



## Alejandro S. Garrido

### *The Platform*

From November 21st 2020 to January 30th 2021

The photographer Alejandro S. Garrido has returned to Madrid with *The Platform*, a series in which he addresses the present reality of urban development in London, the city in which he resides. The project has been carried out thanks to the collaboration between the Galeria MPA and the Museo Patio Herreriano in Valladolid, where it has already been displayed in the "Ciudad y Progreso" (City and Progress) exhibition that the centre dedicated to the artist's latest works and which could be visited until this past September. For this occasion, the author has also prepared a series entitled *Business As Usual* (1) in which he casts a look at the so-called "new normal", which has been installed on the gallery's facade.

After photographing the financial heart of London in the "City of London" series (2018-19), the photographer continues his work by observing the impact of the economic model on the urban form. In "The Platform" (2019-20), the author documents the transformation the British capital has found itself immersed in after the financial crisis of 2008. Garrido composes a panoramic view of the city's current situation through a selection of strategic locations. These places, although scattered across the map, constitute a single emerging urban system. Perhaps that's why they are particularly revealing when it comes to explaining both the accelerated financialisation of the city, and the implications that this new mode of growth has on the lives of its inhabitants.

The sixty photographs compile a dozen sites that stand on the ruins of the modern city. Places like the Canary Wharf financial centre, which, built on the grounds of the old port, has not ceased to grow since Margaret Thatcher's government promoted its construction; the neighbourhood for *young professionals* and *international students* that replaced Elephant and Castle's Heygate Estate, one of the largest public housing complexes in the city, demolished after a long process of social and architectural degradation; or the iconic Battersea Power Station which has been converted into a luxurious mixed-use complex and will house Apple's new European offices.

Born of a process of expulsion and historical erasure, these sites reveal how the new paradigm of urban growth is characterised by the ignoring of elements that have traditionally united the public space. Reduced to a mere production platform, the new metropolis appears as the by-product of finance capital setting their sights on the territory. New housing developments, amassed by large investment groups, remain empty for most of the year. Meanwhile, due to the constant increase in housing prices, the population is forced to reside increasingly farther away from the centres of influence. As the urban sociologist Saskia Sassen (2) has stated, the city grows as it empties.

Sliding his attention from the urban scene over to the actors who populate it, in *Business as Usual* (2020), Garrido offers a physiognomy of central London at the present day, during the pandemic. Stripped of its neighbourliness and free of tourists, today it is filled by only those who have something to do there. Driven by the tempo of capital, which makes it difficult to distinguish between leisure, work or consumption, the centre is mainly visited by those who don't have the option to work from home. If social distancing has dictated any type of change, it's not immediately visible in central London. Here, individuals of different origins and social backgrounds roam the large shopping avenues, ironically, with the same social distancing that urban dynamics have always established. If, as the anthropologist

Manuel Delgado (3) explains, public space is defined by the set of practices and encounters that it houses and receives from its protagonists, then we could think that what governments like to call the *new normal* is nothing more than the reestablishment of a space, hostile to unforeseen uses, that's restricted to pure productivity.

*New normal*: a term whose use, as the artist recalls, became popular in the finance world to describe the scenario that emerged after the mortgage crisis in the United States, when performance comparable to that of the previous period was no longer foreseeable. By defining a severe crisis situation as a "return to normalcy", everything that had preceded the collapse was implicitly presented as something exceptional. Faced with the cycle of tightened budgetary policies and the massive impoverishment that resulted from it, the rhetoric of the *new normal* helped governments and banking institutions to give the set of economic and political measures a feeling of technical moderation that they called, not without a certain degree of cynicism, "austerity".

While our governments oscillate between fear of the collapse of the economy and fear of the fracture of social peace, the *new normal* is presented not only as a set of restrictions aimed at protecting healthcare services on the brink of capacity, but also as an effort to avoid economic bankruptcy by making emergency decisions such as the nationalisation of wages or the injection of capital into the weakest sectors of national industries. The philosopher Alain Badiou (4) has rightly pointed out how, just like in a situation of war, to confront the epidemic, the States have been forced to make the general interest prevail over that of the ruling class, suspending the normal functioning of local capitalism to "win the war" while preserving the existing social order.

Although the data shows otherwise, we have been told over and over again, appealing to our sense of responsibility, that *we are all in the same boat*, that the virus doesn't distinguish between classes, genders or race. The truth is that the pandemic, as geographer David Harvey (5) has demonstrated, has only underscored the inequalities that forty years of neoliberal policies have exacerbated. It is precisely for this reason that this uncertain and volatile situation, of an extremely exceptional nature, shouldn't be *normalised* with such haste. Although it's difficult to predict what the consequences of this crisis will be or the depth and extent of its effects on future society, the questions we ask ourselves today will depend on the answers we will be able to give ourselves in the future.

Alejandro S. Garrido, 2020.

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(1) Expression that in English is used to indicate that things continue as always despite a changing or difficult situation.

(2) Saskia Sassen, *The City: A Collective Good?* Published in *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Spring/Summer 2017 · Volume XXIII, Issue II.

(3) Manuel Delgado, *El espacio público como ideología*, ed. La Catarata, 2014. / *Public Space as an Ideology*. La Catarata edition, 2014.

(4) Alain Badiou, *Sur la situation épidémique (On the Epidemic Situation)*. Published in the Verso blog on March 23, 2020.

(5) David Harvey, *Anti-Capitalist Politics in the Time of COVID-19*. Published in *jacobinmag.com* on March 20, 2020.