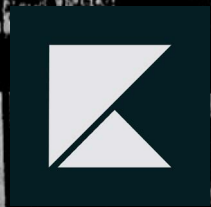




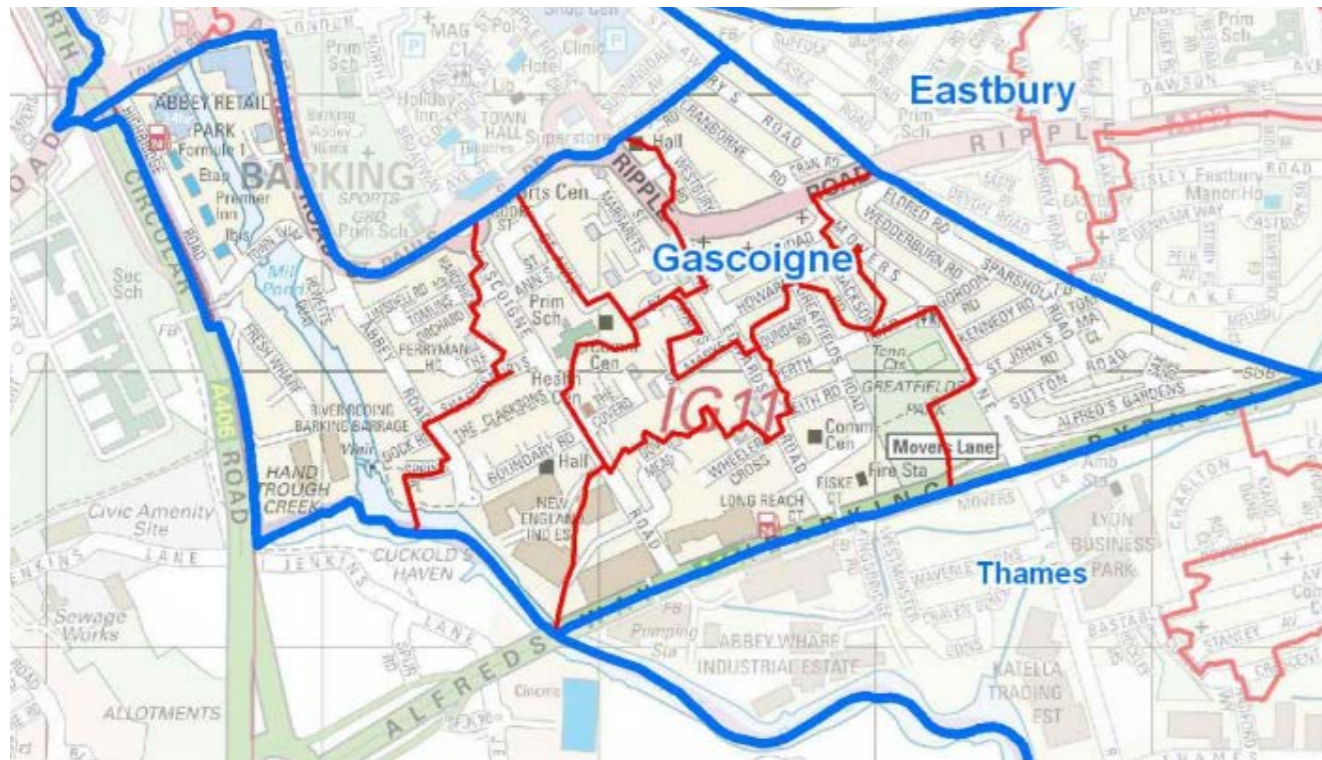
SOCIAL HOUSING
AND MOBILITY
IN 2017:

THE GASCOIGNE
ESTATE

A CREATIVE
INVESTIGATION
BY STEVE LAWES



Gascoigne Ward, Barking and Dagenham



Social Housing and Mobility in 2017: The Gascoigne Estate

A Creative Investigation
Steve Lawes

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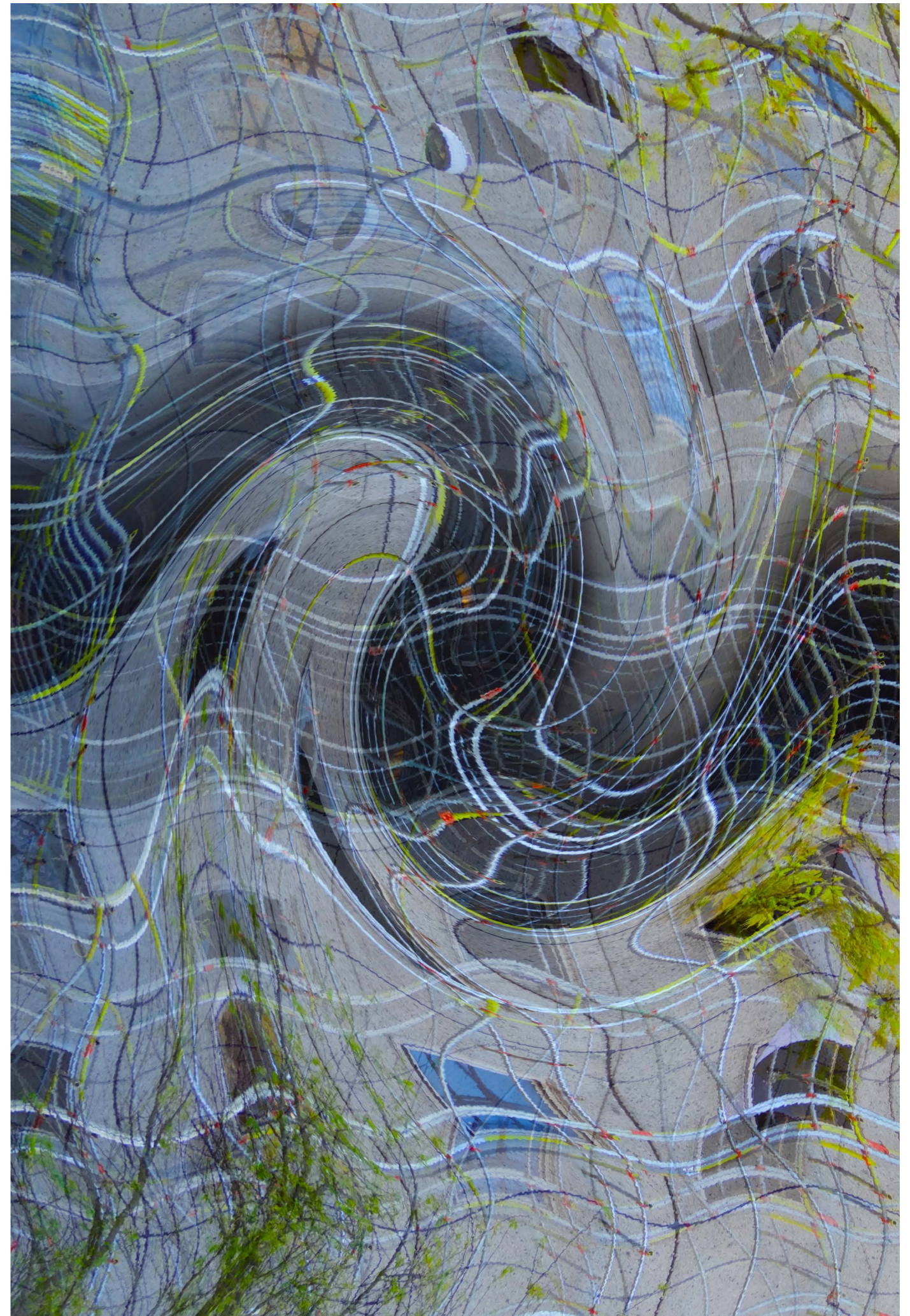
Introduction

The following is a series of ideas which have been growing and evolving in my mind over the last two to three years. I had an acute awareness of gentrification as something that I'd heard of, mainly from snippets on the news, and from going in and out of London on a regular basis to notice the skylines changing gradually. The term soon flooded to the forefront of my consciousness in September 2015 when I began working on the Gascoigne Estate in Barking, during an intense period of its ongoing regeneration. For one year I worked for Studio 3 Arts, an arts charity based on the estate, as Project Officer on *Open Estate*, a heritage and arts project designed to preserve and share the memories, stories and social history of the estate as told by its tenants and workers. I conducted historical interviews, had conversations and made art with local people. I met an array of incredible and interesting people from a plethora of different backgrounds and ages, who all had the Estate in common. Hearing their perspectives on what was happening around them whilst they witnessed the beginnings of a huge transitions in their own lives was both at times enlightening and distressing.

I am attempting to come to terms with, both analytically and personally, the story of the estate in the wider context of London's current transformation. Right now, towers that we put up between the 1950s and 1970s are torn down with ferocious rapidity, and replaced with new buildings. At a glance, this may not be such a bad thing; many of these towers are in a state of disrepair and foster a low quality of life for their tenants - one of the main complaints of Gascoigne residents was that their ceilings were forever leaking. But it's a double-edged sword: with rapidly increasing wealth inequality, and the forced movements of communities away from each other, where does a line in the way we build and own property have to be drawn? Are these new regeneration projects going to benefit local people? What does it say about how we as a society regard people of different ethnicities and class? Will the current regeneration of London provide housing security for future generations?

This presentation is multidisciplinary, a decision which I hope will reflect the complexity of the issue which it is trying to get to grips with. The topics at hand are multifaceted and difficult, coloured furthermore by my own biases and experiences. The project utilizes a combination of poetry, visual arts, graphic design, photography and essay writing. I intend to demonstrate that academic inquiry alone does not always give enough colour and nuance to a situation; indeed, many people without academic backgrounds find it inaccessible. As such, I hope the creative work contained within can help to give a more nuanced and accessible portrayal of the situation.

- Steve Lawes



Wealth Inequality, Housing and the future of London's Working Class: The Gascoigne Estate

London is a metropolis where people of almost every conceivable race, ethnicity, nation, language, gender, sexuality and background come together to live their lives. A literal melting pot, it is on average a couple degrees warmer than anywhere else in the U.K. There are, as recorded in the last census in 2011, over 8 million people registered to addresses in the city (at the time of writing, recent estimates are now suggesting that number has risen to around 10 million people¹); it's the biggest city within the EU – The second biggest city is Berlin, which has less than half of London's population. Over 37% of the people living in London were not born in the UK, making it significantly more diverse than the national average.² Added into this melting pot is the added difference between people in terms of class and wealth. The city is home to some of the absolute wealthiest, and comparatively poorest, people on the planet. The gulf between these groups has increased exponentially in the seven years since the financial crash, with the top 1000 earners in the country doubling their personal wealth in that period.³

There is a fair amount of evidence which suggests that much of this wealth is being held by non-British elites; the UK has become something of a haven for financial elites from China, Singapore and Russia amongst others. A report by New World Wealth shows that between 2000 and 2014, around 125,000 'High Net Worth Individuals' (HNWIs) moved into the UK, more than twice the amount of the second highest recipient of HNWIs, the USA, for the same period. This has propelled the UK to the third in the list of countries with the most HNWIs.⁴ Of the top 15 richest people in the Sunday Times' Rich List 2017, 10 are foreign nationals, and 2 of these hold dual citizenships in their home nation and the UK.⁵ This year's top ranked

1 <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/london-population/>

2 <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/london-population/>

3 <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/apr/26/recession-rich-britains-wealthiest-double-net-worth-since-crisis>

4 <http://nebula.wsimg.com/33c082a103704a172bf3bd8d8288db65?AccessKeyId=70E2D0A589B97BD-675FB&disposition=0&alloworigin=1> pp.2, 7

5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunday_Times_Rich_List_2017; <http://features.thesundaytimes.co.uk/richlist/live/>

entity, the Hinduja Group, was originally founded in India before the company moved its operations to London in 1979. This influx of non-British elites has happened at the same time as the richest one percent in this country doubled their wealth.⁶ One might ponder the possibility of a relationship between these two occurrences.

It appears that many of these newly domiciled elites (alongside their British-born peers) have begun to push forward with a policy of buying up land and property in London, and either leaving it unoccupied for long periods of time as it grows in value, renting them out at inflated prices, or destroying the existing properties to build either offices or newer, more expensive flats. A housing survey by Tower Hamlets Council concluded that around 60% of new homes built in London are bought by overseas investors, and a 'high proportion of them are kept empty.'⁷ As a result, by the end of 2016, 26% of people in London were renting privately – 8% more than any other region in the country – and 22% lived in social housing – the second highest percentage in the UK, only to the North East and Scotland. For the first time since the 1980s, more people in London now rent than have a mortgage or own property, as the increase in house prices alongside stagnation of wages has meant that raising enough for a deposit has become a near impossibility, especially for young people who are just beginning in the world of work. There is a real danger that the rapidly increasing rent and housing prices in the capital, especially in conjunction with housing benefit changes, will increase homelessness as low-income families are priced out of the private rental market.⁸

There are several confusing and seemingly contradictory things happening in the London housing market. On the one hand, as we have covered, there is an increase in the very wealthy moving to England, and simply buying properties and land here to make profit, through building, sub-letting or leaving them empty as the land increases in value. A map shown in the Metro shows that there was between 12,800 and 20,000 empty dwellings in London in 2016.⁹ At the same time, 1.3% of the total of London's housing stock was declared as second homes for tax purposes.¹⁰ London's population (due to high birth rates and increased migration from abroad¹¹) is also experiencing a fast-paced net increase, out-pacing the building of new

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/apr/26/recession-rich-britains-wealthiest-double-net-worth-since-crisis>

7 <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/One-TH/Communities-and-Housing-Evidence-Pack-FINAL.pdf> p. 8

8 <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/One-TH/Communities-and-Housing-Evidence-Pack-FINAL.pdf> p. 8

9 <http://metro.co.uk/2017/05/11/map-reveals-shocking-number-of-empty-homes-across-london-6630121/>

10 <https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/housing-london/2017-01-26T18:50:00/Housing-in-London-2017-report.pdf> p. 49

11 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jul/24/bloated-london-property-prices-fuelling-exo->



homes, and thus putting a strain on the city's resources.¹²

This is happening at a time when we are experiencing a huge increase in new expensive properties being built whilst also pulling down the tower block estates of the 1960s and 70s. Even though housebuilding in the capital is at record highs, not only is it not meeting the demand, but also record numbers of them are unsold once completed.¹³ We are now experiencing a situation where the landscape of the capital is changing with increasing rapidity, as these new builds are justified by the need to try and meet this increasing housing demand. However, at the same time, it has emerged that for the first time in decades, more people are moving out of London than are moving in, citing the increase of home prices and the cost of living in the city as their main motivation.¹⁴ The result of all this is that we have a very strange and disjointed state of affairs where the population is increasing, despite a huge migration out of the city, whilst the landscape of communities' changes rapidly, and simultaneously more houses are built than ever before; yet many are left empty, and they're all so unaffordable that those at the bottom of the financial ladder have no choice but to move.

Another peculiar trend has occurred in the last 15 years, with relation to poverty and housing density: the areas of Inner London (Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Islington) with the highest levels of poverty are the same areas which have seen the highest increase in household density. On paper, this creation of new homes (which are of a higher relative value compared to other dwellings in the area) has actually decreased poverty, on average; but this is because new people, normally of middle-class or higher backgrounds, or students, have moved in, and increased the average earnings of the area.¹⁵ Or, it's because these newly built homes

12 <https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/housing-london/2017-01-26T18:50:00/Housing-in-London-2017-report.pdf> p. 37

13 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-04-24/unsold-london-homes-under-construction-hits-record-as-sales-fall>

14 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2017/aug/04/london-exodus-warning-uk-cities-culture>, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jul/24/bloated-london-property-prices-fuelling-exodus-from-capital>

15 <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/casepaper195.pdf> p. 15

have been bought by foreign nationals with wealth, and left empty, again increasing the house prices due to perceived demand to 'live' in the area, despite not actually contributing to life in those communities through their absenteeism. And with that, the poorer tenants move out, and go to places like Barking and Dagenham – just far away enough from the city to be affordable for now, and just close enough to retain their employment and friendship networks.

The Gascoigne Estate

The Gascoigne Estate in Barking is quite typical of the types of places which have undergone the process of gentrification via 'regeneration' projects: the most deprived ward in the borough of Barking and Dagenham, it was home to roughly 4,000-5,000 people, who speak over seventy different languages between them. The 1960s council flats which currently stand here are, generally, in a state of disrepair. The communities that live here are often transient; many come here on short term rental arrangements before being moved to permanent accommodation later by the council. It is currently being redeveloped by East Thames, a housing organisation who own a portfolio of homes valued in the billions. As the house building begins to slow down in Central London, areas like Barking become a target for regeneration. This process will likely see the same end as those which have come before it: the moving away of impoverished people and communities, replaced by new modern flats which are a bit easier on the eye but much less so on the wallet.

There are some interesting idiosyncrasies about the Gascoigne Estate which tell an important story about social class, perception of class status and social mobility. One of them is that over a quarter of people who reside in the area hold a degree or higher qualification. Another is that despite this, it still has the second highest levels of unemployment in the borough. The estate is also home to more people than any other place in Barking in which people live in multiple forms of deprivation. The ward has the highest proportion of social housing tenants in Barking, but also one of the highest proportion of private renters, and significantly, very low home ownership.¹⁶

Barking and Dagenham has the highest growth rate of properties which are beginning to be valued at a million pounds or over in the whole of London.¹⁷ It also has seen a 10% increase in housing poverty for private tenants from 2001-2011.¹⁸ Between 2001 and 2013, "Poverty rates rose in the relatively disadvantaged parts of outer London. This is accounted for partly by rises in out-of-work poverty, but predominantly by the impoverishment of low-income workers through their wages becoming insufficient relative to housing costs."¹⁹

16 <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Gascoigne.pdf> p. 8

17 <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/dec/17/gentrification-fears-east-london-property-millionaires>

18 <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/casepaper195.pdf> p. 24

19 <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/casepaper195.pdf> p.4

So; this estate is in a situation where a large proportion of people are poverty stricken, yet well educated, who don't own their homes, and sit on land whose value is spiralling upwards. Cash-strapped councils, when approached by property developers with huge sums of money and a seemingly brilliant vision to 'regenerate' an area, are left with little choice. On Gascoigne, many people have already been decanted, and moved to new homes. Some were able to stay in Barking, but many others have not. The development will be completed in 2024.

Despite their qualifications and credentials, the accident of the place they live, its reputation and the real conditions of poverty have created a situation in which they can't physically climb the social ladder to any real degree. Their homes are literally being torn down around them, and they will not be able to afford to stay in the area once the new ones are built. None of the new homes are going to be available for social rent, and there are actually going to be less dwellings in the soon-to-be rebranded *Weavers Quarter*.²⁰ And this will become even more of a problem once the gentrification of outer London is completed, as in cases like Gascoigne, there will be less houses than there were to begin with. On the topic of home ownership levels in the current climate, the shadow housing secretary John Healy recently said: "After seven years of failure on housing, not only has home ownership fallen, but affordable housebuilding has hit a 24-year low, and rough sleeping has more than doubled."²¹

This essay has been written in two parts. The first spoke about the current nuances of London's housing situation and the influx of wealthy foreigners into this country, and the second spoke about impoverished people from all backgrounds and nations living on the Gascoigne Estate, who are not invited to join in this situation. 1 in 7 of London's new houses built between 2014 and 2016 were bought by private landlords from other countries.²² And yet the residents in Gascoigne, who also represent the wider macro-cosmic diversity of London in their micro situation, will not profit from this in any way. I have told a story of a communities with great intelligence and great hopes, in the context of wealth inequality and a broken and unfair housing market. The problem is, I do not know how this story will end, except that it will not end on the Gascoigne Estate.

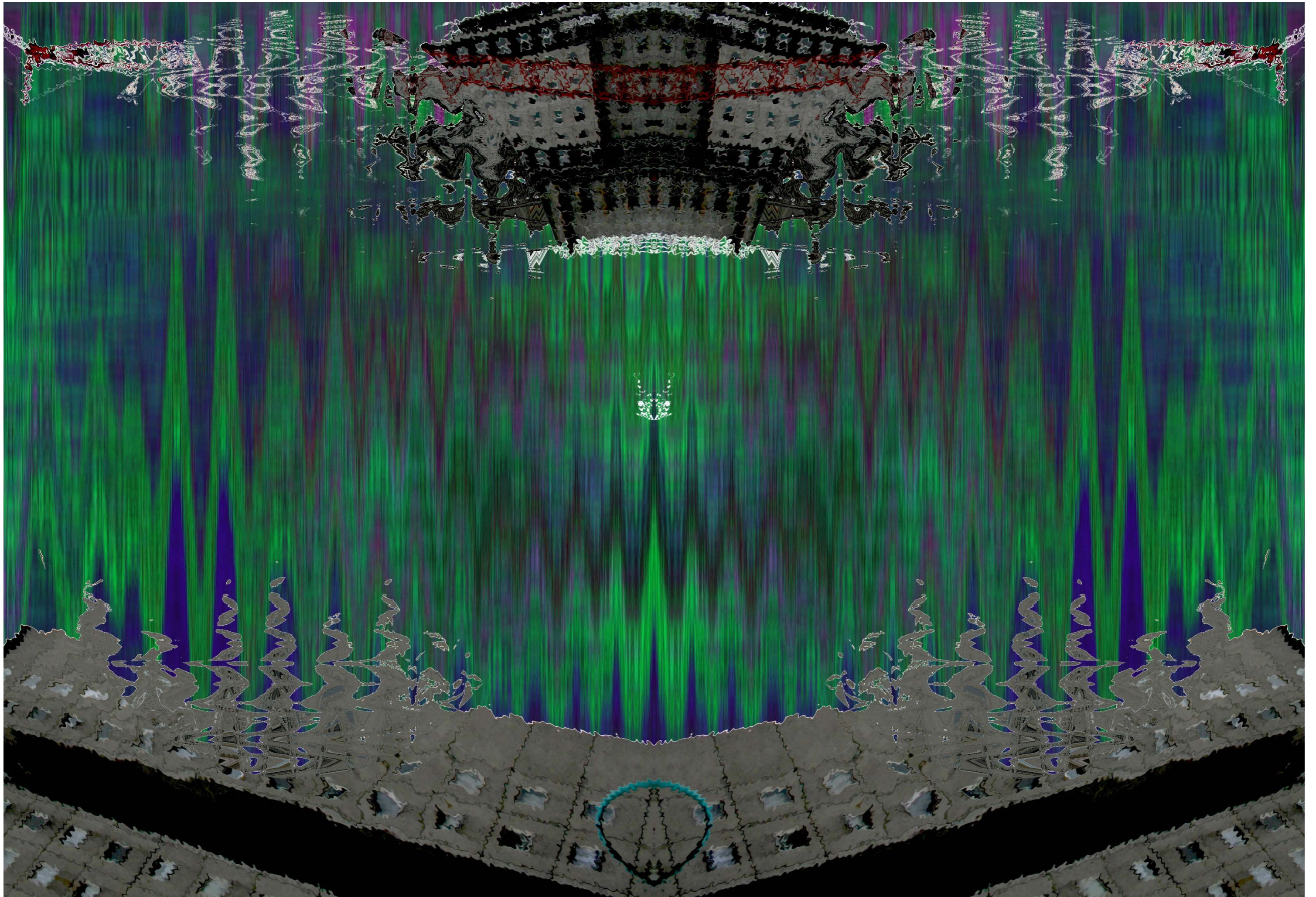
²⁰ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PAWS/media_id_243769/Gascoigne_Estate_East_report%20.pdf ; <http://modern.gov.barking-dagenham.gov.uk/documents/s27197/Estate%20Renewal%20Report%20-%20App.%201.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2017/mar/02/home-ownership-in-england-at-a-30-year-low-official-figures-show>

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jun/13/foreign-investors-snapping-up-london-homes-suitable-for-first-time-buyers>



The last remaining grey towerblock alongside the almost-completed new buildings of Weavers Quarter, August 2017



Gascoigne Ward's housing situation

Number of houses before demolition:

Entire estate: 2,436 (Eastern development: 1,775)

Number of houses after regeneration project:

1,575 (200 homes less than before)

Demographic:

26% White British (vs 49% Barking & Dagenham average)

25.8% Black African (over 10% higher than second place Thames Ward, with 15.4%)

Second lowest ward for English speakers

75 languages spoken in the ward

Social housing stock:

Before regeneration: 1102

After regeneration: 0

<http://modern.gov.barking-dagenham.gov.uk/documents/s27197/Estate%20Renewal%20Report%20-%20App.%201.pdf>

<https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Gascoigne.pdf>

<https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/residents/housing-and-tenancy/estate-renewal-programme/gascoigne-estate/>

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PAWS/media_id_243769/Gascoigne_Estate_East_report%20.pdf p. 12

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PAWS/media_id_243769/Gascoigne_Estate_East_report%20.pdf P. 1

www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/housing_in_london_2015.pdf

www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/housing_in_london_2015.pdf p. 81

<http://www.savills.co.uk/blog/article/216393/residential-property/record-number-of-new-homes-in-london-set-for-2017.aspx>

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/housing_in_london_2015.pdf

London's housing situation

Total number of houses:

46,500 new homes this year
est. total dwellings: 3,450,000

Number of residents:

8-10 million

Demographic:

45% White British

15% White Other

7% Indian

7% Black Caribbean.

Number of second homes:

48,390 (1.4%)

Around 26% of homes are owned by private landlords, vs 24% by local councils. Private rental is up 14% in 20 years

Number of homeless:

1,753 (in 2014)

8,000 in temporary accommodation (in 2015)

Estimated new builds:

46,500 in 2017

45,600 in 2018

Social housing

24%



Further Reading

Anonymous resident speaks about social cleansing

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/researchingsociology/2016/07/26/estate-regeneration-why-it-isnt-just-about-the-money/>

Information, photos and stories gathered by myself and Studio 3 Arts for the Open Estate Project can all be found at www.open-estate.info - this includes a historical essay about the land written by myself

Musings on poverty and inequality in Barking & Dagenham, by writer and Urban Geography PhD student Arooj Khan can be found at <http://arookkhanwrites.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/poverty-and-inequality-in-barking-and.html>

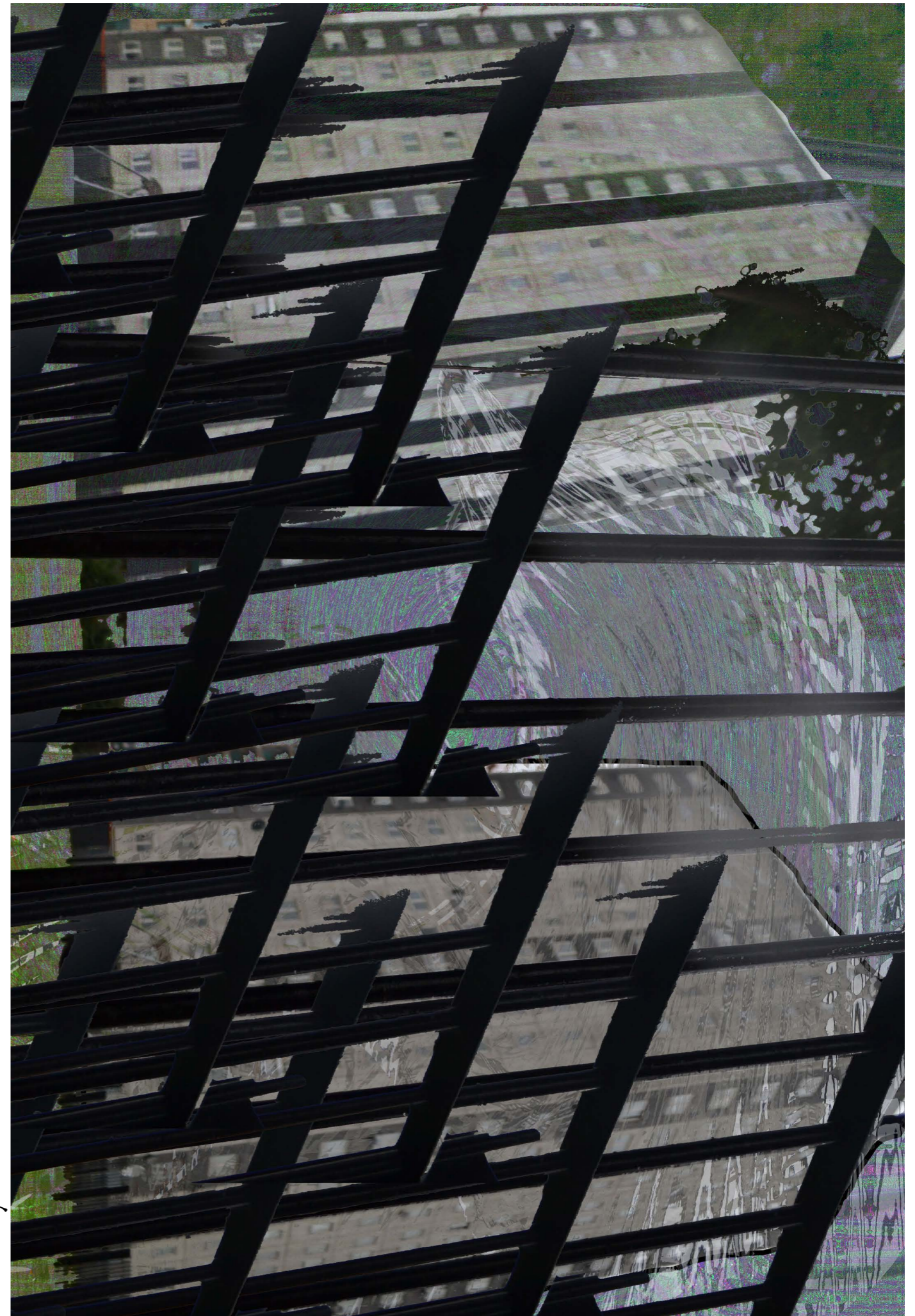
London Mayor's Housing Strategy can be found at https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/housing_in_london_2015.pdf

The Greater London Authority's Planning Report for the proposed regeneration of the Gascoigne Estate: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PAWS/media_id_243769/Gascoigne_Estate_East_report%20.pdf

The Gascoigne Estate's Census Profile: <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Gascoigne.pdf>



One of several photos I took from the same spot to document the demolition process



Gated Days

GASCOIGNE

The Gascoigne Estate

Halfway between Hell's gate and help,

mate—I've spent the past 365 days

perusing through

the newspaper clippings and views

of people who glanced once, but didn't see through

to the actual people that live here.

Now, in my position of privilege in this chair

I've seen light years of strife that strikes fear -

I've also seen quite clear

into the lives of people

who open themselves up to us who come from outside here.

See, these Boundary Roads can't close

the open mouth that to's and fro's

from Algeria to Lithuania, different shoes and clothes -

but all of those call this place home.

And to see that demolished,

abolished, transformed and polished -

who can bring solace when communities that once flourished

are brought to their knees?

And you can say that they're poor and can't succeed -

but did these same people even bother to read

the Census?

Cos the consensus is that this place is full of great senses -

twenty-five percent have degrees or above but, no consequences.

Smart people, stuck in the dark, evil,

with bilingual kids who'll either overlap or equal

their parents in the sequel, but -

not here.

See it's quite clear.

The flats have been cleared and if you look over there,

you'll see a different reality nothing to do with right here.

Yeah - the land's the same,

but the faces, the pain,

the struggles to maintain

all glory and fame

and even the name

in a Weave of disdain will be taken away and replaced.



Photo taken by me, April 2016. The view from the construction site window, showing an old block alongside the new build, as another tower is pulled down.

They'll be given no Quarter.

Just slaughtered as the stories contorted

and by all means aborted,

to start a new chapter in this remorseless distortion.

Like the rest of this gritty city it'll look real pretty

once paved over, but think:

what made this place tick?

See it's the people.

All equal under God,

even if their god's are different -

and language and colour too?

Remember: it's class that's significant:

if you're put here, it's for good; clear -

until they clear this place because it's too hood.

You can hear a recorded version of the poem at [here](#)

Recorded, produced and mixed by John Akinde, resident/poet/musician from the Gascoigne Estate.

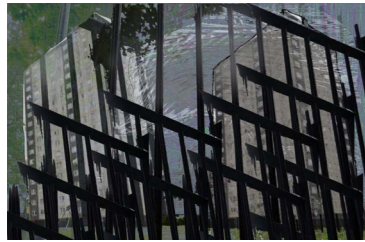


View of the new build alongside a nearly empty tower, 30/8/17

Appendix

Throughout this publication, I have included a series of digital images that I've made in response to the situation on the Gascoigne Estate. Each piece is a digitally manipulated photo that I've taken on the estate.

I am first and foremost a visual artist, and using this medium allows me to express a feeling or mood I have recognised in the estate; each image below is influenced or inspired by my interactions with residents I've had the pleasure of meeting, and also with the buildings themselves as it goes through the regeneration process.



Gated Days

Before the late 1990s, there were no railings on the estate. Now, the entire estate has neatly defined pathways that you can walk down, and areas of the estate are somewhat cordoned off. The railings tell a story about class perception, policing and criminal methodology, and the safety of an area. Many residents bemoaned the restriction of personal freedoms of movement which the gates represented.



Torn Down Dreams

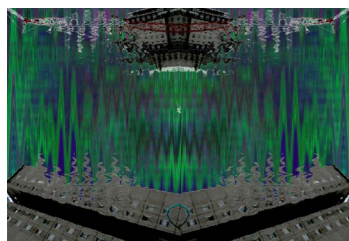
When working at Studio 3 Arts, I endeavoured to take a photo from one spot every day. This piece is a manipulation I made from a particularly striking image (see page 18).

I noticed a deflated mood among some of the children and young people on the estate when the concrete football court at the front of this image was torn down in the next phase of this process. It was their hub, somewhere they developed teamwork skills, fought, won, lost and played. The monochrome of this piece reflects that, the court made barely discernable against the dire background of a torn down block. This piece is also the front cover of poet Sadie Davidson's forthcoming 'Tales from the Estate'.



Tower Block Dreams

This piece reflects a lot of things at once. It's a dreamscape of a river moulded out of a towerblock and trees, reflecting the importance of the Thames, and London, to the development of Barking as well as sculpting people's living space. It's also a reflection of the slow route carved out by those from here who aspire to make something of themselves in life. I was fortunate to meet a variety of intelligent, driven, determined and kind people from the area, and this piece pays homage to those who dream for bigger things.



Surround Sounds

People from the estate always spoke of the importance to music in their communities. There was always music blaring from different windows on tower blocks, and rumbling bass music can be heard from blocks away on summer days. Parties and spontaneous raves on the basketball courts were commonplace. There are some young people who are starting on their musical careers and gaining some traction; most notably Potter Payper, and recently artists such as poet, rapper and social commentator John Akinde, who's local knowledge and musical capabilities have been instrumental in helping me create this project.

This piece mimics the reflections created on water near temples in South-East Asia at sunrise, using the aesthetic of the estate's towerblocks to give a localised feel to this idea, whilst also referencing the varied religious communities of the area.

Thank you

I am indebted to many people who have gifted me access to their lives, workplaces, homes and communities in order to be able to make this publication.

Thanks to Rosie, Liza and everyone else associated with Studio 3 Arts for the introductions to Gascoigne, and supporting me as an artist, writer and poet ever since. Thanks to Gascoigne Primary School, Del, Simeon, Damien and Sai for your help on the Open Estate project.

Thanks to Suzanna, Robert, Danny, Catia, Ronald, Gary, Aneela and many others from the estate for sharing your lives stories, memories and hopes with me.

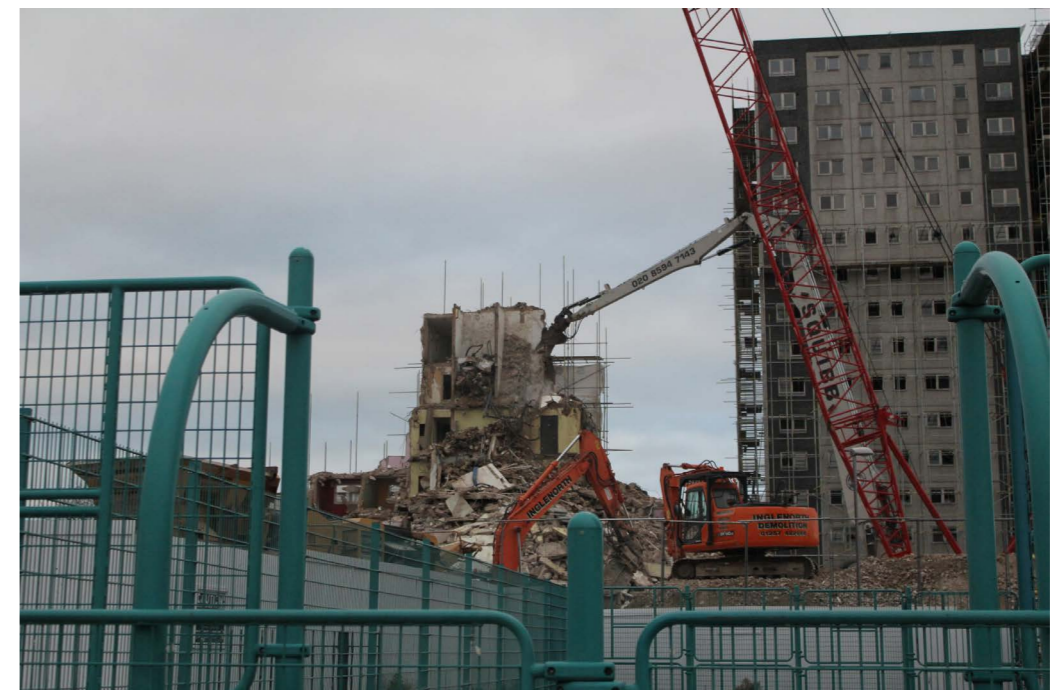
Thanks to John Akinde for recording, producing and critiquing my first steps into the world of poetry. Your musical and local knowledge have been invaluable.

Thanks to Arooj, James and Tom for reading through drafts.

Thank you to Freya and the Koreo Prize, for your guidance and encouragement as I've created this presentation.

I have been inspired by the Gascoigne Estate to ask important questions about the housing crisis in this country, and what that means for the future of ordinary people. I have tried to put together here a compilation of varied thoughts, feelings and ideas that have been a huge part of my life over the past two years. Hopefully, this body of work will inspire others to ask important questions, and tell important stories, in the hope that we might find important answers and responses.

Steve Lawes



About the artist

Steve Lawes is a visual artist, poet, and community arts practitioner. He has exhibited in London and Essex, and creates bespoke images and designs for bands, private collectors and brands.

He has worked on a variety of community arts projects which bring great quality collaborative artistic practice and participation to people. Among others, he has worked with Studio 3 Arts, Green Shoes Arts, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, Kinetika, Thurrock Council and Creative Blast Academy.

He is a member of the Tunnel Artist Collective, with whom he exhibits regularly throughout London.

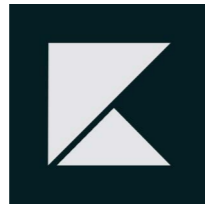
Steve hosts several weekly workshops with people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds, and also possesses an MA in Medieval History from King's College, London.

For more info & to keep up with his work, go to:

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This presentation was initially written as an entry for the inaugural Koreo Prize in 2016. It was awarded the position of Runner-up.

This version has been slightly edited and updated in 2020.

All Photos, digital images, poetry and writing is by the artist, unless otherwise stated.

SOCIAL HOUSING
AND MOBILITY
IN 2017:

THE GASCOIGNE
ESTATE

This booklet explores the current crisis of social housing and social mobility through the lens of the Gascoigne Estate in Barking, East London.

Photography, essay writing, poetry and digital art have all been used here in an attempt to assess the issue from a variety of creative and analytical angles, mirroring and highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of the issue at hand.