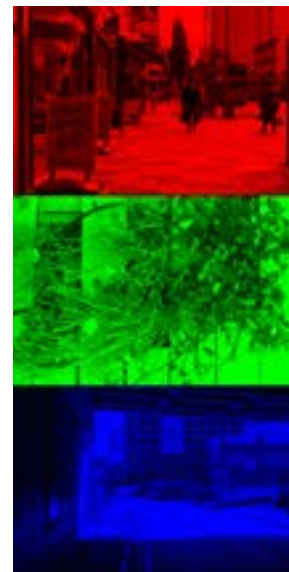


## Precarious entanglements

Andrew Brown

It is a real pleasure to be invited to make a visual contribution to this special edition of Access. The images were selected, through discussion with Julia Shaw, for their resonances with the themes discussed and in the hope that they would make a distinct contribution to the overall impact of the arguments made by the contributors. Given the Editor's aim to explore social precarity 'seen through a spatial and/or temporal lens' (Read 2023, p.1), it is particularly apposite to present the papers alongside lens-based images.

All except two of the images here are from my Entangled Ilford (2022) series. This series was produced for a competitive commission to produce artwork for the 50-metre-long hoardings around a ten-floor derelict furniture store in Ilford, on the eastern outskirts of London. Each of the nine images in the series is composed from three photographs taken at the same place at the same time: one of street activity, one of urban nature and one of the changing built environment. Over a period of two weeks, I walked north to south and west to east across the central district of the town, stopping at intervals to make the three photographs. The intent in each case was, through a process known as channel mixing, to produce a final image that is intelligible from a distance but with closer inspection reveals a variety of scales and the entanglement of everyday activity with the natural and built environment at a time of instability and flux. The images are presented alongside their constituent red, blue and green photographs.



The work emphasises the spacio-temporal in being made in a particular place for public display and engagement in that place, and by juxtaposing elements of the landscape which unfold in time at different paces. Ilford grew from a small village to a metropolitan town in the nineteenth century, and thrived in the second industrial revolution, becoming home to manufacturers of pharmaceuticals, electronics and chemicals, including the Ilford Ltd photographic materials company, all with global aspirations and with both a blue- and white-collar workforce. Ilford entered decline with the Thatcherite shift of the British economy from material to symbolic production, and a particular emphasis on financial services. In 1966, the nightclub on the top floor of the furniture store was chosen by Bobby Moore, captain of the England soccer team, as the venue for celebration of their World Cup victory. Now, the building, derelict for a decade, is no more than a concrete shell, casting its shadow over a faded town centre which bears the scars of successive waves of piecemeal and unsuccessful re-development. The place itself both signifies the ebb and flow of civic fortune in an unstable economic environment and provides a context for socially precarious and financially insecure lives to be played out across one of the most culturally diverse populations in the UK. The images are an attempt to convey something of the entanglement and inter-dependence of human activity with the affordances and vicissitudes of the built and natural environments. They are a product of, and exist within, the 'wider social world' with which the heterotopia of Higher Education has, as Barbara Read states in the introduction, a complex relationship, evoking what, for staff and students, lies outside shaping and shaped by the 'dream space' of higher education (Morris & Rowell 2023, p.9).

Time and space are also explored through the lens in the image *Song and Dance*. This is a still image from an animation which juxtaposes long-exposure near infra-red images with a field-recording made at a particular place (the interchange on a busy shopping street) at a particular time (dusk, as the sound of birds gathering in the tree canopy above compete with and eventually overwhelm the sounds of human activity below). The camera records the interweaving of humans in motion from what cannot be seen (reflected infra-red radiation) and at a pace that reveals sway and pivot in our motion around each other. The final image also draws attention to the effects of the apparatuses through which we engage with the world, in this case a simple camera obscura made from a cardboard box and a plastic lens, wedged in the window of my studio. Resonating with Read's discussion of the university as heterotopia, the precarious device presents an inverted image of the world outside, suggesting contextualisation and relationality, but not determination.

My own working life has been predominantly within the heterotopia of Higher Education, having joined the University of London Institute of Education (now a faculty of UCL) as a temporary contract primary teacher educator following several years of primary and secondary school teaching in London. My initial decision to become a teacher was itself a response to financial insecurity and social precarity. My intention had been to study for a masters in photography in London, but, as the first in my family to stay in education beyond the compulsory school leaving age, and without the requisite confidence and financial support, teaching, at least in the short term, seemed to offer a more secure path. It took me 45 years to find my way back to that particular fork in the road.

*Cover Image and thumbnail: Andrew Brown, 2022, Ilford High Road, Composite Photographs, Entangled Ilford.*



*Installation photograph by David Mirzoeff, 2022.*

Andrew Brown is an artist and educator based at SPACE Studios in east London. He uses analogue, digital, alternative and historic photographic processes alongside soundscapes, documents and objects to explore the impact on communities of rapid changes in the built and natural environment. Recent commissions include SPACE/Aetrium, UP projects and the Arts Council England, and collaborative work with the River Roding Trust, East London Textile Arts, Humorisk CIC and Thames Ward Community Project. Following a career in education, he studied photography at Falmouth University and is now working towards a Doctorate in Fine Art at the University of East London. He is Emeritus Professor of Education and Society at the Institute of Education, University College London and Honorary Professor at the Centre of Excellence in Equity in Higher Education, University of Newcastle, Australia.