



**FEATURED TEXTS OR PROJECT**

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**An Ideal for Living**

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## An Ideal for Living

*Peter Bennett*

### **Abstract:**

'An Ideal for Living' explores the intersection of photography and computer-generated imagery (CGI) in depicting the future of urban life. It specifically examines London's ongoing urban redevelopment, highlighting how architecture is shaped as both a visual story and a construction process. This project blurs the lines between CGI and traditional photography, capturing the city's transformation during this period of change. The resulting images draw from architectural and advertising photography, combining reality with simulation, preserving the present while projecting future aspirations. They convey the pristine novelty of new buildings while hinting at the inevitable effects of time. 'An Ideal for Living' seeks to archive a simulated memory of the city's evolving landscape.

Keywords: Photography, CGI (Computer-Generated Imagery), Urban Transformation, Architectural Aesthetics, Future Urban Life

**Peter Bennett** is a photographic artist and academic. He studied Photographic Studies at the University of Derby before going on to obtain an MA in Photography from the University of Brighton and an MPhil, also from Brighton, which examined ideas of Loss, Forgetting and Erasure. He has taught at a variety of different institutions, including most recently the University of Brighton and the University of West London, where he is currently the course leader for BA (Hons) Photography. He has exhibited and given talks in the UK and abroad. Previous projects have examined the book and the sea, as well as urban landscapes and the materiality of the photograph itself, as metaphoric and material repositories of memory in relation to ideas of place. His images often reflect upon the processes of forgetting and erasure in relation to the hastening structures of temporality that have accompanied the rise of modernity.

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## Statement

*An Ideal for Living* is a body of photographic work which examines how photography and computer-generated imagery (CGI) can be used to depict future aspirational urban life. It considers how the modern architectural environment becomes a geography of representation in the form of a construct for the camera, both in the process of its design and in its mediation to public audiences. It does so by focusing on the ubiquitous areas of redevelopment around London that are transforming urban space and, at the same time, erasing the memory of the past.

The work refers to the new aesthetic of CGI whilst also creating a record of the shifting appearances of the city in this significant period of change. By mimicking the conventions of CGI, these 'real' photographs can exist somewhere between a detached documentary aesthetic and the simulated form of this new kind of imaging. As Melhuish, Degen and Rose have observed, "The urban fabric of global cities is constantly changing. And in the past few years, a new form of visualizing those changes has become commonplace. On the billboards of almost every building site, a new kind of image is appearing: a digital visualization of what that site will look like when the construction work has finished."<sup>1</sup> The images in *An Ideal for Living* possess their own particular aesthetic that is influenced largely from the conventions of architectural and advertising photography. It is always sunny in CGI visualizations and the vantage points from which they are constructed are often ones that it would not be possible to photograph in reality. The people who populate these CGI images portray a particular demographic. They are mainly about 25–35, active professionals, usually relaxing, having a meal as a couple, enjoying the newly constructed 'natural' spaces between buildings. It seems that this is not just about the construction of the built environment but the construction of a way of living.

On the one hand the photographs in *An Ideal for Living* refer to conventions of realism associated with aspects of the documentary genre, but on the other, they are making reference to, and taking on the appearance of, a CGI simulation. One acts as a form of archiving the present to later be remembered and the other aims to project a set of social aspirations and desires for the future.

*These photographs*, in part project a sense of pristine newness, and yet these areas of redevelopment, during the transformational period of construction, also take on an appearance of ruination. The freshness and perfectness of these new buildings, that still resemble the imprint of the CGI from which they have been conceived, we know will start to become tarnished as time transforms their surfaces. These are yet-to-be places suspending in time, in an aesthetic discontinuity between simulation and becoming. *An Ideal for Living* is an attempt to create an archive of a simulated future memory of the city.

1. *Looking at Digital Visualizations of Urban Development Projects: Dimming the Scintillating Glow of Unwork*, in *Cities Interrupted: Visual Culture and Urban Space* Clare Melhuish, Monica Degen, Gillian Rose. P105.







An Ideal for Living #3



An Ideal for Living #22



An Ideal for Living #18





An Ideal for Living #25