

DESIGN UNLIKELY FUTURES IN THE ‘JUNGLE’

ENGAGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Between 2015 and 2016 working under the collective name Design Unlikely Futures we have been working in Calais in northern France, in the camp referred to as ‘The Jungle’. Through a number of interventions we have developed and deployed experimental, empirical design methods working with the camps residents. Here, we will present a set of work in progress films that have been produced through this process.

Built by its residents and various volunteer groups ‘The Jungle’ became an autonomous space home to up to 10,000 people. Despite this, the camp was not recognised by British or French governments and its inhabitants were offered minimal aid from official channels.

DUF developed and deployed a bespoke tandem bicycle with built in cameras in November 2016 shortly before the camps residents were evicted and its structures destroyed. The bicycle had several aims: to generate new opportunities to understand lived experiences of the camp, to ‘map’ the space (in various ways) and to create a place for resident’s voices while altering the dynamics of researcher and researched by inviting residents to ‘pilot’ the bicycle.

DUF, CAMPS & SPECULATION

In this paper, I present a case study that forms part of a larger research project to develop an a/symmetrical design methodology. I will make the case for designers to engage in more nuanced ways in the problematic spaces that exist in an extended state of ‘emergency’ as a result of disasters.



Figure 1: A photograph of a boy in the camp taken in 2015 wearing a cap that reads ‘Design Unlikely Futures’.

Since 2015 I have worked as part of the design collective ‘Design Unlikely Futures’ (DUF) working in and documenting ‘the Jungle’, an unofficial migrant camp that existed outside Calais in northern France. Until its demolition in November 2016 the camp provided temporary refuge to a population of up to 10,000 people. We have developed and deployed

experimental, practice based research devices (Wilkie and Michael, In Press) as part of a set of situated and empirical methods in order to understand and ‘work’ with the camp’s residents’ lived experience.

This paper focuses on the design and deployment of a bespoke tandem bicycle with built-in recording equipment. We conceived of, made and used the bicycle in the Jungle prior to the camp’s demolition, with the aim of generating new opportunities to understand lived experiences of the camp; to ‘map’ the space (in various ways); and to create a place for residents’ voices, while altering the dynamics of researcher and researched by inviting residents to ‘pilot’ the bicycle. In its use, the bicycle brought residents, volunteers and even riot police ‘into play’, facilitating an intimate access to the camp.

The context of the Jungle raised a number of issues and difficulties for designers and design researchers to operate in. Not officially recognised by the French or UK governments, the camp was offered little state aid. Instead, the camp was tolerated through a process of deliberate indifference (Davies et al. 2017: 12). Residents and volunteers designed and constructed their own infrastructures, housing, shops, cafes, legal centres, churches and mosques. Simultaneously media and political discourse depicted the residents as ‘swarms’, ‘waves’ or ‘bunches’ of non-people.

Looking at ‘camps’ more broadly, a number of challenges to this engagement come to the fore. Camps exist in a temporary zone that is a rupture (Guggenheim 2014) to everyday existence in two key ways. First, the camp exists as a *spatial* rupture from the town and its residents. Second, as a *personal* rupture from the experience of normal existence before migrating. This extended state of emergency imposes a set of structural limitations on its residents, whereby they can achieve very little socially, economically or politically. The camp is a site of *detestable liminality* (Agier 2008) and no matter how sophisticated humanitarian or improvised processes are they will always take second place to the ability to participate in political and social processes. The camp bears a resemblance to the prison or the concentration camp (ibid.) in that the distinct lack of equality closes down any possibility of free speech between individuals with equal rights. It is this detestable liminality that I will go on to argue is where designers can be put to use to design tools and processes to challenge and provide temporary spaces to break this liminality.

As part of the larger study, this project has started looking at the ways that design already engages in these highly charged, difficult and problematic spaces. Critical and speculative designers have tended to either choose to remain within or been unable to venture outside comfortable everyday existence. Methods and practices that are supposed to challenge and question our assumptions through speculation often end up in/advertently re-asserting pre-existing normality and

reinforcing the issues that they are supposed to unpick (Wilkie et al. 2017). Frustrated with where speculative design projects and proposals are actualized or finalised (typically in the design gallery) this project aims to work in the politically loaded and high-stakes setting in Calais to develop new methods for engagement and to open up the possibilities for speculation to others, namely the researched.

Participatory design practices have shared a number of these concerns and developed processes of engagement with various audiences, users and groups that we aim to learn from and contribute to. Engagement in the participatory design tradition is typically one component in a larger design process (Asaro 2000). The aim of this project is not to see engagement as a component in design development, instead we aim to take up and develop processes to engage in an actively contested space for production and voice. This will be done through an experimental, hands on process, where a space, and a designed object could be re-appropriated by its users, in a live process of re-assembly, speculation and re-imagining by bringing people into play.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TANDEM

The tandem was originally conceived as a one-person map-making device to capture the space as it existed in the manner a Google street-view car might. In this iteration the bike is little more than a device for looking *at*.

Adding another position to the bike meant we could ride with a resident on the back, and another interaction could occur — an interview or conversation. The power dynamic here was a/symmetrical in a different way: we would still be *in charge*, piloting and processing the outcomes and findings.

PRESCRIBING POSITIONS: AGENCY, SADDLES AND TIMING CHAINS



Figure 2: Screenshot from film – Chapter 4: A/symmetries of Access. Riding with ‘A’, a resident from the camp.

The tandem has a position at the front for the ‘pilot’ and a position at the back for a ‘stoker’. There are two chain sets and cranks that are connected to each other with a timing chain: both riders have to pedal in sync with each other. If one person stops pedalling the other has to and vice versa. At first riders might signal this by shouting

to each other (STOP PEDALLING! SLOW DOWN!). With use, riders become synced, legs start to work together – a quiet, physical communication through the pedals, cranks and timing chain.

The design of the tandem immediately forces a set of relations and way of being on its two riders. Firstly, the two saddles force a physical relation: one person is sat at the front (the pilot) and one at the back (the stoker). The pilot steers and brakes while the stoker can only pedal. The pilot *holds the power* to define where the bike can go, how fast and when. As a *research object* this allows a shifting of relations too — we can physically swap places between stoker and pilot allowing somebody else to take charge of the direction of the bike.



Figure 3: Screenshot from Chapter 2: A/symmetries of Tandeming. CRS officers riding the tandem.

The *positionality* of the riders on the tandem is flipped, and instead of a harvesting of insight, insight might be co-produced: where the riders co-become and are transformed through and with the device. The designer becomes passenger, the resident becomes pilot and the bicycle becomes fluid. Isolating the research event down to the moment of pedalling around the camp, a shift begins to occur. The bike may be used to fetch things, collect friends, to race etc. Thus, in use the tandem is simultaneously, and a/symmetrically two different things. Two different riders can make it two different things and those riders have different agency and ability on the bike based on their positions.

The tandem is not a simple intermediary, but is made up of a network of *moveable* relations: timing chain, saddles, cranks, handlebars and brakes. In this design of tandem the timing chainrings match and make for a synchronicity. We might see a change in the prescription of agency if this was different (if the front chain-ring has more teeth and requires less rotations to the stoker, or vice versa). This serves to demonstrate how a design detail could be altered to develop a new set of relations – how a re-design of the tandem might generate new relations between two users.

The bike is built for an average sized adult rider to sit comfortably on either the front or the rear saddle on the bike (which are both adjustable in height). In use we found that the bike was designed slightly too large and

on some rides this restricted who could pilot. When a young child asked if they could ride the bike, being too small to reach the pedals, they perched in the stoker position with their feet dangling. The design and build of the tandem starts to *exclude* certain people and groups (in this case children).

The tandem itself, then, has agency: the relationships formed are not purely human to human, but are composed in part of technologies and other nonhumans that affect and contribute to the social relations forming. Below I will follow this by looking at one of the more remarkable features of the tandem: its tyres.

ASCRIBING AGENCY

The tandem's tyres are 29" x 3". In the bike industry they are given the marketing term "plus-size". The frame has been designed specifically to accommodate these tyres that immediately stand out as being significantly larger than tyres you might see on an average road bike.

The tyres were chosen for the intended use of the bike on the given terrain. Fatter tyres provide dampening and suspension to the cameras fitted. The ground in the Jungle is a mix of mud, pitted gravel, sand dunes, rough concrete with some newly laid asphalt. These tyres could operate on all of these surfaces with the added surface area offering grip in wet mud and preventing the bike from becoming stuck.



Figure 4: Screenshot from Chapter 1: A/symmetries of Space. Two residents riding through the camp.

Before visiting the camp the bike was imagined as a *derivé machine*: slowly meandering through the camp with conversation flowing between the two riders. Instead, the tyres enabled a way of riding not possible on the bicycles that are typically found there. It was quick and smooth – it could climb over the sand dunes and safely roll back down, ruptures in surface no longer forced a slowing of the bike or caution to be taken. The bike was fast, and the riders intended to find out how fast it could go: it became an escape vehicle.

Here, the agency of the non-human – the tandem – enabled the human: ascribing the riders an agency that was rare in the camp: speed, and the ability to ride on previously impossible surfaces and spaces. There is a

chain of decision making (agency), from decisions in the design process to rider's decisions for direction, speed and braking that enables this. This goes some way in producing a certain kind of distribution – or redistribution – of agency: where agency might be seen to flow between humans and non-humans, back to humans and so on. The tandem is simultaneously activated and activating.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

In the above I have looked at a short case study for how the design of experimental devices might allow a co-becoming between a researcher/designer and a resident in a camp. There is still lots of work to do in this respect and this short paper represents the starting point for a number of iterations and possibilities for further engagement. The *device* has offered us the opportunity to turn the cameras inwards towards its riders, not only the space and its residents. The bicycle strove to co-author documentation and representation through the process of riding it. We have subsequently made four short films from the footage that the tandem collected. These films form part of a larger project by asking how the notion of a/symmetry can be used to unpick design interventions, the space they occur in and the relations and uses they form. It is in these four films that we take up four symmetries that have been developed through this engagement. Clearly, there is still an a/symmetry of agency and relations occurring throughout the processes we have developed and our interventions have been instrumental in bringing about these a/symmetries that are constantly changing and developing (for example in our continued relationships with residents from the camp). We are the ones that bring the device in, we decide when to stop the study, when to leave the camp and cross the UK-France border. It is important that we

recognise this and remain reflexive. The bike does not and cannot *solve* these issues, instead it is an experimental device that allows for an exploration of symmetry in the design process and how we might develop more of these devices that go some way in reassembling social relations and agency albeit temporarily in spaces such as the Jungle.

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