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COMMUNIQUÉ FOUR

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AUTUMN 2020

# INTRODUCING: HOME AND OTHER HABITATS

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# WELCOME

BY RYAN HUGHES AND DR MICHAEL PIGOTT

Coventry Biennial 2021: HYPER-POSSIBLE will explore the legacies of artist-led networks, activisms and pedagogies that have emerged from and through the local area since the 1960s. Many of these networks galvanised around domestic spaces. Art & Language published their journal from a house on Jubilee Crescent and the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit moved their activities to an apartment above Body Shop on The Parade in Leamington Spa after disagreements at the University of Warwick.

There is an outstanding local precedent for artistic and cultural activity in the domestic, but the question of what a home actually is is much more complex.

What is a home?

Home is an everyday feeling. It is banal but beautiful. Or sometimes it is a surface with hidden depths, hidden secrets. It can be a source of hope, a destination promising a new life. Home is a place one finds after a long journey, possibly through difficult times and hostile environments. Home is also a

nostalgic memory, one that possibly never existed in quite the way that we remember it. It is somewhere left behind, in the past, or in the distance.

'Home' is a vague and multivalent concept, but 'housing' is a much more concrete proposition. This year, because of Covid-19, our relationship with the idea and realities of both home and housing have undergone significant metamorphosis. This has impacted families, work, education, aesthetics, politics and every other aspect of our lives.

We recently announced that we will be working with Ayo Akingbade and Laura Dicken and in this issue in our series of Communiqués we introduce their practices in more detail while also providing some insight into what they will present during HYPER-POSSIBLE. Housing, and its material, political and cultural implications, is a concern for both of these artists.

Ayo Akingbade is a filmmaker whose work investigates the commitment of people to the places they live. Her social

## ARTIST ANNOUNCEMENTS

housing trilogy, *No News Today*, charts a variety of relationships between community, activism, art and place in the local spaces of London's East End, and it does so in a way that is vibrant, sincere and searching. Similarly, Laura Dicken shares that commitment to people and the places that they live in and much of her practice is co-created with different community groups. Her *Out of the Darkness* project was made with homeless people and focused on developing a sense of belonging and amplifying the voices and concerns of her collaborators.

Following these introductions we republish a text that Alan Van Wijgerden, who will also participate in HYPER-POSSIBLE, originally shared via Facebook about squatting in Coventry in the 1980s and we're so pleased to present a selection of insightful photographs that he made in people's homes during this time. This Communiqué then concludes with a newly commissioned piece of writing by local artist (and long time Coventry Biennial collaborator) Helen Kilby Nelson. In this text

she attempts to analyse what homes mean in relation to community, body, race, and architecture.

As the geographer Doreen Massey has written, place is an accumulation of '*stories-so-far*'. Places are fluid, ever-changing amalgams of the people that have lived in them, and the stories that they have brought with them. This publication provides an initial glimpse of our research into homes and our relationships with them, and introduces just the first few artists that we'll be working with on this strand of the HYPER-POSSIBLE programme. More information will be released early in the new year, hopefully following the end of the second Covid-19 lockdown that we're currently living through in this country, which has once again impacted how we live in homes and other habitats.

Following the initial artist announcements that we made in the first issue in our series of Communiqués in the summer of 2020, we have continued to develop the HYPER-POSSIBLE programme and were delighted to announce additional artists during the UK City of Culture 2021 programme release in October. These further artists, who will be exhibiting work during Coventry Biennial 2021, are:

**Ayo Akingbade**  
**Faye Claridge**  
**Laura Dicken**  
**Alan Van Wijgerden**  
**melissandre varin**

We are continuing to develop the HYPER-POSSIBLE programme and still anticipate that over the coming months we will be able to confirm and announce projects with around a further 40 artists or groups who will respond to themes arising from our three art historical starting points.

As Ryan and Michael highlighted in their introduction text, the artists who were involved in these moments in the city's history had unique

relationships to homes, houses and the places that they lived and worked in.

Of those artists that we announced in October Ayo, Laura and Alan are each particularly interested in these ideas around home, housing and belonging.

Over the coming pages you'll be able to discover more about their works, find out what being involved in HYPER-POSSIBLE means to them, see some of their past works and gain an early insight into some of the things that they are already working on ahead of next year.



## FILM STILL

AYO AKINGBADE  
*STREET 66*  
 16MM FILM & 2K VIDEO  
 2018

AT ANGELL TOWN COMMUNITY PROJECT, BRIXTON

PHOTOGRAPH: THE ANGELL TOWN COMMUNITY  
 PROJECT

## AYO AKINGBADE

Ayo Akingbade is an artist, writer and director. Her work often addresses urbanism, gentrification, notions of power and issues related to social housing.

Ayo's contribution to Coventry Biennial 2021: *HYPER-POSSIBLE* will include the presentation of her trilogy of films called *No News Today*. This body of works includes *Tower XYZ*, *Street 66* and *Dear Babylon*. Dessane Lopez Cassell, Editor of Reviews at Hyperallergic described this trio of short films as "a poignant ode to public housing".

These documentary-style films, made between 2016 and 2019 explore our relationships to home, community and place in a way that is rooted in London but which resonates with a much wider range of British neighbourhoods.

Ayo explained via a manifesto that she produced for ICA, London that:

*"I have stories I want to share – important ones,*

*about London and the wider diasporic community. Ones that I am not seeing being told, so I am creating, slowly. Which is fun."*

She goes on to explain in Le Cinéma Club how:

*"Often the depictions of social issues in British cinema are grim kitchen-sink tales, with dull colour palettes and negative reverb. My artistic vision is to weave a rich tapestry of intimate sounds and words, bright cinematography and obscure portraiture into a cohesive energy that will penetrate the heart."*

Ayo previously participated in Bloomberg New Contemporaries and has exhibited at, and been commissioned by galleries and festivals including ICA, London; Chisenhale Gallery, London and the Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival.





## WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

LAURA DICKEN  
*OUT OF THE DARKNESS WORKSHOP*  
PHOTOGRAPH  
2016

IN WOLVERHAMPTON

PHOTOGRAPH: LAURA DICKEN

## LAURA DICKEN

Laura Dicken is a socially engaged artist and producer based in the Black Country. She most frequently works with photographic processes and has recently been developing a series of moving image artworks.

We have commissioned Laura to co-create a new artwork with citizens of Coventry, continuing her ongoing research into heritage and migration. She explains:

*"I hope to facilitate windows of opportunity for previously untold stories to be shared authentically and with agency. My process is primarily built upon meaningful connection and conversation".*

Laura has previously exhibited at UNSEEN Photography Festival, Amsterdam and Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool and has recently received commissions from Multistory and Creative Black Country.

Over the coming months Laura will be meeting people and groups in Coventry. She explains:

*"I am committed to giving any participants I may collaborate with the time and space they need to offer as much of themselves as they feel comfortable to share.*

*My hope whilst making work is to connect with participants and audiences to offer a genuine and collaborative exchange."*

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If you would like to share your stories of heritage and migration and are interested in working with Laura on the creation of this exciting new artwork then please email:

[info@coventrybiennial.com](mailto:info@coventrybiennial.com)







# SQUATS

BY ALAN VAN WIJGERDEN

Tom was hit hard by a policeman who said “*We don’t have squats on the M1*”. An event that led to an indeterminate court case. The main squat was 3 Binley Road. A location now under the tarmac of a bypass that follows the old railway line. Although later they also used an old brewery that had latterly been part of a wholesale supply company. And which also was demolished some decades ago to make way for the new bus station. Even the road that went past it is gone. Tom was the main protagonist behind the squats. Was it just that they didn’t have the cash to pay rent as other students did? I’m not sure. But my first introduction to the squats, which I thought was exciting, was 3 Binley Road. I didn’t know what to expect and it was a large house that would have been very expensive. The later warehouse was much more exciting, it had a working lift and there was enough empty space to lark about and play football. The bedrooms were in the old offices, one had been the manager’s office. There was electric but no water. No heating of course so it would have been freezing cold in the winter. Somehow my memories of the places are always in summer in sunshine, and the

place was really warm. I always lived in rented accommodation, not in halls of residence, but what we called a shared house, well before these things were called HMOs, houses in multiple occupation. This was my first experience of moving away from parents. The first thing you found is that all the old shared houses pretty much were hard to heat in winter. And what heating there was to be had was generally two bar electric fires. The ideal was a gas fire. And a bedroom with a gas fire was much coveted. So influential that my then favourite college band called itself *Gas Fires*. It was very appropriate for a college band. The squats though, some people from town did move in, but 3 Binley Road really came to an end when what was referred to as the “heavy” dossers moved in, and frightening violent events happened. There were some fairly wild parties that happened at 3 Binley Road. Though I don’t remember any parties at the warehouse. I don’t have any contact with people who squat today. It was a fairly rough way of living. Tom and friends did move back to 3 Binley Road later on after the warehouse. But lived in the concrete double garage to one side of the house. This prefab

garage was later stolen. Who and how no one knew. But it was typical of the sort of thing that could happen around the squats then. It really was a fairly wild way to live. And to a student from a fairly sheltered background, who had romantic ideas about what student life was like, having seen the TV documentaries about life in California in the sixties, Berkley and UCLA and so on, it was exciting. Now it just comes over as being a bit of a dubious way to live. But hey in the heat of a summer evening sat around a campfire in 3 Binley Road it was all happening and had an exciting future. And you didn’t know where people were going, and what the future might hold. You could always tell when someone had had been round 3 Binley Road later on because they smelt of wood burning. I remember someone saying I smelt hippy. Later on, perhaps in winter, a group of people lived behind 3 Binley Road in a round tent with a hole in the middle to vent the large fire in the centre that kept them all warm of a night. Kat had what was called a bender. A tent made from branches bent over into an arch and covered by a tarpaulin to keep it dry. She had a large homemade stove like a potbellied man to keep it warm. I spent many hours talking to people from the squats. They were largely working class. Although one or two did come from very well to do backgrounds. It was mainly

students off the art courses, and fine art in particular. I’m sure modern students would be horrified, not a router in sight, no mobile phones, a few Apple IIe computers at college. Communication was mainly by word of mouth and maybe a poster or two on the fifth floor. I remember one important message to me was chalked on the pavement at the bottom of the art fac (Graham Sutherland) main stairs. The squats mainly ended when Tom left the college. He went on to be a film director. Of the rest they drifted away as they graduated. Although in the middle of this stream of life no one thought of the experience ending. Everything seemed so important and political ideas and outlooks much talked about. And yes, almost fought over. It wasn’t like the TV programme *The Young Ones*, it was much more down to earth than that. Mainly I think because, as I say, so many of the people were working class. I miss many of the aspects of those days now. It was all very exciting and life was really lived!

Alan Van Wijgerden originally posted this text on his Facebook page on the 17th August 2020. It is republished here with his kind permission.



PHOTOGRAPH

ALAN VAN WIJGERDEN  
*BENDER 1*  
 PHOTOGRAPH  
 1982

AT THE 3 BINLEY ROAD SQUAT

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN VAN WIJGERDEN

PAGES 9 - 10:

ALAN VAN WIJGERDEN  
*BINLEY ROAD SQUAT 8*  
 PHOTOGRAPH  
 1982

AT THE 3 BINLEY ROAD SQUAT

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN VAN WIJGERDEN



PHOTOGRAPH

ALAN VAN WIJGERDEN  
*BENDER 4*  
 PHOTOGRAPH  
 1982

AT THE 3 BINLEY ROAD SQUAT

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN VAN WIJGERDEN





PHOTOGRAPH

ALAN VAN WIJGERDEN  
*BINLEY ROAD SQUAT 4*  
PHOTOGRAPH  
1982

AT THE 3 BINLEY ROAD SQUAT

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN VAN WIJGERDEN

**Sometimes Alan's work is a mystery to us, other times we feel like we were there with him. He has a knack of capturing the spirit of times we remember, or times we think we might have remembered, had we been there.**

**Mark Cook, Historian at Photo Miners**



# Home COMPLEX Home

## BY HELEN KILBY NELSON

### HOME

Definition:

i) The district or country where one is born or has settled for a long time. (1)

COMMENCE UNPACKING:

### WHERE ONE IS BORN

Why **stop**/start there? The Home Office decided to stop there, to put a full-stop after the word 'born' and ignore the rest of the sentence, when they took away the rights and the autonomy of the Windrush generation. When they ignored lives lived, years spent, families made, homes created.

"This is not your home", they were told, "Your home is ...

"...the district or country where one is born"

## END OF!

It mattered/matters not the years lived in Jamaica v. the years lived in England.

Award winning photographer, Andrew Jackson gave a talk back in 2018 for New Art West Midlands' *Accelerator* talks programme at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery.

At the time he was working on *From a Small Island*, the first chapter of a trilogy of works, exhibited at Midlands Art Centre and in 2019 at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum as part of Coventry Biennial 2019: The Twin.

He spoke openly and candidly about his experience of being a second generation migrant of Jamaican descent, born in the UK. He spoke of feeling dislocated both in England and in Jamaica. In the UK he is viewed as Jamaican. In Jamaica he is viewed as English. His works continue to search and explore identity and belonging and what that means.



INSTALLATION SHOT (CB19)

ANDREW JACKSON  
*VARIOUS WORKS (FROM A SMALL ISLAND)*  
2018

AT THE HERBERT ART  
GALLERY & MUSEUM

PHOTOGRAPH: MARCIN SZ

Where is home?

...the district or country where one is born

As long as:

Your skin colour is the same as the majority		✓
You were born here	✓	

## SKIN

Definition:

- i) The tissue forming the outer covering of the vertebrate body.

Alt:

## CLADDING

Definition:

- i) A protective coating. (1)
- ii) Cladding is the skin of your house - it's the outer layer that helps to insulate and protect it from the elements, and it enhances your home's appearance, too. (2)

## ENHANCE

Definition:

- i) Increase the quality, value, or extent of.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman's work, *Estate* (2010) challenged the prejudice perpetuated by supposed 'council house symbols' (3). Zimmerman worked with fellow residents of the tower blocks in Haggerton, Hackney, London, due for demolition, enhancing the orange boarded up windows and decaying building with a display of portraits of the people living within them. It is an analogy perhaps that a structure alone is not an indicator of home but instead the people living within the building and the area. The presence of rows of faces at once subvert the dehumanisation they had previously been subjected to; each flat a home and each tower block a community providing a wider sense of home.

## COMMUNITY

Definition:

- i) A group of people living together in one place.

## PLACE

Definition:

- i) A particular position or area.

During Coventry Biennial 2017: The Future, Katie Hodson and Aleksander Wojtukiewicz performed *Bodies and Buildings*, a participatory yoga session, in The Box at Fargo Village. Bodies were placed and positioned within a place. Hodson and Wojtukiewicz were exploring the relationship between our bodies and buildings within the city. In an interview in 2017, Hodson commented on how participants felt at ease as they had been invited into the building. (4)

## INVITE

Definition:

- i) Ask someone in a friendly or formal way to go somewhere or do something.

## SOMEWHERE

Definition:

- i) In or to an unspecified or unknown place.

# HOME IS NOT SOMEWHERE

## BODY

Definition:

- i) The whole physical structure of a person or an animal.



## PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION (CB17)

KATIE HODSON & ALEKSANDER WOJTULEWICZ  
*BODIES AND BUILDINGS (ARTIST-LED YOGA)*  
2017

AT THE BOX, FARGO VILLAGE

PHOTOGRAPH: EMILY JONES

## STRUCTURE

Definition:

- i) The arrangement of and relations between the parts of something COMPLEX.

There is an undeniable reference too, not only the complexities of home, but also the fragility of the concept of home within its different contexts in the work of Donald Rodney (1961 - 1998), "*one of the most central and important founding figures involved in the Midlands-based BLK Art Group during the 1980s*". (5)

Rodney uses the structure of the house in his works, *The House that Jack Built* (1987) and his later work, *In the House of My Father* (1996 - 1997). Both powerful statements and questions on the concept of home, *In the House of My Father*, is a miniature house made from the artist's own skin and *The House that Jack Built*, is a series of x-rays of the artist's body placed on the house.

Rodney's use of his own body struggling with sickle cell anaemia in his work, was not just a representation of that struggle, but one that dug much deeper to become an allegory of the complexity of the ideology of home in contemporary society.

## COMPLEX

Definition:

- i) adj. Consisting of many different and connected parts.
- i) noun. A group of similar buildings or facilities on the same site.

The complexities of our relationship with buildings, home and place have been explored in diverse ways by the artists presented in this text. A complex of artworks perhaps? Add to these the most recent changes to the idea of home: "*we don't work from home, we now live at work*". (6)

## WORK

Definition:

- i) Activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a result.

What is 'home' in contemporary society?

# HOME IS NOT SOMETHING

## SOMETHING

Definition:

- i) An unspecified or unknown thing.

If home is not something is it, ergo, nothing and does that explain societal and political behaviour towards who has authorship of it?

## NOTHING

Definition:

- i) Not anything.
- ii) Something that is not important or interesting.

# HOME IS NO THING

## REFERENCES

(1) Collins English Dictionary

(2) <https://www.idealhome.co.uk/project-planning/rendering-a-house-everything-you-need-to-know-203271#:~:text=Cladding>

(3) Zimmerman, et al., 2010. Estate: Myrdle Court Press

(4) Kilby Nelson, interview with Hodson. K., 2017

(5) <https://museumgeographies.wordpress.com/2017/06/30/black-art-matters-reflecting-on-the-life-works-and-art-political-legacy-of-donald-rodney-1961-1998/>

(6) The Guardian - paraphrase

(7) Definitions: Oxford English dictionary unless otherwise indicated.

## COMING SOON: 21 ANNOUNCEMENTS

In January 2021 we will be making 21 new announcements of artists that we will be working with, programmes that we will be delivering and organisations that we will be partnering with during Coventry Biennial 2021: HYPER-POSSIBLE.

Although UK City of Culture 2021 have moved their starting date back to May 2021 in response to the shifting COVID-19 restrictions, we are pleased to mark what would have been the beginning of this exciting year in the city with a series of announcements that are designed to provide the greatest insight into our programme of exhibitions, activities and events that we have released so far.

Ryan Hughes, our Artistic Director, explains that:

*"Our team have been working tirelessly since Coventry Biennial 2019 closed, developing an inspiring and enjoyable programme to be delivered as a part of UK City of Culture 2021.*

*The projects that we have lined up and that are ready to be announced in January include new opportunities for local artists, major*

*international collaborations, details on venues that we will be making exhibitions in and further introductions to artists that will be contributing outstanding new artworks and projects to the HYPER-POSSIBLE programme.*

*Our team have made great progress while fundraising, building partnerships and developing activities and we can't wait to share more detail around what we'll be presenting next year!"*

These new announcements will add to the activities that we've already shared and will grow our current HYPER-POSSIBLE artist list that currently includes:

**Ayo Akingbade**  
**Ryan Christopher**  
**Faye Claridge**  
**Laura Dicken**  
**Georgiou & Tolley**  
**Grace Ndiritu**  
**Alan Van Wijgerden**  
**melissandre varin**  
**Duncan Whitley**

Coventry Biennial 2021 will open on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2021 and will run until January 2022.

Coventry Biennial is a social, political and critical platform for contemporary art. In recent years our exhibitions, events and activities in galleries and more unusual locations have attracted over half a million visitors including local residents, artists and art professionals from across the UK, and cultural tourists from around the world.

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



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