

## Visual Spaces of Change

*Photographic documentation of environmental transformations*



**SOPHIA**  
SCOPIO EDITIONS

volume 6, issue 1 | publication year: 2021  
issn: 2183-8976 [print] 2183-9468 [online]  
doi 10.24840/2183-8976\_2021-0006\_0001\_10  
homepage: <https://www.up.pt/index.php/sophia>

© SCOPIO EDITIONS



# **Impressions of Wembley Park: Photographic Representations in a Landscape of Corporatism**

Jazmin Charalambous

## **Abstract**

Corporatisation eradicates the human places that rely on local infrastructures and direct connections made between people. This visual essay looks at a moment of transition happening in Wembley Park, in the suburbs of northwest London. A series of photographs captured between 2017–2018 records how a new residential neighbourhood for London takes shape. The photographic series, used as the backbone to an architectural thesis, challenges the corporate development built up of identikit zones and influenced by profit margins, risk assessments and quality indicators. Photography is used as an instrument for a critical reading of the territory that observes the area from multiple perspectives. The photographs drive the design proposal: predictive future scenarios were developed through photomontage and digital reconstructions. The proposal explores the possibility of an 'Urban Carpet' that transforms the central public space built as a series of ad hoc acts of construction over 90 years. A series of collages juxtapose the strict, corporate landscape with the nature of incidental and spontaneous encounters. The collages are a provocation, arguing for the necessity of disorder and complexity as a way to build up a sense of community in a nondescript zone.

*Keywords : Public Space, Corporatisation, Spectacle, Photomontage, Theatre*

**Jazmin Charalambous** (London, 1991) studied Architecture at Glasgow School of Art and obtained a master's degree from Delft University of Technology (2018), where her graduation thesis received the University's honourable mention. She has guest tutored at Kingston University, London, and was awarded grants from Design Management Netwerk, CBK Rotterdam, and Stichting Droom en Daad. After working in architecture and design practices internationally, she set up an independent practice focused on exploring the intersection between art, architecture, and public space. She crafts site-specific situations to provoke flashes of understanding between people, using a combination of analytical techniques and theatrical principles.

Since 2002, a £3.4 billion regeneration development has been taking place in Wembley Park led by the property development company Quintain.<sup>1</sup> A rendered photomontage of the area featured on a billboard is used as a way to communicate how it will look in 2027, in which a dramatic scale shift depicts the transition between local and corporate (Fig.1). The area has been a historically prominent destination of spectacle and entertainment since the British Empire Exhibition and Games held in the 1920s and 1930s, giving London two of its major event venues, Wembley Stadium and Arena. Now the landmarks of the new development, the buildings' surrounding public spaces are managed entities where there is little possibility to generate any new forms of ingenuity, unity, or, appropriation. Whilst observing the area, I was interested to understand how the new development affects both the public spaces and the people using them: how an environment can be made to condition behaviour through an increasing inclination towards *corporatised* everyday environments.

Douglas Rushkoff states in his book, "Life Inc.: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back", corporatism's purpose is, "to suppress lateral interactions between people or small companies and instead redirect any and all value they created to a select group of investors."<sup>2</sup> London as a whole is subject to increased corporatisation that prices out the lower classes and encourages people to act as if they were individual corporations in competition with one another, exacerbated through cultures like football that create an "us" and a "them". Conversely, in the hinterlands of Wembley at the peripheries of the new development, places can be characterised by the presence of strong communities. Such places retain their own sense of freedom and a texture of incidental meetings suggestive of the human condition. Along Ealing Road, known for its large South Asian community, the inchoate and diverse state of things, where cultures and architectural styles clash, produces new fusions and meetings between people and environments. Looseness and disorder create opportunities for people to behave in different and complex ways (Fig.2).

The iconic arch of Wembley Stadium – the emblem of home for England's national football team – is visible from miles around (Fig.3). The arch sets the scene for a corporate atmosphere that draws people along the Olympic Way towards it. The world seems to tilt up towards the stadium; a spectacle board and spectacle contained within itself. One becomes a spectator silenced by the drama of the arch, viewing the corporation as saviour and fellow humans as competitors to be beaten or exploited. Transforming Wembley Stadium was the first step in the regeneration of Wembley Park. The original stadium designed by Sir Owen Williams in 1923

<sup>1</sup> "Overview", Quintain Ltd, accessed September 22, 2017, <http://www.quintain.co.uk/wembley-park/overview>.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Rushkoff, *Life Inc: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back* (London: Vintage Digital, 2011), 89.



[Fig. 1]  
Billboard showing Quintain's projection of Wembley Park in 2027  
© Jazmin Charalambous, 2017



[Fig. 2]

The Red Car Park adjacent to the Stadium becomes a grey area allowing for spontaneous activity to occur.

© Jazmin Charalambous, 2017

had a capacity of 250,000 people at its peak, creating a tightly knit audience of togetherness.<sup>3</sup> The new stadium redesigned by Norman Foster in 2007 highlights the formal transition of football's corporatisation. Four times the height of the old, it underwent major changes to its layout, structure, seating, materiality, and financial management. The total capacity of 90,000 is much less than the original, despite the huge increase in size. High admission prices, numbered seats, and segmented tiers prevent the informal atmosphere that was traditionally associated with Wembley.<sup>4</sup> The new stadium can be seen as a manifestation of globalising economic flows, which have coalesced around professional football, pointing to a wider transformation of social and political structures.

The public realm designed between buildings is coated with a supplementary layer of marketing applied to the surfaces of space, but not integrated into the urban fabric. This causes the "deadliness" of the zones between buildings driven by consumption, and heightened by standardised construction processes that flatten the environment. Wembley Park's advertising campaign, branded as a "new residential neighbourhood for London" is transacted by Tipi, a sub-company of Quintain. The scheme creates 7,600 new homes, 5,000 of which are build-to-rent. Students and young professionals are offered an all-in-one solution to the housing crisis, whilst Tipi extracts capital and exploits their youth as part of its brand image. Living in one of these luxury complexes feels comparable to a resort hotel, described by the real-estate agent as being, "like Miami or New York." The build-to-rent market streamlines services so that everything is without complication, whilst impeccably furnished. It shifts the emphasis from humans as citizens who have a stake in their local environment, to temporary workers who fluctuate from place to place, breeding passive political cultures.

At the heart of the development lies Arena Square, which operates under two conditions; on event days it is lined with orderly queues formed of people waiting to access the Arena for music and entertainment concerts, but otherwise it does not offer people opportunities to encounter one another based on the vastness and dispersion of the scheme. As a managed entity there is little possibility to appropriate the space. The strict lines of the plan dictate how the square should be used and the types of activities that are allowed to take place. Every stone is pre-cut to an exact dimension and nothing is left to chance. The repertoire of spaces produced in the corporate landscape confines people to the roles and actions preconceived for them, smoothing out the social concerns that make collective human behaviour multifaceted and complex. Instead people take actions directed by the much simpler calculus of the market.<sup>5</sup>

3 John Geraint and Dave Parker. *Olympic Stadia: Theatres of Dreams* (Routledge, 2019), 72–73.

4 Sybille Frank and Silke Steets. *Stadium Worlds: Football, Space and the Built Environment* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 10.

5 Rushkoff, Life Inc: *How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back*, 89.



[Fig.3]

Wembley Stadium arch meets a "Hopkins Hat" over the temporary playground, a cliché symbol denoting the presence of Fun

© Jazmin Charalambous, 2017





[Fig. 4]  
Improvisation takes place on the topographic carpet, 2078  
© Jazmin Charalambous, 2018



[Fig. 5]

Collective making and participatory events are used to mark out the carpet's structure, 2029

© Jazmin Charalambous, 2018



[Fig. 6]

The carpet as a place for immediate action, 2096

© Jazmin Charalambous, 2018

In the landscape of the Wembley Park development, we are abstracted from one another, growing dependent on a business model that was not intended to serve us as people. The more predictable and predetermined our actions become, the less alive and able to imagine alternatives we are.

The photomontage is an assemblage that produces new associations and meanings between things. It is a technique of the twentieth-century, a work that reveals progress by taking apart and putting together found images and visual fragments.<sup>6</sup> Whilst used by the mass media because of its way of bringing together radical ideas in a shocking way, it is also used as a tool of critical engagement that creates an "uncanny" effect by interrupting the logical world with an imaginary image.<sup>7</sup> The medium of photomontage through collage was used to develop a proposal for the future of Arena Square. The technique's openness gives agency to visualising future transformations. Five key images show the construction process transforming the square over 90 years, in which onlookers participate in the events that make the traces of human work visible. Tactile materials, textile-like construction methods, and subtle changes in topography applied as a set of small disruptions, transform the landscape of corporatism into a place for active citizens. The type of collage employed disguises itself, presented as a realistic image in a similar way to the developer's render of an aerial view of the area as actuality. The nature of these images is intended to be experienced as strange and unsettling; as a way to challenge the viewer's assumptions, forcing them to stop and question the greater meaning, and reflect on the real as it is experienced. The images estrange the language of corporatisation in order to bring people together.

## Bibliography

Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. London: Penguin, 2008.

Dyckhoff, Tom. *The Age of the Spectacle: Adventures in Architecture and the 21st-Century City*. London: Random House Books, 2017.

Frank, Sybille, and Silke Steets. *Stadium Worlds: Football, Space and the Built Environment*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010.

Judah, Ben. *This is London: Life and Death in the World City*. London: Picador, 2016.

Moore, Rowan. *Slow Burn City: London in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Picador, 2017.

Perec, Georges, and John Sturrock. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. London: Penguin, 2008.

Rasmussen, Steen Eiler. *London: The Unique City*. New York: Macmillan, 1937.

Rushkoff, Douglas. *Life Inc: How the World Became a Corporation and How to Take It Back*. London: Vintage Digital, 2011.

Sendra, Pablo, and Sennett, Richard. *Designing Disorder: Experiments and Disruptions in the City*. London: Verso Books, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Barthelme, *Not-knowing* (Random House: 1997), 58.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Feinstein, *An Unheimlich Media: Bringing the Uncanny into the World, in Masaaki Kurosu, Human-Computer Interaction. Theory, Methods and Tools* (Cham, Springer Nature: 2021), 220–230.