carrying a huge pipe), the presence of homeless humans in their usual locations, amused to watch the 'light ladies' (as they called the performers), crowds of regulars sitting outside a café animatedly discussing the 'zombie' audience (speaking in Cypriot).

The circumstances of the route evolved nightly, throughout both the devising and performing periods: large trees had been suddenly cut down from one day to the next; excavations and temporary fencing appeared on pathways; an Extinction Rebellion demonstration temporarily filled the city's central square; teenagers followed the audience, contributing sarcastic comments or making noises in an attempt to join in; a man on his mobile phone gave a running commentary to his friend as the piece temporarily swarmed around him and then moved on; locations were empty or sometimes crowded; cyclists or skateboarders intermittently zoomed past; urban foxes rustled just out of sight in the bushes; it rained, it was dry. During the otherwise continuous effort of the audience's journey the pauses, silences, and changes of pace gave individuals a chance to notice their own bodily pulses, their fatigue, their lack of certainty about where this was all leading.

Through all of this, the piece evoked particular *affective atmospheres* by encouraging a sensitised sensory response to the city. Hence, the audience might find themselves responding to the *meaning* implied by their noticing of these *sensory signs*. For example, several noted a distinct change in the air, a perception of being near water, as they passed from the centre to an industrial estate and then to the allotments area:

*Our walk continued and we gradually moved out of the city perimeter and into an area towards allotment plots. The change of temperature was significant, it became cold suddenly and I immediately realised that we were near water*

*Running water*

*A river hidden behind warehouses and houses along a large portion of land with allotment plots*

*There were no lights so you could see the starry sky and my ears, nose, taste buds and skin were suddenly sharper than ever...*

*I could smell and almost taste the mud, the earth and plants, the grass, the moss and the humidity of the water*

(Appendix: 19)

The perception of humidity and damp ground was a sign (in Peircian terms), which indicated the presence of a river (the object) and produced a cognitive and emotional response (the interpretant) in the audience member. This sign was apprehended in concert with many other sensory perceptions such as the fading (increasingly distant) sound of traffic, the group's movement towards a darker (not artificially lit) area of the city. This point in the

piece also featured a performance intervention which added to the emotional, atmospheric affect: as the audience turned off a busy road and entered the empty industrial estate, from the back of the group one of the audience stewards (Rakel) began singing an a cappella song about a wayfarer. The words were in Spanish and so not intelligible to everyone; nevertheless, the song (beginning unannounced) contributed a mournful tone to the transition from busy roads, paved surfaces, and bright electric lights into an area without traffic, featuring the scent and sense of the river, abundant foliage, and darkness. Given the gradual fade of the traffic sounds as the audience walked away from the busy road, their perception of the song emerged gradually, rather than as an abrupt interjection. Energetically, this point in *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* was also one where the long journey had begun to wear people down, where not knowing their destination had begun to produce anxiety:

*My feelings and responses to the work changed as we moved along the route. As the walk progressed, my body became tired and cold, which made me feel less vigilant. I let the experience wash over me in a hypnotic trance rather than being alert. This transition was intriguing, especially when punctuated by moments of transgressing borders, or occupying spaces which are normally prohibited. The glee at being subversive and being part of a group taking up space and activating them in ways that do not normally host people in such a way. At times, this wasn't always gleeful. I did experience some feelings of intimidation and uncertainty, and some confusion about where I was headed.*

(Appendix: 18)

The piece seemed to produce other visceral, bodily reactions: *"I felt a sense of starkness in the city and felt how it affected my body – I felt a bit two dimensional at times"* (Appendix: 3). Some read significance into the transition from sunset into darkness (experienced during the 2.5 hours of the piece). That sort of noticing is in contrast to the usual human disconnection from natural cycles of light/dark in cities when day and night are artificially produced by electric lights.

*The journey from intense light into darkness produced an interesting spatial effect. Light emphasised distance and expanse and brought the clamour of the city with all its busy activity and hotch-potch of visual and aural sensation; darkness brought intimacy and intensity, that of nature and the urbanwild; in a sense there was a reversal of cliché in that journey; normally we think of the claustrophobia of the city being given relief by escaping to the open space of the country. In the bright city was*

*a sense of expanse and in the dark, it became more intimate; the most intense point was at the allotment (the sense that I had of having no idea where I am).*

(Appendix: 21)

Overall, the practice, through relatively simple means, facilitated audience awareness of their own *Umwelt* – an effect dependent more on *focusing* the audience towards noticing *everything*, rather than merely paying attention to elements of devised performance or other artistic interventions during the work. Rather than attempting to be a constant presence, the performers' role was more that of sporadic provocation or signposting. The repeated action of the performers, enacting fragmentary actions and then running away, fulfilled the warning from the mouth video that they would be unreliable:

*the dancers were always within our proximity, always there before we were  
signposting  
signifying  
lighting and highlighting  
and then disappearing in the shadows  
their performance as inbetweeners was very masterfully conducted*

(Appendix: 19)

The dance-trained performers were highly attuned to the energetic suggestions in the site(s) and thus had the potential to re-perform, repeat, and reposition these energetic patterns. That amplification or repetition was a form of enacted semiosis that the audience might intuitively 'read' on a subconscious or pre-verbal level. Similarly, the running and disappearing of the performers had a sensory, kinaesthetic effect: several people said they also wanted to run *with* them. Other sorts of physicality within the performance inspired kinaesthetic desire, such as those who wanted to lie down on the ground with the performer who did so. But the running was perhaps the most tantalising motion of all as it suggested *freedom*. Cities (especially Coventry) are designed to encourage modes of upright and/or bounded travel for bodies (humans and nonhumans). Therefore, by circumventing these implied rules, the performers invited a different sort of physicality and one which many found themselves longing for: *"It was really hard not to run with them. We were forced to slow*

*down...but the pace that they moved through the city was really beautiful and the shape they created in the city and the strength of their stillness . . . something about their determination to move forwards” (Appendix: 22).*

The running created a kinaesthetic response in audience members, but so too did what many perceived to be the performers’ ‘animal-like’ physicality, an ‘other’ way of becoming. People recognised it on a visceral level and that perception in turn altered their own manner of noticing: *“they felt like animal-like spirits drawing us into looking around and noticing things, which I accepted quickly and became fascinated with . . . I felt drawn into looking around more, the way they seemed to be, and I felt an increasingly childlike sense of wonder. I wanted to run around too” (Appendix: 11).* There was, however, also frustration at the constant disappearances, though for some this frustration was also productive:

*I was drawn in by the movement and energy of the performers, they were a motivational force, even though the encounters were fleeting. I desired, at times, to stay in the performers’ presence longer, at times fleeting was too fleeting, as soon as we arrived to where they were positioned, they were already gone and there wasn’t necessarily time to pause and draw breath. It would have been nice to hear more of what they had to say . . . I had to strain to listen. I like this action though – to strain, to strive, to really consider what is being said and why. It was abstract and conceptual, but earthly and rooted in a deep and rich understanding of the space.*

(Appendix: 18)

The ongoing, quotidian world performed as much as any artistic actions or interventions that were offered by sirencrossing’s choreography. There was no attempt to contain or separate or control the incidental events encountered. For audiences, the context and its players became integral to the heightened experience, though some individuals felt uncomfortable or exposed by this. Movements, comments, or exclamations from passers-by became woven into the overall audience experience.

*I found myself tuning-in to the ‘unknowing audiences’ and their comments. . . . it was interesting to hear what people thought about this unobvious show, and how they passed on to their friends/phone calls what they were experiencing; whether it was jovial, rude or intrigue in their voices, it was fun to witness . . . And I suppose I spent more time watching how the surroundings were affected by the action, than the action.*

(Appendix: 10)



**Figure 24 (above):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry, UK). Chalk markings on pavement by performers Katy Coe, Lauren Jane Sheerman. Photo: Adele Mary Reed.

There was a sense that the piece was travelling through a bigger narrative, that the whole thing resonated with a complicated series of meaningful intersections. Individuals found their own synthesis and very personal meanings in response: *“I admit to enjoying the bemused and amused reactions of bystanders – including the man in IKEA suggesting that shoppers should follow the performer for free cannabis, and the incidental things we weren’t necessarily supposed to notice . . . but also the embrace on the balconies of the flats along Spon End”* (Appendix: 4).

In attempting to encompass both human and nonhuman urbanwild flows, the piece acknowledged hidden, as well as more obvious manifestations of movement, survival, liveliness. Chalked messages added to the pavement by performers pointed out the buried River Sherbourne under concrete in the city centre, and marked a buried forest next to the place where a homeless man had apparently been forced to abandon his spot by overzealous council cleaners:

*I think the most poignant and powerful part for me was the writing on the paving pointing out the river below . . . right next to the [chalked] pleas for help from homeless people, which I see a lot. This spoke volumes to me, with this powerful source of life flowing below, completely disconnected from us by concrete and steel*

*of our own making. Like we have cut off our own life source and left our kind to struggle and decay. I'm left more believing that perhaps the start to changing this overwhelming problem is to explore, understand, feel and share all this uneasy balance of disconnection and connection.*

(Appendix: 11)

Thus, a feeling of urgency seemed to affect both audience and performers, producing a layer of political implication to the everydayness of the sites. Perhaps following on from this, the work was described by some people as apocalyptic or scary; a perception articulated here:

*[W]hen we walked through the shopping centre (whose interior was dead and deserted as shut for the night) with the performers running around, cyclists whizzing past – everything was empty and felt desolate but there was this underlying sense of foreboding and angst, potential panic – like the people in these spaces were on the edge of something. As part of the travelling group though, it felt like we were on the outside, striving to go beyond, witness and move on – to escape. The sense of escape and the way the ending was framed – in as much as we were gently reassured that we had arrived at a safe space – made it feel like the city centre was a post-apocalyptic world where society was vying for survival. We in contrast were an intrepid group, lucky, privileged to escape and find solace away from the desperation of the city.*

(Appendix: 18)

The altered mood of the audience seemed also to impact on the nonhumans encountered along the way. This was especially notable as the silent group entered the green area by the river, leading to the allotments: “we could hear rustles and flutters, all kinds of stuff, it was really alive...with little animals and birds and bats. And I felt because we bring people in in that silent alert state, the animals feel it. They come because they know that we're sort of with them” (Appendix: 24). This observation points to the affective cascades moving across both human and nonhuman *Umwelten*. Creating ‘affective atmospheres’ is made possible through listening and silence as much as by adding anything; what can be perceived if we dial down the volume? Sensory noticing such as the strong scent of lavender outside IKEA or the calls of birds or a bat flying suddenly overhead or the sound of the skateboard circling slowly in the mall; all of these and more contributed to the sensory accumulation. Audience members found themselves experiencing the city and the performance as one interwoven series of impressions, their sensory noticing coloured by the cognitive, energetic, symbolic, ordinary, mythological or surreal elements brought into, or happening to coincide with, the

**Figure 25 (below):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry, UK). Audience view looking down from 6<sup>th</sup> floor IKEA restaurant. Performers: Katy Coe, Lauren Jane Sheerman. Photo: Adele Mary Reed.



mix. The piece strove to collaborate minute to minute with this semiotic and energetic happenstance of the city, adding or nudging specific fragments and signs so as to influence, to some degree, the overall affective atmospheres or porous immersions in urbanwild relations. As Wheeler observes:

it turns out that we are not one but many. . . We humans not only construct a world but are, ourselves, an often intimate part of the makings, the natural constructions, of other kinds of equally semiotic life in this ecology of meanings. Our various, always subjectively experienced (but not subjectively made), *umwelten* overlap, not with shared points of view but with shared biosemiotic systems. This shared and finally semiotically interdependent ecology of meanings is what we mean when we talk about reality.

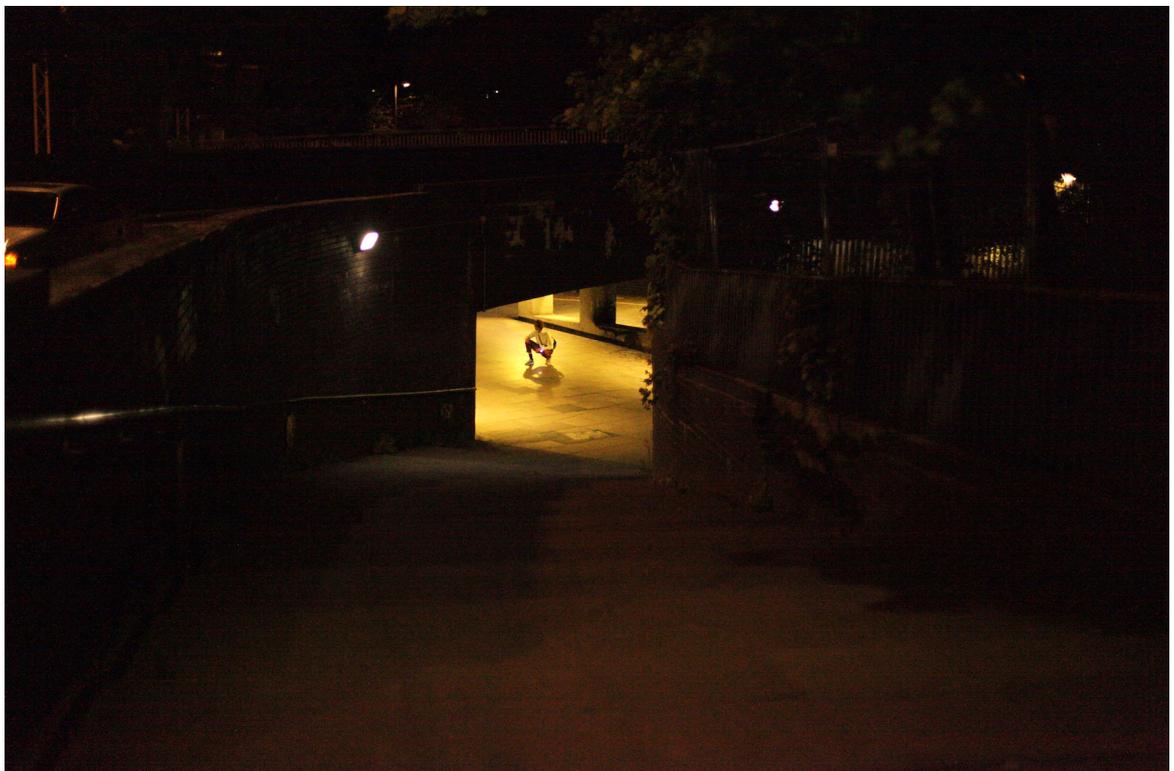
(2016: 174-175)

### **In summary – *urbanflows***

*urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* incorporated several key features which were crucial to creating an enlivened sensory experience of audience members' entanglement in the sign processes of the city's urbanwild, and thus an expanded awareness of their own *Umwelten*. As in previous sirencrossing pieces, there was a contract of audience silence and therefore no discussion during the piece, encouraging a mode of sensory noticing

rather than one of cognitive verbalising. This enabled audiences to short circuit any natural tendency to pre-subtract from the experience or default to habitual understandings and assumptions. It also made more likely that they would perceive the entire experience as meaningful (not merely the fragments of 'performance'); thus, the incidental and the intentional became merged into the same choreography. Similarly, the invitation to contemplate an unusual view of the city as an entry point for the imagination (in this case, up high and panoramic, from the top of tall buildings), introduced another sort of shift out of everyday ways of being. This change in perspective – engaging sight, hearing, scent, skin feeling, and proprioception – encouraged poetic reflection and the productive possibility to perceive metaphor, as the perceptual difference or rupture layered new interpretations onto what might have previously been mundane or unnoticed.

The piece incorporated an introductory scene to initially draw audience into a different imaginative space; thereby setting the tone, tuning them into a state of enhanced receptivity, and preparing them for an altered experience of the ordinary (as in a stage performance where the darkened theatre with its lights, music, and special effects serve to prepare and focus the audience). Given that the piece was to unfold in loud/distracting everyday space, facilitating a shifted, more attentive state of awareness was essential to making the piece

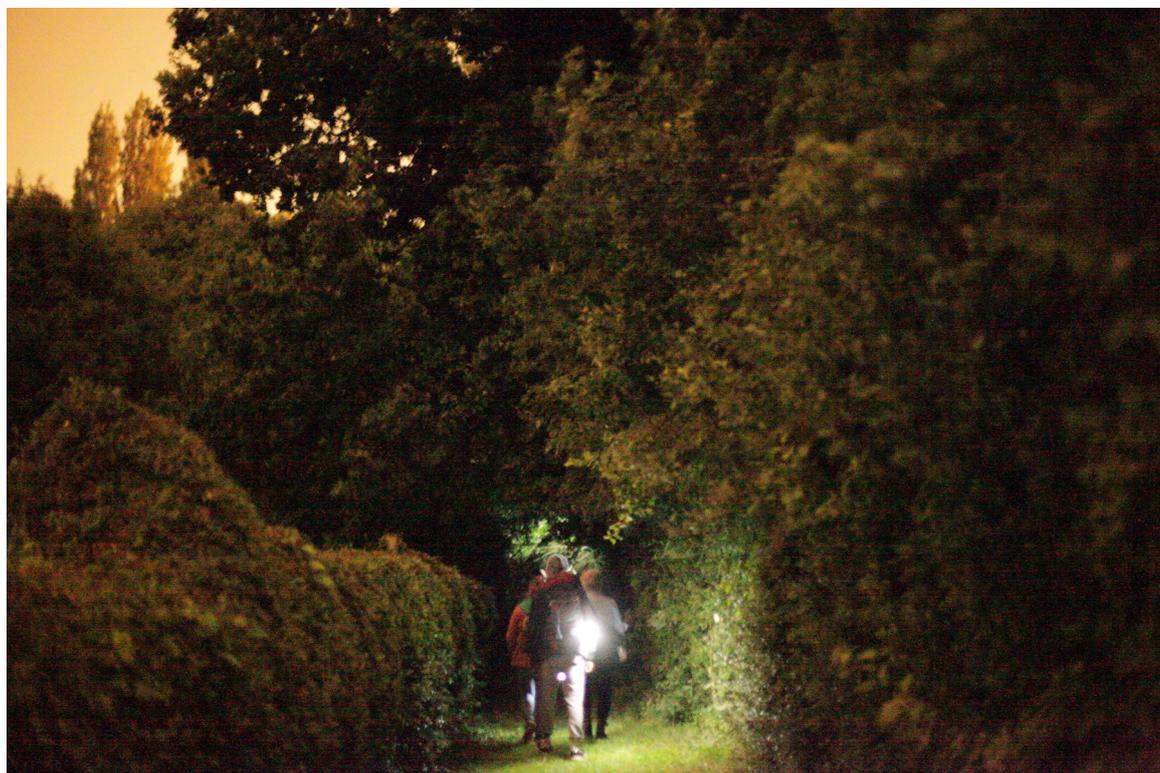


**Figure 27 (above):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry, UK). Performer: Katy Coe. Photo: Adele Mary Reed.

'work'. The introduction also served to make clear what the audience contract was; a necessary aspect, given that the familiar agreement in a more conventional performance setting (to stay seated and focussed on the stage; to be quiet) was not activated. The demands on the audience during *urbanflows* were more inter-active, requiring an ongoing and non-passive engagement.

Again, as in other sirencrossing pieces, the audience were asked to stay together as a group, with the suggestion that they form a temporary family or community (likely including strangers); their silence meant that this group 'got to know each other' in non-verbal ways, through an embodied co-experience. This produced intimacy but one that remained affective and tacit; built-up through a shared sensory layering, including through shared kinaesthetic impressions. The feeling of travelling through the city in a group was also, for most people, an unfamiliar one and served to heighten questions about who and what were the performers. The audience were less sure of their role as voyeurs, unable to settle into a passive mode of receiving, more obviously part of a disruptive collective energy that was far from invisible as it journeyed through the currents and tendencies of the city.

In order to highlight the inherent urbanwildness of the city, the piece embraced the elemental and organic, facilitating sensory noticing of weather, fire, plants, the river, and



**Figure 26 (above):** *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (Coventry, UK). Audience walking towards Sherbourne Valley Allotments. Photo: Adele Mary Reed.

other creatures; all perceived as interwoven with humans and the 'hard stuff' of the built environment. These were proposed not as extraordinary but rather as ordinary and possibly overlooked. Noticing in this way was made possible through kinaesthetic suggestions: to 'be slow', to move differently, to try on different bodily perspectives. The choice and sequence of sites, the physical proposals from performers, the pace and rhythm of audience travel influenced by hosts and performers – all of these contributed to encouraging an altered embodied experience, entangled in the hybrid natures of the city. At certain points poetic or informational texts were layered into the ongoing situation; these received in combination with specific sensory/kinaesthetic moments so that the transfer between 'knowing in the body' to 'knowing in the mind', as Bateson described it, might be nudged towards particular interpretations (2000: 143). The use of text/language was balanced delicately in relation to the non-verbal, with an awareness that it would be easy to disturb the heightened tacit way of knowing that silent, pre-conceptual sensory perception can achieve. Kinaesthetically, the performers' human-animal movements, their grounded four-leggedness and moments of prone lying on the earth or pavement were actions that broke the usual human social contract to remain upright and away from the ground while in the public realm. As evidenced by audience comments, these actions created a longing to join in or behave similarly.

The piece proposed a shifted perception of everyday sites and situations by taking unusual routes through the ordinary, connecting the unexpected and the mundane, shifting habit through rupture and difference, and drawing attention to noticing the in-between. It employed strategies of amplification and focus which repeatedly moved audience perception between scales, ranging from micro to macro, from detail and intimacy to panoramic overview, from interior to exterior, from light into darkness; between natural light and artificial light, between extremes of noise and silence, and so on. The peaks, changes, and troughs of these shifts overlaid the experience with a dynamic sensory patterning that simultaneously expanded audiences' perceptual range and exercised their facility to move back and forth across this breadth of perception.

Similarly to other sirencrossing work, *urbanflows* maintained porosity to the everyday life of the sites: skateboarders, shoppers, homeless people, other passers-by, vehicular traffic, rain and changeable weather, other life (such as birds, rats, bats, and foxes) – all of these having an effect on and/or producing reactions to and in the performance. The performers and audience maintained an ongoing responsiveness to the live situation which led to awareness of semiotic entanglements, suggestions, affordances, and possibilities that the field proposed. To achieve this, in advance of the performances, the sirencrossing team

undertook a research and devising period of psychogeographic immersion, employing a 'drift' process to become saturated by and familiar with the usual flows and energies in play; thus, through attending to the researchers' own semiotic relations and responses, the process suggested the most meaningful routes and sites for audience experience. The devising and rehearsal processes also 'rehearsed' the collaborators' own state of responsiveness and their ability to stay 'in relation', which in turn indicated to audiences how they also might act or react.

Mobile screen interludes during *urbanflows* complicated the audience's embodied immersion in everyday life, producing a split focus and/or distraction which also altered their body-world relations. It became clear that much more research is needed to truly interrogate what is happening here and its significance, especially in relation to notions of the Anthropocene, the technosphere, and the posthuman. If we consider the human as just one player within multispecies relations then it remains to be understood just what (or if) severing or split is enacted when humans are imaginatively and virtually removed from their material experience of the body-world. Language, science knowledges, fictions, dreaming, and the vast realm of the unconscious are other well-established options employed by humans in order to move beyond their own sensory/embodied knowing. Therefore, mobile screen worlds may produce only a difference of degree, rather than a radical split.

Importantly, the audience experience inhabits a real place, as opposed to being staged within a representation of place. Articulation of the *urbanflows* practice-based research shows its human audiences to be continuous with the urbanwild and its hybrid natures, whether looped through screen or embodied spaces, open to a myriad of sensory impressions that define their enlivened *Umwelt*. The ongoing processes of biosemiosis form the background activity to this lived process of sensory noticing and interpretation. Global chaos as framed by the Anthropocene is understood as continuous with human/nonhuman/multispecies entanglements which are in turn experienced within the local and singular. Multiple ways of knowing are pulsed and accumulated over time and with rhythm; these, in turn, adding to the shimmer of affective atmospheres which characterise a knowing by moving, into and beyond the everyday.



## **PaR DOCUMENTATION AND VIDEO MATERIAL**

The reader is now encouraged to view video material from *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* on the following series of five Vimeo links.

### TRAILER

This trailer (29 seconds long) was used in publicity for *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* in Coventry, England (2019). As did the rest of the project publicity, it was intended to begin the piece in the minds of audience, to initiate a process of tuning them into the concerns of the work, prior to their experiencing it directly.

video camera/edit – Carolyn Deby

<https://vimeo.com/360761854>

### DOCUMENTATION

*urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming*

18, 19, 20, and 24, 25 September 2019 (test audience runs, 16-17 September)

A short impression (06:19) of a 2.5-hour audience experience which ran for seven nights in Coventry, England during September 2019. *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* took small audience groups through the city, with elements of performance, installation, sound, video and words scattered through the everyday spaces passed through.

Commissioned by *Sensing the City*, with a grant awarded to the University of Warwick from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Performances funded by Arts Council England. Additional support from Coventry Artspace Partnerships, The Pod/Food Union, IKEA, Culture Coventry, and Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art.

project director – Carolyn Deby

performer-collaborators – Jia-Yu Corti, Katie Coe, Lauren Jane Sheerman, Annalise Cowan

audience host-performers – Rakel Ezpeleta, Warren Murray

stage manager – Katy Stone

assistant stage manager – Kirstie Lewis

The Pod/Food Union – Greg Muldoon, Marc Hammond, Tom Simpkins, Christine Eade

mobile phone videos – Carolyn Deby

video documentation edit – Arthur le Fol

video documentation camera – Daniel Brohawn

still photo documentation – Adele Mary Reed

lead investigator, *Sensing the City* – Professor Nicolas Whybrow, University of Warwick

<https://vimeo.com/375500167>

VIDEO MATERIAL SHOWN DURING THE PIECE

***Urbflow\_MOUTH (2019)***

During the introduction to performances of *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* this video played on a mobile phone that was mounted on a selfie-stick-tripod in front of the windows of a room on Floor 11, Eaton House, with audience seated facing the mobile phone and the windows.

video camera/edit and text – Carolyn Deby

performer – Jia-Yu Corti

<https://vimeo.com/359989222> (password: **fox**)

***#1 Kitsune (2019)***

This was the first video that audiences for *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* viewed on their smart phones as they walked during the piece.

video camera/edit – Carolyn Deby

<https://vimeo.com/359529966> (password: **fox**)

***#2 Kitsune (2019)***

This was the second video that audiences for *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* viewed on their smart phones as they walked during the piece.

video camera/edit – Carolyn Deby

<https://vimeo.com/359761596> (password: **fox**)

## Sympoiesis: a Conclusion

The background to the final writing and revising of this thesis in the spring and summer of 2020 has been (tragically and ironically) the unfolding global crisis of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic, an invisible nonhuman interloper which has penetrated borders, walls, bodies, and cells: with deadly effect. World-wide, business as usual has come to a halt, although populist leaders are determined to ignore science in their rush to return to the status quo. The permeability of bodies, the interconnecting global circulations made possible by human technologies but also inherent in the nature of organic life, have all been made plain. And suddenly, many people find themselves in a live global experiment, where both work and social lives have been transferred into the online space. That is at least true for those lucky enough to still have (certain kinds of) jobs and/or access to screens. As an artist-researcher who has been interested in the permeability of bodies, global flows acting at local and bodily scales, and the split between screen and embodied worlds in everyday life, the experiment is suddenly everywhere. I have already been commissioned to develop several pieces of artistic work for Zoom or similar contexts. At the same time, lockdown has meant that some people (lucky to have private gardens or access to outdoor space) are now noticing more about their own relations to the urbanwild. Meanwhile, recent headlines announce record-breaking global warming, tornadoes, plagues of locusts, ocean species' population collapse, mass human deaths from pandemic, continuing extraction-destruction by fossil fuel industries, the wildfire season beginning in the northern hemisphere, and so on. Thus, the Anthropocene plays out its Great Acceleration of all measures of human impact on planetary systems (Steffen et al 2015). It seems urgent to DO SOMETHING. Are we witnessing the collapse of civilisation? What is most relevant and urgent to tackle next and how? Will the COVID-19 crisis provide an opportunity to make systemic changes which could address these cascading crises?

This research project most certainly won't save the world, but it is at least asking questions that are relevant to the current moment. How can humans notice and deepen their relations with the rest of the planet? Can art and performance practices create relevant new insight? How have the hybrid realities of the technosphere, including the ever-increasing domination of screen-life, affected human relations with other earth beings and systems? Recent scholarship across several fields including philosophy, anthropology, urban studies,

multispecies studies, geography, biology, indigenous studies, sociology, Earth systems science, and more is pointing from these various disciplinary perspectives towards an understanding that all life and earth systems are intimately and continuously engaged in processes of entanglement. The binary of Nature and Culture has been refuted, complicated or reconsidered as ‘naturecultures’, the ‘biosocial’, ‘hybrid geographies’, the ‘pluriverse’, ‘ecosophy’ (Ingold and Palsson 2013, Haraway 2003, Whatmore 2002, de la Cadena and Blaser 2018, Guattari 2000). The entanglement of “culture, nature, environment and mind” is implicit in the insights from biosemiotics where human culture is shown to be only one manifestation of the sign processes inherent to all of life (Wheeler 2016: 4). These understandings recast the everyday for every organism (including humans) as a rich life world or *Umwelt* that is always in flow with multiple other worlds. Entanglement isn’t just what happens to string in your junk drawer; in this thesis it refers to dynamic processes of co-becoming, of sensory readings of meaning in the world, of sympoiesis (in Haraway’s terms). But theoretical knowledge will not do the necessary work on its own. Neither will bombarding humans with dire facts, headlines, and predictions as described earlier. These ways of knowing need to resonate along with the full symphony of embodied sensing, affective shimmer, and tacit understandings that are available for bodyminds to access. Combining experiential ways of knowing, via practice as research, with philosophical insights, this research project has shown that multimodal audience experience provides an approach towards greater noticing and valuing of relations within the everyday urbanwild for human audiences. Such audience experiences might be devised and facilitated by ‘expert bodies’ (artist-performers) whose training gives them a particular sensitivity to the flows of the urbanwild. However, this practice-led research shows the potential for audience experience to tune audience members in order to heighten their embodied, sensorial, imaginative, and cognitive capacities. Going forward, this particular research conversation between practice and theory, text and embodied experience, knowing and *knowing*, will continue to open out, to encounter and perform, to notice and collaborate with more-than-human worlds. By attending to the in-between this approach calls to mind the way that improvisational jazz plays across a full range of affective possibility. Understanding the human audience member as being in flow with the devised experience has potential implications for other, perhaps more traditional performance settings where the event could nevertheless be conceived as a co-produced improvisation between all of the co-present bodies/systems/site(s). Whether in a concert hall, a studio, or a forest, such an approach serves to decentre anthropos, therefore allowing all sorts of relations to rise to significance. In an interview, Ugandan poet Petero Kalulé also draws on the example of music to describe a “poetics or erotics of relation”:

I feel that the human as a frame “of being” is not only violent (for the idea human is always predicated on whiteness, sovereignty, owning, consuming, extracting etc.) but also delimiting. My critiques of Self-presencing are an attempt to go beyond man/the human in a way that may for example consider relatedness and other ecologies and cosmologies beyond after and beyond the paleonymic category of the human.

This is why I again turn to music, to ghosts, to polyrhythms, to my own African ancestral memories. I feel that they allow for what I may call a non-categorical poetics or erotics of relation. By this I mean that a kind of relation that goes beyond condition and hierarchy i.e. one that is only perhaps concerned with play, sustenance, care, reciprocity, and relation. These poetics/erotics work from an entirely different place and we cannot entirely define, grasp, categorise, or delimit them. They are mutually improvised and choreographed, not before the moment but always in the moment.

(in Rivera Maya 2020)

This then is the territory within which site-based audience experience can operate: traversing the unreliability of our human experience of the everyday; inviting audiences to notice potential meaning and disruption while moving through the disregarded currents and voids of urban space; deconstructing accepted patterns of societal interaction; reading and responding to the more-than-human patternings of the world; highlighting the insignificant, the immaterial, the unruly, and the poetic.





## *Appendix: Comments from urbanflows audiences*

Transcript of audience comments received by email or recorded during audience discussions or interviews about *urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming* (2019). Due to technical problems, most of the post-performance talks with audience and cast/crew around a bonfire were not recorded. For those transcribed here, only the cast/crew have been named (with their permission). Comments quoted in the text of Chapter 2 are identified with an in-text citation referring to the respondent numbers shown below.

### **1. N**

Here are a few further thoughts with reference to your questions:

**Did it affect your perception of the city?**

**What did you notice?**

**What did you feel?**

**Has anything in particular stayed with you?**

I was born in this city. The fox led walk certainly has left a mark on my imagination of the city, layering my life-long experiences. The tracks we crossed have also heightened my sense of the material matter and infrastructure of the city, especially the city crossings with the car. The walk also opens other more hidden parts of the city, especially when walking to the allotment, where we met the river and the Langer House. I really liked the way the walk started with the view from above (Lefebvre) and then we went down to follow very different trails. I also liked the way the ecology was referenced through historic medical herbs and the witch hunts. The harsh comments of the public audience reminded me of the class divides in the City of Culture to come. . . . I was not too sure about walking through IKEA, however over time this has played on my mind as a good imaginative intervention.

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I really did enjoy the walk Carolyn, those figures (foxes) feature often in my everyday references to the city. I have been mentioning the walk to colleagues and students, esp the start of it, from the skyline to the fora and the witches down on the ground. I am writing a book . . . largely from Coventry. I will certainly reference how the walk you took us through recomposed the city.

## 2. I

I very much enjoyed the performance, for me the video clips, only the first resonated with me, the link between dancer and fox. The second I felt was a distraction. The whispering in Spon Street was mysterious but I had no idea of the oak tree, were they the trees that each dancer was under, do I respond or say nothing to these whispered conversations?

### **Did it affect your perception of the city?**

I rely on driving to places as I fear for my safety in Coventry, I enjoyed the group walks especially at night. It made me appreciate a freedom I have never felt before.

### **What did you notice?**

it surprised me of the secret pockets of rural landscape even in small scraps is somewhere. It made me interested in the plants of my childhood, playing with dandelions and brushed by nettles. It made me wonder if I should pick them and make herbal teas. It made me want to share the knowledge imparted.

### **What did you feel?**

I felt out of place, the silent walk seemed to bring animosity to others in crowded places, such as Ikea and walking down streets. I did wonder about the Spon street residents as I felt as though I was trespassing. In one way this added to the secrecy of the event. But I also felt a barrier to the people in the vicinity, a 'they and us', so I do wonder about the exclusivity of the piece.

**Has anything in particular stayed with you?** The freedom and exploration of new places, and I do want to go back and explore these areas again. I loved the stillness of the allotment and the hidden river. I loved the way the dancers embodied the foxes' mysterious ways, as they darted and fled from one space.

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## 3. E

### **Did it affect your perception of the city?**

I was surprised how well I knew the city except the final stop in the allotment. Feeling like after living here for 6 years, I now know most places. I hadn't realised that so much before.

**What did you notice?** I noticed how rundown the city was still despite regeneration.

**What did you feel?** I felt like I was in constant motion. I didn't feel emotions so much but aware of light, and pace of walking and things like that.

**Has anything in particular stayed with you?** I realised a lot of ground was covered, I was surprised by the route looping in and around itself, I wanted more moments of dwelling. When Katye lay on the ground I wanted to lie down too. I got as far as sitting on the ground! I wanted to immerse my whole body in the city and rest my usual senses / modes of sensing of eyes & hands. I felt a sense of starkness in the city and felt how it affected my body – I felt a bit two dimensional at times. I liked the support of the hosts who were playful & handy touchpoints. I wanted to get up close & hang out with the dancers as much as possible. That made the city easier to handle.

**Reply to my reply:**

Hi Carolyn

The final destination felt quite different alright but I find it interesting to reflect on the bleakness of the city afterwards, so I value that too. Not an easy place to work & you have to work with what's there. We have the same conundrum of dwelling & moving to contend with. I'd be curious to hear what others felt of the performance too, I imagine it was very different every night.

---

**4. F**

I certainly wasn't aware of the allotments, which I found lovely – nor of that particular stretch of the Sherbourne, which led to them. As we walked along it, I heard the twit of a female tawny owl but (possibly drowned out by the group's steps), didn't hear the woo of a mate (interestingly, Sarah also heard the female call, but no male response...WHERE IS THE MALE?). As it grew darker and the sounds of the city further away, I found myself listening and looking out more for nocturnal and crepuscular animals. In that regard, I admit that I found being part of a group – and the pace of our walk dictated by the group – frustrating, but then I am a very contrary and difficult creature myself (as, sadly, you've discovered). I enjoyed looking at the plants growing around the station (the nutritional and medicinal potential of urban plants is a subject that I have an existing interest in). I admit to enjoying the bemused and amused reactions of bystanders – including the man in IKEA suggesting that shoppers should follow the performer for free cannabis and the incidental things we weren't

necessarily supposed to notice – such as clearing up dropped blackberries from the lift – but also the embrace on the balconies of the flats along Spon End. So, yes, there was occasional frustration at being in a group (which is never a comfortable experience for me) but there were also moments when I could focus on the details of the weeds that grew, the sounds of the water flowing, the birds, the people and the cracking wood on the bonfire – and it is those moments that will stay with me.

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## 5. F

here are some thoughts regarding the "urbanflows", which I enjoyed greatly, by the way:

What I enjoyed most about the piece was the contrast: when you leave the city (and I was reminded that Coventry is, to put it delicately, one of the most ugliest places I've ever lived at) and come into nature, the gardens, the river... That was really impressive. I also liked the tour throughout the city itself and the way it presented. I certainly saw Coventry in a new light. One of the best parts was the "(not) so secret abundance"

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## 6. I

Thanks for last night's performance and also for your kind attention to my small fall (grazes are now healing).

Your basic format, of silently walking through the city and its contrasting corners, worked well. Your route was clever and led to a dramatic climax in the quiet dusky allotments. I suppose we needed some framing event, and not just words, at each stop, however ballet itself doesn't for me translate into greater engagement or 'sensing'. On a few occasions it was directly functional, for example 'now look up at the stars' and I liked how you used, for example, the empty window of the ruined St Christopher's chapel by the river-bridge. There was a verbal proposition made during the initial dance – that the city is somehow nasty/soulless/bleak. The reply given by the performance, but not put into words, was 'not necessarily' (there's an old song somewhere with the chorus "It ain't necessarily so.") Another conclusion was however that the city is tolerable only when you escape it into a bit of ersatz countryside.

My take was biased by our being all the time on territory I traverse every day.

You ask for 'feedback' but not an essay. If you had asked me what makes Coventry NOT bleak, it is its international nature after the waves of Caribbeans, South Asians, Eastern Europeans and now Chinese students during my 50 years in the city. So, in a less artistic and more political setting, I would have walked through the covered market with its multinational traders and tropical produce. (Not however an option for your production which needed the evening time to function properly.) In the opposite direction there is bleakness in the endless repetition of unimaginative houses, which we didn't traipse past.

One feature that several of us noticed, and one I guess commonly arising in the arts, was the amused (?) indifference to our antics by the passers-by. Too much or too little engagement has a bearing on the feel of a city, which of course is always somewhat anonymous and tolerant of peculiarity.

Without some encouragement to deliberate reflection afterwards, some of any sensing engendered by the walk would quickly dissipate.

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## 7. G

This person's comments were private.

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## 8. M

### **Did it affect your perception of the city?**

Yes..in that it expanded my perception of the city...things I hadn't noticed were brought to my attention...specifically wild plants with herbal properties in the wasteland by the station and the amazing night view overlooking the market and the city as seen from IKEA. I'd never been to the allotments by night or sat around a campfire in the city before.

**What did you notice?** All the usual things I would notice in the city...plus the extras (as above) and the quietness in the allotment space.

**What did you feel?**

Various emotions...surprise, amusement, a bit of bewilderment (esp at the ramp when I realised we were in some kind of performance walking very slowly as if we were in a horror film (the Walking Dead/Zombie Apocalypse). This felt a little uncomfortable...but by the end of the ramp I had gotten into the spirit of it....and by the end of the journey I felt mega-chilled, serene even, in a sort of half trance...as if I had been at the end of an extensive meditation....I would have been happy to spend the rest of the evening without saying a thing.

**Has anything in particular stayed with you?**

I remember it all...from the disembodied mouth as guide/instructor/scene setter to the crackle of the fire at the end...I think it would be quite difficult to forget it!

FROM AN EARLIER EMAIL:

Thank-you. A most enjoyable and imaginative adventure...

Feral witches, disembodied lips, a disembodied arm, a night trail through the meadowland, the poetry tree, that stunning IKEA view, the campfire....no ordinary night out!

Loved it.

---

**9. H**

Loved the space it created and a different way of seeing the City especially the waste land that is a home to many we just can't see it.

I noticed the architecture more in the centre and the mosaics on buildings and how parts of the city are so empty of human life. It has a whole different feel at night at bit sinister and echoing.

I was challenged to use my hearing and sight more and sense ground under my feet. Silence helped to create the atmosphere and set some boundaries too.

The berries being crushed in a lift leaving a mark ...

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## 10. G

It was a really lovely piece, considering I had no idea what was about to happen!

It made me appreciate being silent, throughout a city filled with noise. However, I didn't know it was finished, I thought Lauren was joking when she said we've arrived, and go and explore the garden, I just assumed it was still going and didn't want to break my vow of silence! But by the by! I liked it really, bordering the line of reality is a fun place to be, I think.

I sometimes found it frustrating to arrive somewhere that performers were waiting for you, then they would do something very very quickly/a short scene and run off, left me wanting more, but then it made the longer pieces of interaction a lot more enjoyable, I guess. I really did love the Ikea excursion, but that is because I like silly make-believe things and could've spent all day with her, wandering around imagining the things she was saying!

I liked the sporadic interactions of the stewards.

I thought it was lovely to leave the urban and venture down dark rural paths to a fire lit garden, which to be honest, is where I feel very at home so it was lovely to see torch lit things that you wouldn't normally notice enroute like the leaves at the bottom of the trees.

I found myself tuning in to the 'unknowing audiences' and their comments. As a regular outdoor performer, it was interesting to hear what people thought about this unobvious show, and how they passed on to their friends/phone calls what they were experiencing; whether it was jovial, rude or intrigue in their voices, it was fun to witness the two.

And I suppose I spent more time watching how the surroundings were affected by the action, than the action.

I enjoyed not really knowing how things connected, but more saw it as a series of interactions that resonated or didn't. But at the heart of it, it was obvious that the performers cared, and it was great to watch their commitment to sticking with it, which stands out the most with the lady who 'felt' her way around the Starbucks. The performers made me so comfortable to be in all the spaces, at night, witnessing bizarre things, and feel at total ease. For that, I think you have done the best to instil that passion into those wonderful people; it was clearly a collaborative effort. Well it seemed that way to me.

I may think of other things but that is it for now.

I would do it again for sure. Thank you.

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## 11. I

For me, *urbanflows* was an experience between wonder and jarring disconnection, with some uncomfortable challenges. The uneasy balance between the urban world and the natural world has always been uncomfortable for me. But the performance has fuelled my interest in the wildness within Coventry when it is easy just to notice all the artificial structures and decay.

From being playfully drawn to wonder at plants around broken tarmac and rubble by the fox-like performers, to the jarring interruption of using phones in a group and getting a video to load. I'm now thinking about how one took away wonder from the other. I don't even really want to talk about going through Ikea, that killed all the wonder for me. I desperately wanted to be by the river as described, or maybe anywhere else. Thankfully back outside the broken paving and wild weeds and air felt more connected than before. It got me looking around a lot more and taking a lot more in than just illuminated signs, litter, and people ignoring each other as usual. I liked that this felt like it was challenged at the coffee place. Like our connection between each other is as uncomfortable as our connection with nature.

Although a little uncomfortable at first the slow walking went further towards opening up my senses and made me feel very aware. I didn't really want to look my phone again after that. But I might well do if I was walking through there normally. Then the decaying buildings in Spon End through to the river, which sometimes make me feel like it is decaying back into nature. There was a beautiful moment where a bat swooped right up from the river past our heads, and really showed our journey was part of that wildness. Then gradually the aging brick buildings and arches gently decayed into the allotment and everything started to feel more connected and peaceful. Although it's a familiar environment to me it felt particularly special to be back there and more connected to the rest of the city.

I just realised I haven't really mentioned the dances and performance much, which were incredible. I think that was because they felt like animal like spirits drawing us into looking around and noticing things, which I accepted quickly and became fascinated with what they were showing me. I felt drawn into looking around more the way they seemed to be, and I felt an increasingly childlike sense of wonder. I wanted to run around too. Maybe I should have.

A couple of days after I've been thinking about it a lot. I feel excited to go out into Coventry, leave my phone at home sometimes and notice more things around me.

Finally, I think the most poignant and powerful part for me was the writing on the paving pointing out the river below, like a lost sense of wonder running under, right next to the pleas for help from homeless people, which I see a lot. This spoke volumes to me, with this powerful source of life flowing below, completely disconnected from us by concrete and steel of our own making. Like we have cut off our own life source and left our kind to struggle and decay. I'm left more believing that perhaps the start to changing this overwhelming problem is to explore, understand, feel and share all this uneasy balance of disconnection and connection. Which I think is what my experience of *urbanflows* was.

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## 12. J

A meeting . . . became conflated with an immersive city-wide performance from sirencrossing that happened later on the same day. Confronted with the question 'Who do you want your audience to be?' I was charged with three occasions of different horizon-wide views of the city on in one day and reminded that the city is delicate, dangerous, multivarious (sic) and multi-spectacular. Reliant on no particular person it will constantly reform its image the minds of its inhabitants that sustain and leach from it, which the other inhabitants only become aware of at certain, surprising transitional points.

Some meet the city simply to traverse it point to point, some meet it to perform a kind of bartering and then transport some materials across it and away from it, some meet to communicate with each other and perform certain social occasions to cement their relationships. The premise of this particular meeting with the city would be exposed during our time with it.

Today I met the city to watch dancers pretend to be wild spirits, wild animals: wild fox-spirits living directly in the city's spaces. Spirits who wished to open up for me a route into the spaces that humans had built for themselves with the city that reminded them of their hereditary wild abode. But let me make it clear: there was only one real wild-space. On bare ground around the car-park adjoining ground on a roundabout a fox-dancer pointed out ten plants that could still be used medicinally by humans. It was abandoned land – made to cross or drive round – land used simply for transitioning the city quickly, and so the wilderness was

allowed to reclaim it until it was deemed out of order and then it would be mown down. This obviously suited the ten medicinal plants that grew there.

In the city human had built fake trees in concrete and steel, re-created babbling brooks in concrete and ceramic. Wind was allowed to rustle through cultivated plants and plastic vines trailed around metal stair rails.

We were taken to visit The Great Abundance and raised up in a giant box to where we could see the city in shadows and glowing spots of light. Spirit-fox dancers played light against a wooden barrier wall far below us showing us their habitat – making me wonder if I had really seen this wall for what it really was. Having been briefed at the start that our handlers and guides could not be completely trusted and that we should be observant, we questioned if what we saw then was real. Was this the real city now? Had they opened our eyes to another layer of existence or were we simply being told a story.

It takes a while to realise what you are looking at, just as it takes a while to take it for granted. After the performance one of the dancers admitted that she had rehearsed under a tree for days before she realised it was a walnut tree. Her surprise statement “This is a walnut tree!” became part of the script: “Do you remember that tree? We moved it. And those two over there.”

The fox-spirits became, by the end of the story, more responsible for the state of the city than other city dwellers. We all walked through their spaces as a mass of silent people – at one point all observing the same video on our phones – aware, as we did so, that we had become part of the performance and in doing so we dragged all those outside the performance, in with us. The two people looking down from apartment building balconies as we passed the walnut tree, the two men filming as we watched a dancer perform perched on an empty window ledge of an ancient ruin – one of those preserved to prove Coventry’s status as war-destroyed city. Also, the large group of young people dining outside a restaurant who slowly became aware that they had become backdrop to the play and turned their attention on us in an attempt to get back their power as observers again. I worried this nascent potential to power-grab attention could put the dancers in danger, but tonight, all was fine.

We ended the night around a campfire at Sherborne Allotments, courtesy of The Pod. This introduced a slightly strange tone as I found it easier to imagine a maintained wilderness in the strange hard places of the city than in the cultivated soft spaces in a verdant allotment

full of hand-snipped bushes and brushed soil. The allotment was perhaps the greatest antithesis of wilderness that I encountered that night.

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### **13. R**

**Did it affect your perception of the city?** – I think I am already quite a keen observer of Coventry as I am relatively new here and enjoy exploring urban spaces and the green spaces within them, but I hadn't been to the food union allotment before, which I really enjoyed. It was interesting being made to slow down at the entrance to the covered bit of the Precinct, and I have thought about that slow walk every time I've walked that route since.

**What did you notice?** – I noticed a lot of homeless people's 'houses'. I see them all the time but walking around for that length of time with regular stops made me aware of the number of them and their semi-permanence. I also noticed how, although some people looked uncomfortable when they saw us approaching, most of them were intrigued and seemed to want to take part or find out what was going on in some way.

**What did you feel?** – I felt irritated by the video on the phone section! I'm always annoyed when people do this, and try not to do it myself, and it made me very aware of how much it gets under my skin. I wanted to experience the city but felt I couldn't do that fully while watching a video, which I also wanted to watch. I loved sitting around the fire at the end.

**Has anything in particular stayed with you?** – the allotment space and the sound of the wind in the trees there; the river Sherbourne and how it's a shame it's not more uncovered in the rest of the city; the edible plants being pointed out near the station; the little dangly lightbulbs; the people outside Starbucks forming an unwilling and then slightly more willing audience!

At times it was very hard to hear the performers (possibly because of the loud weather); I would love to ask you at some point . . . about the planning of the piece and the kinds of conversations you had to have with IKEA (for instance) about access etc.; I also wondered if you or the performers had thought about providing a few free or lower-cost tickets to low-waged people (prob dependant on funding), or perhaps even one of the homeless people, who were mentioned quite a lot in the post-performance discussion.

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#### **14. C**

There are a number of things that will have impacted on my experience of the walk, mainly because I knew the destination, but also I'm from Coventry, I have lived in the city centre, I've lived in Spon End, I have worked in the market, I have walked the city centre at night time and streets of Spon End in the early hours of the morning, I was a dancer, I am connected with the rough sleepers through work so know the spaces they occupy at night.

#### **My responses/the experience.**

I loved the sound of the city from the upstairs of Eaton House. A fantastic beginning. I could have listened to that for much longer.

I was less keen on the introduction of technology. It was strange to feel so instructed but at the same time to feel very free

The introduction of the dancers on the scrubland was brilliant...it would be interesting to speak to someone that drove by, and the shape making around the trees and scrub.

I talked in my feedback about my desire to run.

Still not sure what I felt about watching the films. They were good films, but I wanted to watch my step and feel the air. But perhaps discomfort was the idea.

Under the ring road – again an incidental audience – I wonder what they thought?

It was at this point on one of the nights that I actually felt life was at risk: a car skirted so close to Lauren (as it would to a fox).

IKEA, good looking out of the window and seeing the dancers and making shapes.

Uncomfortable for me to be in the space of our homeless community as I work with some and felt they had right to anonymity – so more invasive for me than perhaps others.

The use of lower precinct, sound and slowing down was fantastic and then the marking of the river by being on the ground.

The journey to forward of this to and within the allotment was wonderful particularly the use of the river and the intensity of the darkness.

Loved that people found themselves enjoying silence around the fire

All in all, an incredibly choreographed and memorable performance, one that for me, centred on feelings, movement, occupied spaces and being present. Many of the curated walks sit uncomfortably with me because they assume the walkers want/need to be educated about the city. This was about being part of something, an intense and personal shift of emotion a changing of pace – creating your own city.

On a more practical note I thought that it was so well managed. Great that there were producers in the background to keep a quiet eye on what was happening and that there was good coordination at the allotment site. All the team had an acute understanding of the spaces they were moving through (and the lives they were impacting on). The publication is something I will return to, so quietly respectful of the spaces we occupy and move through.

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#### **15. G**

Really glad I managed to make the last performance. It was a really beautiful evening.

Although the walk took us along some of the only familiar parts of Coventry that I'm aware of, I really enjoyed the opportunity to take it at a slower pace and take the time to look down and focus on the wild/urban flora growing throughout the city. As we wandered the city I felt as if we had involuntarily become part of the performance and we were actively parting passers-by from their phones to question what we were up to and make them ask questions of their own.

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#### **16. R**

I think I said most of it but just in case you want it in writing. I liked seeing the view from Eaton house and the foraging bit at the start. I liked the way you could hear and smell the city in the paced walk from the bridge in Spon End to the allotments.

I already said that I felt very uncomfortable being asked to watch the section in Ikea, at Starbucks and in the shopping centre. I didn't think they were very respectful of people using the space or the audience.

I think seeing more movement and dance rather than acting might have played to the performer's talents.

I don't think the filmed sections added much to the narrative and the walk in general was a little long.

I hope you've got some useful feedback and all's well.

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### **17. I**

Liked the shutting out the world at start as I am very much a sound person. But not into the lips on screen. I liked the sounds generated from humming too. I would have liked much more info on herbs and uses even some connection to herbalism and its relationship with the church and witches or woman and patriarchal defined by man's needs and nothing to do with women.

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### **18. C**

#### **Did it affect your perception of the city?**

Absolutely, my experience of the city has been rather transitory. I have only visited Coventry in the past for academic events at the university; arriving and departing around the event's timetable. This had not previously given me any time for exploring or venturing into the city itself. So, by navigating the centre on foot, rather than dashing round the ring road by car, I was able to get a sense of the city's layout, its function and the way people occupy Coventry at night.

I was surprised at how vibrant and active the centre was, in contrast to the quieter seemingly 'unpeopled' spaces of the suburbs. There was a huge contrast in sounds, colours, and smells, and an even bigger contrast in how busy and populated different pathways were in different sections of the city.

Overall, my perception of Coventry changed in as much as it expanded my thinking about how many people live in the city, who works here and how the architecture and business layout affects the ways in which people act and behave in this space.

The interactions *urbanflows* facilitated also helped me to understand the layers of the city through time and history – a set of stories and experiences I had just not previously given time to considering.

### **What did you notice?**

The noise of silence.

The motion of the city.

The hypnotic state walking sends a group into.

Our complicity and willingness to follow and trust. A sense of openness and solidarity for allowing and excepting a series of events that we had no control over.

A calmness at waiting and watching.

I noticed different vistas, shapes, textures. I noticed curiosity and confusion from those watching us pass by.

From outside the caravan procession of our en-mass movement as audience, I specifically noticed the disparity between streets in the centre where certain buildings were unoccupied/disused to the lively congregations of people sitting at Costas or hanging outside pubs, or calm solemnity of those eating dinner in the Ikea café.

### **What did you feel?**

At the beginning I was immediately enthralled as we were gently guided and transported from the stresses of the day into the mysticism of the performance journey. The opening scene was powerful, immersing us in the poetic, critical text juxtaposed by the visuals of film, it exposed the technology and mechanisms of the city, which were beautifully reflected in the open window behind the phone, where you could see cars navigating the streets below. In the background this sentiment was echoed on the reflective surfaces of the buildings around the ring road and station square.

The horizon line was always felt throughout the walk, a feeling of anticipation, being on the precipice of time, architecture, thinking, feeling.

I was enthralled throughout, always curious to see more, experience more, to keep on moving and to see where we would end up. I was drawn in by the movement and energy of the performers, they were a motivational force, even though the encounters were fleeting. I desired, at times, to stay in the performers' presence longer, at times fleeting was too fleeting, as soon as we arrived to where they were positioned, they were already gone and there wasn't necessarily time to pause and draw breath. It would have been nice to hear

more of what they had to say, especially when there were moments when the dialogue was rather quiet and I had to strain to listen. I like this action though – to strain, to strive, to really consider what is being said and why. It was abstract and conceptual, but earthly and rooted in a deep and rich understanding of the space. Some of these links I did not understand because I do not know the city, but I didn't feel like that mattered. I wanted to delve deeper, know more!

My feelings and responses to the work changed as we moved along the route. As the walk progressed, my body became tired and cold, which made me feel less vigilant. I let the experience wash over me in a hypnotic trance rather than being alert. This transition was intriguing, especially when punctuated by moments of transgressing borders, or occupying spaces which are normally prohibited. The glee at being subversive and being part of a group taking up space and activating them in ways that do not normally hosted people in such a way. At times, this wasn't always gleeful. I did experience some feelings of intimidation and uncertainty, and some confusion about where I was headed.

This occurred mostly in the centre following the interlude with the skateboard (which was mesmeric and could have had me hooked for longer), when we walked through the shopping centre (whose interior was dead and deserted as shut for the night) with the performers running around, cyclists whizzing past – everything was empty and felt desolate but there was this underlying sense of foreboding and angst, potential panic – like the people in these spaces were on the edge of something. As part of the travelling group though, it felt like were on the outside, striving to go beyond, witness and move on – to escape. The sense of escape and the way the ending was framed – in as much as we were gently reassured that we had arrived at a safe space – made it feel like the city centre was a post-apocalyptic world where society was vying for survival. We in contrast were an intrepid group, lucky, privileged to escape and find solace away from the desperation of the city.

The arrival at the end thus came with a huge sense of relief. The mysticism lifted, we were re-transported out of the tales of the city, away from the crowds and lights of the city; we had arrived somewhere 'wholesome', restful. This pause was relished as the pace till this point felt constant. So, the ending allowed us to draw breath and by sitting and sharing a drink and conversation it really did feel like a momentous pause to contemplate a lot of thoughts and feelings.

#### **Has anything in particular stayed with you?**

Some of the most striking imagery which lingered for me was:

The opening section at the top of the building where the windows were open and the first impactful view of the city was the reflection of the cars in the window and on the buildings along the ring road horizon.

The warmth offered by the candle lit allotment, hearing about the work undertaken by the community group and how this links into the poetic text of the performers that opened up so many thoughts and feelings around what it means to occupy a space.

Movement, motion, architecture, time and space.

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### **19. E**

I will start from memory because too much time has dripped into the future-past

The date today is 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020

It was September 2019

it was late in the afternoon.

It was at a moment when the sun was setting and reflecting its pink, red and yellow rays into the building alike the Eaton House

We entered the building and took the lift in groups to one of the top floors

although the number of the floor escapes me I remember that one of us had a skateboard attached to their rucksack

we entered a room, take a seat and receive a briefing by a digital pair of lips speaking through a tiny smartphone screen

although the screen was small and the voice coming through the lips was like a voice of cyborg or data or a genderless computer it immediately gave a sense of been drawn into another space

a spatio-temporal trajectory 'other' than that of our everyday lives

the voice gave us instructions...unfortunately I can't remember its name but I know it has something to do with the fox.

After the briefing, talking between was censored since we consented to take on a vow of silence

I find it deeply amusing and invigorating that a vow of silence between a group of humans on a guided tour can reveal so much

I never knew that by restricting myself to speak enabled and strengthened my sense of place, space and movement

a movement through and through that allows me to follow while manically collecting stimuli from all around me

we walked around Coventry, along, beneath, in between and betwixt the ring road, underpasses, bridges, traffic lights and reached IKEA

A huge retail box in the city centre

the small performances along the way of the dancers resembled a kind of staged but delicately placed other-being ripped out of its ecology and into the cityscapes of the city that carries and holds the memories of its disappointments

the feeling of derelict and neglect was echoed by the Coventrians randomly walking by engaged either in an argument, the homeless like night creatures dwelling to find a suitable nook in the streets for the night

In IKEA we walked as a group and followed our guide up into the cafeteria where we caught a glimpse of one of the performers ravishing bright red raspberries with her hands

it looked as if we caught a glimpse of a carnivorous ethereal beast with red-stained blood running down her chin...scanning our movement with her eyes as we drift by her like a swarm of giddy tourists on our performance experience tour

We approach the windows on the 6th floor and look down on to the road across from IKEA

I recognise Katye who seems to be light drawing with another dancer on some panels on the back of Coventry Market

It was evident that they were signifying our next route

the dancers were always within our proximity, always there before we were

signposting

signifying

lighting and highlighting

and then disappearing in the shadows

their performance as inbetweeners was very masterfully conducted

our guides were there to support and facilitate the journey but not to direct

as we leave the IKEA building we enter a lift to go to the ground floor

there was a Cypriot woman in the lift and her daughter

she was startled and wondered where the lift is going

she and her daughter were unsure which floor they wanted to go to

and they were both curious about who we are and what we are doing

it is hard to imagine a group of people; moving together and but not talking

I was bursting to speak to this woman because she spoke Cypriot; my father-tongue  
(English is my mother-tongue)

I waited until we all got out of the lift and then took a couple of steps back and told the  
woman and her daughter in Cypriot which floor to go to and what we were doing

They were relieved and smiled and shared a Cypriot blessing 'na sai kala' (be well)

We then followed the dancers along with our guides alongside the Coventry market and then  
witnessed the police patrolling outside of Tesco as one of the guides skateboarded away  
and disappeared in one the Coventry walkways

As we crossed the city centre and main square (if you can call that a square) we made a short  
stop outside Starbucks where my ear caught some Cypriot chatter and gossip

A group of young women and men were enjoying the tradition of afternoon coffee and gossip  
outside Starbucks and heavily questioning what we were doing:

"look, its them again! The zombies! What are they going to do tonight? Who are they?  
Where are they going? What are they doing?"

I then stepped out of the group and made a point of letting the Cypriot coffee drinkers know that I am the only one in this group that can understand every word they say. I found this particularly funny at the time since it was true.

So, they were startled and asked me where I am from and what we are doing. I briefly explained that it is a performance project and they should look it up and join. They then invited me for coffee (a typical Cypriot hospitality custom). I politely declined and wished them well.

I did somehow feel that perhaps I should not have spoken to them since I broke my vow of silence twice but I made an executive decision that since it was my native tongue I could not resist.

Our walk continued and we gradually moved out of the city perimeter and into an area towards allotment plots. The change of temperature was significant, it became cold suddenly and I immediately realised that we were near water

Running water

A river hidden behind warehouses and houses along a large portion of land with allotment plots

There were no lights so you could see the starry sky and my ears, nose, taste buds and skin were suddenly sharper than ever...

I could smell and almost taste the mud, the earth and plants, the grass, the moss and the humidity of the water

It is wonderful to walk in the dark in nature and to be guided

There was huge feeling of trust in the guides and dancers

They really took care of us

We walked along various little pathways along these fenced up plots of lands

At some point, we split into smaller groups and I remember hearing this odd sound

Like a scream or squeal. It was the sound of a fox! I was impressed since I had never heard a fox before!

We then walked into a farm (I think it was five acres farm but I may be wrong)

We then walked around the little pathways which were lit by little candles and viewed, touched and tasted some of fruit like apples.

Finally, we sat by a huge log fire and sipped on some juice (some also had wine)

I enjoyed engaging with sounds that compose a city, like Coventry, it could have been any city but there sounds, tastes, smells, textures and temperatures are indigenous to this place in the west midlands. They carry the stories, the traces, the memories and places of things gone or things that are coming. The river being the strongest presence although it is hidden and runs beneath the feet of the city. The muddiness of the land beneath my shoes as we walked along those allotment plots was most distinct of what resides in the urban canvas of the ghosts of the water that flowed.

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## **20. N**

I have walked a reasonable amount in and through Coventry, including as part of a teaching group in which we pay particular attention to the experience of the city, so I guess I already have a strong sense of Coventry as a place capable of supporting innumerable diverse narratives and worlds — this perception of the city as a whole was reinforced, rather than altered. However there were particular moments that were truly transformative, and the experience of the work as a whole has lingered in a kind-of trippy way; looking back, to walk the city with such unexpected guides was like being absolved of the responsibility of knowing precisely where one was; we could relax into the city in a way that is not usually possible.

The experience of the city as feral, as if another creature, was something I had felt lay in the city to be found but had not experienced (had not found an effective means of accessing) until the video-interrupted fox-scuttle along the ring road. Likewise, I am aware that Coventry contains strange moments of wilderness that can seem to be ancient pathways, but to walk one such route, previously unknown, as group and in the dark, with particularly dramatic accompaniments by wind and night-time birds alongside the performers' texts, was very powerful. Other sensory experiences that have particularly stayed with me was the scent of the lavender outside IKEA, which was very strong on the first night that I saw the work, and the moon and stars on the second night, when the sky was clearer. Passing through the centre of the city, too – Starbucks, and the chalk intervention in the semi-enclosed, echoing shopping area, the sound of the skateboard by the bandstand – was very effective; I really felt the way the city was wild and human at the same time; or rather (better) that there was

no distinction; that the human was still part of the wild, and the waters and lives that we might sometimes think we have excluded are still present, and not part of some realm at odds from our own.

Once, in Scotland, I watched a weasel (possibly stoat) perform dozens of cartwheels, one after another, on a log at the edge of a woodpile; it was only later that I read that this is a hunting strategy, a means of the animal to mesmerise potential prey before attacking. Coming in the late sun, after having been introduced to the city from the high and windy tower, the first encounter with the dancers, the foxes, had the same hypnotic sense — their surreal circulations of the patch of scrubland in front of Eaton House; the way people not taking part in the walk stopped to look at the performers and walkers; the way it led into a minute encounter with a square metre at the edge of the space. I loved the tone that this set before we whirled away to the rest of the walk. The text put me in mind of the song “Burning Times”, by Charlie Murphy — do you know it? There’s a beautiful version by Christy Moore on his album of the same name.

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## **21. N**

group silence was key: chatter between participants would have destroyed the effect; the containment of being part of a group, even if you didn’t particularly know the people in it, and yet having the focus of silence which enable you to sense the city and yourself.

Walking on your own in silence would not have been the same.

The temptation is to chat; absolutely essential to manage those in-between times in order for audience to register the city and what is happening; both spatially and temporally; creates a performance tension; means that anything that happens is still within performance time.

The silence permitted the clamour of the built-up city to be emphasised and registered. In a sense, the dancers/sirens movements were ‘silent’ as well, quietly drawing attention to things, beckoning and always moving on – wills of the wisp, guardians of the city, 21<sup>st</sup> Century monks asking you to meditate on or contemplate your surroundings (keeping vigil) – the important vow of silence and what that means; reflecting on yourself; possibly a connection to be made there (with Coventry monks).

fascinated by the role of the sirens; how they were letting the city unfold for you; small flourishes; play within the play; enchanted world unfolds; Sylvans had a similar kind of role;

interesting part of the performance; subtle showing going on; as though there were a whole load of other things...

The journey from intense light into darkness produced an interesting spatial effect. Light emphasised distance and expanse and brought the clamour of the city with all its busy activity and hotch-potch of visual and aural sensation; darkness brought intimacy and intensity, that of nature and the urbanwild; in a sense there was a reversal of cliché in that journey; normally we think of the claustrophobia of the city being given relief by escaping to the open space of the country. In the bright city was a sense of expanse and in the dark it became more intimate; the most intense point was at the allotment (the sense that I have no idea where I am)

The quotidian change that was marked by this journey was key and actually very compressed temporally speaking – profound when one considers how far we shifted within the space of 2 hours. The conflation of space and time in thinking about this journey is also interesting i.e. spatial shifts as temporal and vice versa.

The films: the initial framing declaration of the mouth appeared like a landscape of skin and is interesting in the light of Pallasma's reference to skin and mouth being the origins of the experience of architecture.

There were shades of Beckett's 'not I'; but this was about the embodiment of (not disembodiment or fragmented identity as in Beckett)

The film sets the tone in terms of the distraction presented by screen time in situations of urban encounter but also sets up the narration/guidance of the journey as being unreliable; good to be vigilant and cements your desire to be a participant; also sets the scene for the sirens.

There is also a highly resonant presentation of the city as a place of danger and of beauty and ultimately, life. The tone of voice was interesting and for me, unresolved: a mixture of didacticism and naivety. What was the idea behind adopting an already alien voice – that of the homeless migrant perhaps – speaking with a form of forceful deliberation?

Against the backdrop of rush hour noise of the twilight city, breezing in through those tilted windows, which is then shut out, leaving mainly its imagescape, the vista is a great scene-setting moment that picks up on the ending of the previous urbanflows prototype which ended on this note. It has the feel of an ending but is actually the beginning and so emphasises the inversion of that journey from light into dark (referred to earlier).

something to say about the view from up above; ownership of the city; looking out...

De Certeau opens with this view from the Twin Towers.

The two other film interventions on phones, initiated at specific intervals during the walk and experienced while walking; seemed to operate as rude distractions while epitomising the desensitising effects of urban screen fixation. One has been lulled into a sensitised state of attention and awareness by the time they kick in, so their effect is disruptive, and we have physically to be wary of stumbling. The agitation is captured in the first film which utilises the screen as a prosthetic extension of the body as it races through an urban terrain. Therefore the film is jarring and awkward and an interruption; have to watch to not fall; first film mirrors that instability; the second film seems to reflect, in showing a brutalist building being demolished, on the damaging nature of concrete, a material that clearly does not stand the test of time, that covers over the environment and moreover requires vast quantities of the natural resource that is water to dampen its polluting dust as it is demolished.

those films acted as a disruption; questioning screen time in urban space

Jia-Yu's IKEA tour guide emerges as a witty narrative in the wrong time and place.

In effect she is already in the allotment as she points at various herbs and plants and vegetables (not that a first-time audience would know this at that point. The penny drops later). The effect is to point out the inherent inauthenticity of the Ikea aesthetic.

The continuously emerging succession of vignettes offered by the sirens keep the audience going, hungering for more as it makes its way through various other atmospheres.

They subtly conjure the city for the audience (lists several specific moments).

skateboard

hand in the stream immersed

other things that could be interesting: Rakeł's song (wanderer through the landscape)

The Pod connection: something to be made of that perhaps; drawing attention to something important; growing food and agriculture and in the depths of the city; not just a neat place to end the piece; distance between the Pod and the allotments is an echo of the journey of the piece

end point is an invitation to conviviality; also the realisation of where we were; says something about the intensity of the performance that it seems further away

The ending was a moment of detheatricalisation; performance as a logistical challenge is not to be underestimated; sense of two performances going on; making the whole thing happen is bubbling under; responsibility to make things good afterwards

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## **22. transcribed audio – urbflw-fireside 3**

NOTE: >> symbol denotes a different speaker

>> My experience was that it made the city strange to me. It allowed be to see stuff that I don't ordinarily see. And also, my other kind of key thought was, ummm...that sense of not really knowing who the performers were...were we the performers? Were the people performing for us the performers? Or sometimes, were the other people in the city performing for us? Those were my two over-riding feelings.

>> I was thinking that the other people in the city were the audience...although as an audience member I was enjoying their reactions, so I guess it does go both ways.

>> Alongside that I was sometimes aware of the perception of the performance by other people potentially...whether or not we were affecting their plans...or making a mess that they might have to clean up or something...or potentially making them feel like they were being judged or observed in some way? [Q: was it worrying at times?] hmhhh...possibly. I think particularly when we were walking past people's bedrooms...you know people's spaces where they sleep.

>> One thing that was particularly interesting for me...I'm a night-time runner and I really like not knowing how stable the ground is ahead of me, so I enjoyed doing that bit en masse. I think we need to enjoy the dark more. I think it would have been really interesting to see how the walk was without the intrusion of man-made life.

>> I think the part I enjoyed the most was when we were walking along the dark path and I realised that the description we had been told earlier was the same place. I know that is fairly obvious in retrospect but that moment of realisation was my favourite.

>> I felt really safe. I felt there were all these presences around, guiding us...and especially when we started to get into the dark. But throughout, even early on, I felt like everything was really clearly described even though it was really poetic.

>> As we carried on walking, I was aware (I have arthritis) that I was getting in pain, as we were walking, and that sense of where are we going and how far is it...and I am going to get there? Was also a sort of physical experience of the journey: that kind of slight anxiety and discomfort.

>> I also enjoyed the change of temperature after we came, after a great big bridge, I just had this rugs rugs, Godiva, arrow, secret trade, trade secret, on some signs and then suddenly the temperature changed and I thought I bet we're moving near some water...

>> I'm not so familiar with Coventry but even so the piece allowed me to perceive other things.

>> I saw a new bit of the city that I hadn't see before which was the last bit. I guess I'm not disorientated exactly because I know roughly where I am, but I wondered if you were an outside to the place, if you'd be completely disorientated?

>> I've never been to Coventry before...but like you, I felt safe. The fact that I didn't know anything probably helped. I felt that it was sort of the old vs the new, walking around...being aware that there's this history under the ground, being there for centuries and then seeing the modern day, that juxtaposition, suddenly being very aware that as we walked past groups of people. It felt like, oh I don't know, sort of like a freeze frame... [couldn't hear the rest]

>> a big problem for me was that I couldn't hear a lot of what was being said.

>> someone said that they felt safe...and I actually felt unsafe until we got away from the people because my instinct in the city is to be part of the background, to not invite attention because attention can lead to confrontation.

>> all round Spon End is very front line it has to be said. There's been all sorts of things from shootings and stuff recently there.

>> there has. A fifteen-year-old kid got shot in the head just about 100 yards from where we were walking...a few days ago.

>> I enjoyed speaking Cypriot, two times. I engaged with some people in front of Starbucks...yeah that was quite unusual because I hadn't heard any people speaking Cypriot in Coventry. So, I interacted with them. [later this person explained to Carolyn that the crowd in front of Starbucks were talking about how the audience all looked like zombies]

>> [re. sitting in the room upstairs in Eaton House] I felt it was a clear introduction...

>> I liked it

>> [what about using the phones] I felt it was distracting

>> that was deliberate... [couldn't hear the rest...]

>> something that hasn't been talked about here was the motion of the dancers. It was really...I wanted to run with them. It was really hard not to run with them. We were forced to slow down...but the pace that they moved through the city was really beautiful and the shape they created in the city and the strength of their stillness...they must have worked hard to create that connect. That was quite powerful, something about their determination to move forwards. The only thing that I found challenging, I found the Ikea bit really challenging because it felt as though I was being forced to have some sort of...fun wasn't the word I wanted...I couldn't make sense of how the location was being temperatured [?] – it was only later that I could make sense of that...not meant to be a criticism but it felt like an imposed playfulness. The rest of it felt very familiar, very intuitive. [question from someone else – couldn't make it out] Yes, I could see that it was clues...It might have been different for me if I hadn't known we were coming here. I knew we were coming here and have had to keep that secret for like two months! ... I really enjoyed that way that you grounded people who shared space with us [telling passersby what was happening].

> **Katye:** that's something that I talked about last night and I talked about in the group the day before...in all of the waiting and all of the journey that you don't see, there's so many meetings that are forming a whole other way of meeting the people who really occupy these back spaces and side spaces and upside down spaces. Ummm...it's funny that you talk about wanting to run at the same pace that we're running because tonight was the first night that I thought actually I'd quite like to be, I'd quite like to just stay now because actually the encounters...with incidents – I don't mean like police – the encounters with incidentals are kind of another audience in a way, but they're not an audience who show up or pay for tickets. That's moving something in a way... [couldn't hear]

> **Jia-Yu:** we've been running since Monday and so we've really created relationships with the surroundings, with the people. They're getting used to us now, all of the regulars, and then there's some [didn't hear]...it's all very interesting for us to situate.

> **Katye:** it's just that the same people occupy the same spaces on many evenings so actually you start to become part of their evenings. To me that is a real privilege.

> **Katy Stone:** and actually there was a group of police that walked past us at one point and they said “oh it’s alright, it’s the light ladies”.

> **Lauren:** I think we’ve been shown a real generosity by these people.

>> and Ikea...they let you in...did you ask?

> **Carolyn:** yes, absolutely...Head Office said yes, and then they didn’t bother to tell the rest of the staff. So quite often we were...one of the early times that we tried to run it, there was a security guard on his phone calling somebody and I went up to him and said “It’s ok, we have permission” and told him the name of the person and it was fine, but...it was a bit hairy.

I don’t know if you know but Ikea is almost like the town square. There’s habitually the same people in that restaurant...there’s a table full of Sikh men, I think, who go and play cards all afternoon and drink free refills of coffee all afternoon...and Starbucks is also...the same people every night]

>> there’s also a gang of hide and seek that goes on in Ikea. Teenagers in the city play hide and seek in Ikea. I did a project with kids from a catholic school and I was asking them what their culture was and what they would make a programme about if they were to bring some cameras to the city. And the thing that they said they would like to show is the enormous game of hide and seek in Ikea. So, there may be other play going on that we don’t even know about.

> **Kirstie:** there was a huge game of tag going on ahead of you lot. I’m quite a bit ahead of you...yeah it was fun.

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### **23. transcribed audio – urbflw-fireside 4**

**NOTE:** > symbol denotes a different speaker

>> [initial group discussion about enjoying the view from Eaton House; that the dark weather seemed appropriate; then silence; then after a bit, noting that it is the same people or ‘regulars’ who are every night in front of Starbucks and in the restaurant at IKEA.]

> **Katye:** We also have a journey with...so there’s those people who are visible and then there are also...like the guy by the staircase, I think that’s the third time he’s been sleeping there.

We have a journey of waiting when the audience is not there...which means that any other people that live in these places that are...they can't hang out at places like IKEA or Starbucks. There's kind of layers of hanging out...some by choice.

>> It was actually interesting to walk that slowly through the city and what really stuck out for me was all of the more than temporary homes...like it's not just a bit of cardboard anymore. It's a pop-up bed, it's suitcases, a sign that says 'home sweet home'...yeah they're sad but necessary homes that, you know, you see them but you don't see them, when you're in the city on your own.

> **Katye:** Kirstie works with quite a lot of these people...many of them definitely do have their homes in these places and have been there much longer than we have.

> **Kirstie:** The lady under the underpass, with the bed...she's been there for 10 years or more. . . It's been really nice going to these places where they hang out...and like they are having their own adventure with the 'light ladies'. They want to tell me their story: "did you see the light ladies?" It's nice to hear they're having adventures with the performers, they are having their own little relationship with them.

>> They have been creating their own exaggerated stories about what the dancers are doing...

> **Carolyn:** Did you find the mobile phone videos irritating? interesting? I don't know...

>> Yeah, I have say I found them irritating, I'm afraid. But I don't like being on a phone when I'm walking...it really frustrates me and I find it really annoying when other people do it, and so I found that quite off-putting. I wanted to just experience the walk, or the video, but not both at the same time.

>> It was really hard focusing on just the video because I had to look up every other second so that I didn't run into something. I didn't think I was in any danger but...

>> It's the darkness as well, isn't it

>> But you can watch them again right?

> **Carolyn:** Yes, you can just go look at them....but, I'm guessing...it's a thing we see people doing all the time in the city?

>> Yes...

> **Carolyn:** And maybe none of you people here are prone to doing that? [silence, noises of suppressed amusement]

>> No, it made me even more aware of my irritation [laughter] because I was then one of...

> **Carolyn:** And did you then catch a glimpse of the other half of the audience looking at their phones? [discussion that the timing hadn't worked very well tonight for that to be possible].

>> There was a bit at the end of one of them...it started of looking like a demolition process of a building in the centre of Coventry...I don't know...I mean it wasn't that because it was being demolished on the screen but it made me locate myself.

> **Carolyn:** Did you recognise the building being demolished?

>> No...was it a building here?

> **Carolyn:** Yeah apparently...I mean I didn't film it...I filmed it off the internet...but it was a building close to the train station that was knocked down a few years ago.

>> I remember seeing that machine [speculation about where it might have been and which building...]

>> but then it turned into this apocalyptic fiery vision

> **Carolyn:** the Amazon...

>> yeah, and it made me think of Bolsonaro destroying the Amazon. Was that what it was?

> **Carolyn:** yeah, it was a news clip...

>> yeah, well that was really awful.

>> I just want to ask the performers a question: So, in terms of this performance, what does it mean to you, personally? You must have done it quite a few times...

> **Katye:** yeah this is number 6. Well I can speak from a very Katye place...I've lived and worked in Coventry for 10 years and I curated lots of work when I was...two years ago I left and went freelance. This is the first time I've been invited to perform in something which is about the city. Carolyn and I went for a few walks, earlier in the year, and I was astounded by the change that's happened in relation to what's been torn down...what's been built...what's in front of me on the street...and what's, I guess, happening in the cityscape. And because Coventry is belted by this ring road everything is kind of condensed...so there's something for me about a return...something for me about a very condensed experience...today, now...

in relation to something I have lots of memories of. But in many ways, it feels totally unfamiliar...another place, another...yeah, it's a particular kind of body, the people and stuff. I'm aware of time passing, I'm also performing with two people that I taught...Warren and Annie, who are ex-students. So, there's something about how time passes slowly...and in a flash...at the same time. And then something really particular about today...well, there was something particular about Friday...the huge climate protests beginning...and then today with what is happening in relation to leaving and staying and...so there's a timing to this project that is having fat resonance. [laughter across the group] It feels both empowering and sort of existential at the same time. Like its nothing... [noises of agreement...]

> **Jia-Yu:** For me I think because of the environment we're in...I don't really do a lot of site-based work. I do mostly in the galleries and in the theatre...so to have these surroundings that is so changeable and so unpredictable...I feel like I need to...this sense of sharing this space, this ground, this land we're sharing with everybody and that brings me to kind of to this connection with people around me more...and I'm very aware of the city of Coventry, the history...because I've done the project with Carolyn twice before, in 2016 and 2017 and we've done a lot of research with the local people and we walked through the place...ummm...weeks on end. And so, I kind of know...but in a research aspect. I feel more universal longing of building a place for people to exist and I feel like the city is somehow trying and failing...and to me that's kind of moving...this kind of striving to do something. And yet it's so...and this place is so transient and there are so many students. I come and I see lots of students.

>> Why do you feel like explaining those?

> **Jia-Yu:** Well because they have to tear down so many things and rebuild. It's almost like every other year there's some building being torn down and now there's this new shiny things coming out...and at the same time I kind of feel like people are...it's more alienating rather than bringing people together. I mean, I don't know...I don't live here. But from people I know here, there is this kind of, being driven towards this fast paced changes of a city landscape.

> **Lauren:** well you can just see in just a few years how the homeless population has increased by...I don't even know what the percentage is...I graduated in 2011 and came back last year...completely different...people having to make homes and they're cold and hungry, we haven't made space for them...so just today on that route we walked past, there were two spaces that used to have public toilets that have been filled in. And that has been quite...for me...there are no public bathrooms, nowhere to go to the toilet! And so,

experiencing that kind of...human poo...oh my god that's horrible...I don't want to be in this space actually. And then realising, actually, the city is failing people...it's really heart-breaking. It's been pretty sad to see that everyday...

> **Jia-Yu:** but I also feel like this project for me, and for us, has this kind of anarchic spirit...that we are here and we are with all these people who are there...

> **Katye:** ...and other things too. I say at the beginning there's 12 species of plants on that wasteland and it's true...it's not something that I made up...and I've also counted along the way and I've only been foraging for 3(?) years so I probably didn't identify everything but there are 23 different edible plants on the route that we walked this evening...I'm not including in here [the allotments]. And we've also eaten them...there were these amazing Shaggy Ink Cap mushrooms that popped up on that Telly Tubby grassland outside the station...we're talking about this anarchic thing...there's also this...the ground is still giving us more than what we think we might need right now. So, it's not some historic, romantic idea of what something might be or what something was...there's also a lot of life, very present that still isn't human life but also often gets unnoticed or we don't consider as wild, but actually it's far more wild than I'll ever be. I haven't dared to eat from the wasteland, but I've given myself a challenge that if there's something that's a root, I'll dig it up, and eat it...before we walk away from this place.

[short discussion about safeness of eating plants foraged from the wasteland...then discussion about the poplar trees, the buzzard and its chicks, the magpies arguing with the buzzard]

[comments about the strong scent of lavender outside IKEA; also scent of lavender in the paved circle where Warren was skateboarding; the scent also clinging to the costumes as Kirstie transports them back every night in the car].

>> it was interesting the use of stewards as performers...it was kind of nice...when we were walking just after the bridge and the stewards were also talking...I thought it was kind of fun that they were part of it...and Warren, he did like a skateboard mime, a spin and then pointed out "this way". It was really cool...nice touch.

> **Kirstie:** I never get to see what happens, I just hear what he's gonna do each time

>> does it change?

> **Kirstie:** what did you do yesterday?

> **Warren:** it doesn't change, it just keeps getting better [laughter]

>> yeah so that's a question then...this is the 6<sup>th</sup> time that you've done it. So, what changes have happened responding to the outdoors everyday?

> **Katye:** it changes...I was really aware...the place that I'm really aware of the changes most is when the three of us are standing...you know that part in the shopping centre called West Orchards. And there's just these two stumps left.

>> yeah I know that's so depressing, that.

>> have they been felled quite recently?

>> yeah..it was in July...and there's more that have been pollarded as well

> **Katye:** Last week there was this quite amazing evening when we were standing there and this huge forklift truck with a massive steel beam reversed as we were standing there right out of the place where the three of us run. And we stood there for a very long time while this enormous, floodlit steel beam...and of course you can't know...and like tonight I noticed that it was at eight o'clock and there were these chimes...so the city comes into the performance in extraordinarily different ways. And, I shine a light on the river where the waterfall is...and on Thursday, I think it was, a rat...a huge rat came across the waterfall, and I was like "I'm the follow spot for this rat" and it came across and then eventually swam away. I love it when the action of the city becomes much bigger than, you know, the ridiculousness of us performing really. The material of the city is bigger and more important than what we were doing...

>> there was a moment at the start, with the voice on the phone where he said "we're now in motor city" and a car went "beeeep" [laughter] right on cue

>> and that skateboard, they let you do that. Skateboarding's always...skateboard and BMX have sort of...the unintended consequences of the city's architecture and people are reacting to it, you know...they've made it their playground. And they start skating in places the designers never intended them to. And that sort of mirrors what you were saying at the beginning, that the plants...all those just keep coming up, and they shouldn't be there, but they're edible and they've got this history that goes back. And we as people sort of create our own histories by skateboarding and BMXing around the city but that should never have happened.

> **Carolyn:** there was one night last week where a bunch of BMX teenagers came bombing through where Warren was doing his skateboarding and he didn't stop at all. He just kept

doing it and they just threaded their way through...and...yeah, to the question of whether it's changed, we've been adapting it ever since we started running it last Monday. And so, there've been things that we've altered or changed the timing of or....

> **Jia-Yu:** it also depends on the audience

> **Katye:** but you guys were super amazingly obedient [laughter]

> **Jia-Yu:** I notice myself, every time I get to IKEA and when I see Kirstie and I ask, "how are the audience...are they fast...are they on time?" So, you know how much time you have...

>> I'm going to refer to IKEA as the secret abundance from now on [laughter]...or the not-so-secret abundance...

>> that was my favourite bit...I just loved it. And then when the door closed you said, "What was that?...that was the hedgehog" and I just lost it [even more laughter]

> **Jia-Yu:** no but you see, these are all accumulative so like you say, what's changed...everytime that I hear Marc saying okay that's the buzzard, so I know that tomorrow I will add that. So, things are being digested in different ways.

> **Carolyn:** and the hedgehog...we actually had one on the path, we were coming along and there was a hedgehog right in the middle and it didn't want to move, it was terrified and we had to wait till it left

[then suddenly, time for everyone to go...]

#### **24. transcribed audio – conversation**

**J:** I thought that bit with the two stumps was moving and profound and that there was a...what I got was a suggestion...we were going downhill and then we got to that fountain, and there was a suggestion of an underground river flowing, but because I know that that's one of your underlying themes. But I felt like there could have been a much more dramatic exploration of those two dead stumps by the dancers. I thought that what they did there wasn't enough, it didn't convey enough of a message. All the way through....there was this whole dystopian, apocalyptic McCarthy's 'The Road'...I found it very moving...yeah, quite scary...because the bit after that when we went down and then we started walking very

slowly and then the performers started humming, I found that really creepy. That was like something out of *The Shining*. I found that really creepy.

**Carolyn:** Could you tell what we were humming to?

**J:** No.

**Carolyn:** That's too bad...nobody noticed. There was an air-conditioning sound in there...

**J:** Ahhhh...

**Carolyn:** and we start humming with that, in the exact same tone...and then playing against it...so going in and off of it...creating this sense of dis-ease because of the slight disharmonies and going in and out of harmony

**J:** ahhhhhh...because I couldn't work it out, I was thinking is this an air-conditioning noise? Is this some kind of background noise from the shopping centre...or is this the performers?

**Carolyn:** yeah because I was humming, the performers and the hosts as well...so we were all humming

**J:** Ahhhhh....I found that really creepy, but in the *Rivers of London* books they talk about this whole alternate reality where magic exists...all this sort of liminal, secret world that you only see when you're initiated into it. They have this thing, the author Ben Aronovitch creates this thing, he calls them the demi-mondes – they're not quite faery and they're not quite human. So maybe their father or their mother was spiritual-like faery or something. And he's also got all these river goddesses...and that's what I really found the performers that they were sort of like that to me. They were not quite human, not quite spirits, not quite pagan, not quite genius loci, but something like a melding in-between. They seemed to become more fox-like, the further we got on through the piece...like more fur appeared and gloves came on and they became more fox-like. The way they sort of popped out of the middle of nowhere as well, it was sort of like this little fox staring at ya...and so it was sort of an exploration of the magical that still exists but is secret and you only really know it if you look for it, or if someone initiates you into it, or if your mom's a witch. I found it really profound...yeah it was scary as well.

**Carolyn:** yes, as you can tell, foxes were an important thing...and there's no surprises there because you know my predilections...and the series of encounters that weirdly were so...after living here for 13 years, and then in the months before I went to do this piece, I was having these really amazing encounters. And then also, we'd seen a fox in March when I was doing

the audition...in the publicity shots is a video still from the video I shot of that fox...and then Katy Coe, the dancer with the orange hair, the foxy hair, she was there as well and saw that fox in March and because she lives in Kenilworth nearby she made a point then for the next month or so of whenever she was taking the train to go from Coventry to London she would go early in the morning – you know 6am or something – and go and sit near the patch of wild ground that we'd seen the fox...and she saw it more times...you know playing...and she'd just sit there and watch it. So, she was having additional encounters with that fox and then since we've been working on the piece this summer, we haven't seen it. I don't know...it could have got run over or something but...ummm we were looking at different sorts of mythology about foxes and you know I got this book. And then it was Jia-Yu who said that we should look at the Japanese legends about foxes and that's where the name Kitsune came from...that's Japanese for 'fox'. The Kitsune are magical shapeshifters that are part human, part fox and they can pass for human but sometimes they slip-up and a bit of fur starts showing...

**J:** The Chinese have the same thing...the seven-tailed fox.

**Carolyn:** yes...so we decided that that's what they were, they were kind of this wild...and that's kind of standing in for the wild spirit, the magical wildness that's always there but we don't always see it. And so they became these creatures...it was a bit obvious in a way...the way the costumes were but...the colours...

**J:** I don't think it was obvious, you know they gradually became more fox-like. And they had this sort of trickster element to them...you couldn't quite trust them. Like at the beginning when she said, "I'm the guide but you might not be able to take everything I said verbatim". They were really playful sort of spirits...liminal, bordering on human, bordering on animal, bordering on archetypes or you know genius loci. Yeah, I thought it was fascinating! I thought it was really, really well done. And it's really chimed with a lot of things I've been reading of lately...yeah it really worked well. I think it's one of the best pieces you've ever done, to be honest.

I thought the beginning was quite weak. I mean in front of the building when they were just walking around and then Katy was talking about the plants. I didn't really...I mean it was such a barren patch of ground, surrounded by cars and all the rest of it and...please, I'm trying to be constructive...I mean what do I know about dance...I thought it could be more dramatic, what they were doing didn't quite convey much. But the further we got into the piece...it really was...I really found it quite profound. And then when we got to the allotment and then all of a sudden you were in this oasis. You know you walk down this dodgy little side road and there's these used car sales places and industrial units and then you open this door and

you're in this magical allotment! But they were more like farms than allotments...I've never seen allotments like that. Incredible...absolutely gorgeous. Completely silent...a real feeling...you've got the river flowing by...a real feeling of something trying to burst forth. And this nature just so close into the heart of the city. It was only about 15-20 minute walk from the centre of the city. And it was really quite bizarre...I'm just plodding along...really, really incredible.

**Carolyn:** thank you...not a lot of people have sent their thoughts yet, but there are others who chime with what you're saying. It's nice to hear that, because that's what we were kind of trying to do...and actually my first experience of going to that allotments was in daylight. We walked all the way, straight across the whole centre of the city, under the ring road and then across the centre and then under the ring road and then not quite the same way that we went with the piece but I have this profound memory of coming round this corner...we were walking on a really busy road past a shopping centre, and we came around a corner, and it was like "what is this place?" There were those tall poplars and the busy road was Four Pounds Lane and the park across the way was Lakeview park...that's really nice as well, where the river continues to flow. And yeah, it was like "... this is gorgeous" And then we turned and went into the allotments and I was just blown away by it. In some ways I was really just trying to recreate that moment, that sense of that place. Of course, it's very different at night. The other thing that was magical, way back when I met Marc and Greg who run the allotments and I was telling them about my fox encounters in London and Marc who is the boss of the allotments, he said that I was a fox whisperer, from the stories I was telling. And he said, well you're gonna see them here because we have them in this area – but we never did see them. I never did see them. But, the last maybe three or four performances, we could hear them and they'd seen the fox right in the allotment. Yeah there was one night last week where we came in and Marc said yeah there is a fox here tonight and we could hear it in the bush but it didn't make itself visible. And there were some of the nights when we came in with the audience and were going and the thing is, I think it's because everyone was so silent, you know? And we could hear rustles and flutters, all kinds of stuff, it was really alive...with little animals and birds and bats...so magical. And I just felt like, because we bring people in in that state, the animals feel that, you know? They come because they know that we're sort of with them in a way.

**J:** The bit when we got into IKEA, I thought was just so funny. What was it? The Secret Abundance...that was like something out of a post-apocalyptic scenario. "Come look at the concrete remains of the previous gods, who destroyed our world. Look at what they used to do. Look at the abundance they used to have". I thought that was really funny, really

playful...but also quite scary. It was like she was the only survivor, or she's a member of a small band of survivors and they wander the remnants of our so-called civilisation, post-apocalypse and they're scavenging whatever hard fought remains there is inside IKEA. Once a month they wander into the shopping malls and try to scavenge whatever's left. And the reactions of the people in the IKEA, just they were like "what the fuck is going on". There was a bloke on his phone and he was at a window that we looked out and he was talking on his phone and he's talking to his mate "yeah, I think I'm in the middle of a performance, I'm going to make a move now".

## **25. transcribed audio – conversation**

**K:** It really gave me a strong feeling of wilderness in the middle of a city...which was very precious and that feeling of the fox fleeting, you know that always out of reach and there and then not there...it was really quite a wild way to go through Coventry and it...you felt like on the edge of it and you felt like we were likely peripheral to the city...seeking out safe places in the city.

**Carolyn:** safe places?

**K:** yeah, because it felt like...being with the foxes...the women, the dancers...and then coming across groups of people, I felt very much like I didn't want to be with the other people for very long. I wanted to be on the outside and I wanted to keep moving. And we went past a bar and they were looking at us and we were looking at them. You know it's very intense. You can only do that for so long and you're like, "right, I'm out of here". Which is very fox behaviour, isn't it? You know, they kind of hang about a bit, and then they're like, gone. And thought there was like really beautiful moments when ummm...so the skateboarder when he just took off...that was very like a fox moment wasn't it? Yeah I don't know...the way they were running, it really put me in touch with running and...you know I always think I'm not a runner now...you know I only run for the bus, but umm actually how beautiful if was to be with people running through the city.

**Carolyn:** there were quite a few people who said that they wished they could run with them...that they felt like they wanted to join in

**K:** It actually made me feel like maybe I could live in another city and not London because of all these in-between spaces and all this nature in the middle of the city that's not developed and it's not full of cranes and it's not all about property of...Coventry felt freer because of that. And I thought it was interesting...when you took us through IKEA, I thought it was

interesting and then when she started pointing out all the...this is where the pumpkins are and I thought, "okay, yeah" And then we went to the allotments where there was all the pumpkins...she was describing what the allotments were in IKEA. And then, I really liked that. So yeah, I thought it had a nice wild freeness to it, that I liked. I think I felt a little uncomfortable going through the homelessness, where the homeless people stay. I probably would have liked a bit more permission, rather than feeling like a voyeur. But at the same time, I thought this is interesting...I'm going to a place that I'd probably not normally go to... I would normally stay away from this. So, I had mixed feelings about that.

**Carolyn:** absolutely. I mean, we made a point of speaking to them all...but I was a little uncomfortable with the way that the performers chalked arrows right to where that guy was living...which I didn't want them to do... I mean that feels like we're using him, though I know it wasn't their intention to do that.

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