

Infrastructural immobility: Movement and material culture in the Calais Jungle

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Abstract

This paper develops the idea of infrastructural immobility, a dynamic within infrastructural systems whereby the movement of one thing relies upon the immobility of another. Drawing on fieldwork carried out in the Calais Jungle over the summer of 2016, it explores the relationship between what moves and what stays in processes of migration, arguing that if we are to make sense of camps as both spaces of confinement and spaces of mobility it is important to look at the role of infrastructures and the objects they contain. Infrastructures have been defined as ‘matter that enables the movement of other matter’ but it is rarely acknowledged that the matter that facilitates movement will often have to stay immobile. To carry cars, our roads need to stay fixed: they must not shift, rupture, buckle or break. To channel water, pipes need to be sealed and secured, remaining stationary and solid. This also applies to camps and other carceral junctions, which have their own balance of confinement and mobility shaped by material forms. This paper focuses on two objects in Calais – fencing and shipping containers – to illustrate the point.

Keywords

Refugee camps, Calais, infrastructure, material culture, shelter, displacement

Introduction

On a crisp December morning in 2016, whilst walking in the frozen sands of northern France, I found a torn and sodden prayer book on the ground. It had been neatly arranged on a grassy dune, opened at a specific page with a religious poem placed on top and a small stone keeping the whole assemblage in place. The pile of paper had probably stayed for several weeks like that

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as bulldozers churned and ground the earth around it. I bent down to look more closely and saw that the pages of the prayer book were ripped right through. The low light of the early morning sun illuminated specks of frost and sand scattered over its sheaves, but beneath them the poem was clearly visible. It proclaimed that travellers should never feel alone – an irony that was lost in this particular location, as heavy machinery removed homes, schools, churches, restaurants and other remnants of a once-vibrant community. The noise indicated not togetherness but an act of destruction, as this temporary town of around 10,000 migrants and refugees was being gradually ground back into the earth.

This was the site of the Calais Jungle, whose paths and streets had long shifted like the dunes on which it stood. Many of its makeshift homes had over the past 18 months been removed by the police or burnt to the ground through accident or artifice, then built up and adapted again. On the day I found the prayer book, the site had finally been emptied of people and shelters. The refugees and other migrants who once lived here had been loaded onto buses and dispersed around France. The prayer book was one of countless remnants in the sand, and I walked around with some colleagues looking at what else was left. Linoleum and wood testified to the homes that once stood. Gas canisters and bullets indicated resistance and riot. Socks and suitcases testified to hurried departures. Exercise books with half-finished compositions rested alongside pens and paper at the site of a former school.

Jason de León, in his study of undocumented border crossings in the Sonoran desert, has shown what the study of material culture like this can bring to scholarship on migration. As de León (2013, 2015) points out, migrants need objects like water bottles, money, sunhats and backpacks for their journey, which they discard as they travel. Such objects, for de León, help to build the stories of lives lost and the brutal violence of border enforcement in the process of human migration. Journalists and artists have realized this too, often drawing on discarded objects to tell powerful stories about migration. The orange lifejackets piled on the shores of Greece over the summer of 2015, in particular, became an arresting image of mobility. The material remains of makeshift camps like Calais, similarly, have been turned into exhibitions and photographic publications asking powerful questions about migration (Hicks and Mallet, 2019: 77–78; Mendel, 2017).

There are other objects, too, which are less immediately moving but can reveal a different side of mobility. They do not move and disintegrate so much as stay and endure. In the ruins of the Jungle, particularly, it was the fencing and the shipping containers that truly dominated the landscape. At this point the camp was being gradually wiped away, but some of its parts remained highly visible, and continued to serve a purpose – particularly the fences, which stretched away alongside roads and demarcated areas for the police. At the eastern edge of the site, too, a large collection of shipping containers remained. These had been clustered together to form a more formal, regulated camp for migrants. Such objects formed the heart of the camp as a carceral junction, a site of both confinement and of mobility, of state power as well as attempts to evade that power. They were important not because they document the undocumented, like de León's water bottles and backpacks, but rather because they showed how movement can be both blocked and allowed by objects (Latour, 1992).

Jungles

Like many of the other refugee camps and reception centres around Europe, it is tempting to see the Calais Jungle as space of isolation. It had been built on a sandy wasteland at the edge of the city of Calais, bounded to the east by a country lane and to the west by a highway that led northwards to the

ferry port. This highway formed the dividing line between the camp and the city: a large road that was elevated on a huge bank of earth, lined by a double fence topped with barbed wire. To the north lay a vast, open beach – and anyone oppressed by the crowded density of tents and shacks in the Jungle could find a striking and relieving contrast in the beach that lead north to the English channel. After fighting through the gorse and grass one could stand on tall mounds of sand and see for miles around, which only contributed to the sense of isolation: flat sea in the distance, dunes rolling behind, the turrets and chimneys of factories and the wide arc of warehouse roofs sitting atop the industrial areas of Calais to the west. This was hardly a well-connected place. Travelling east from the Jungle one would quickly arrive in farmland and wetland, as the city gave way to the countryside. The landscape in that direction was one of coastal nature reserves, bird hides, and World War Two artillery batteries: enormous concrete structures that had crumbled to reveal rusted iron skeletons and cavernous, rain-stained interiors.

Apart from its location in the isolated and decrepit peri-urban edges of a city, the Jungle was not in fact a usual camp – at least not in the sense of being a top-down managed community constructed by aid agencies. On the contrary: this was a bottom-up settlement, which had been created by migrants in order to assist their onward journey from France to the United Kingdom. Many of the inhabitants spent the nights trying to gain access to a lorry on the way to the ferry port, or trying to board a Eurostar train to London, and the camp was just the latest in a long line of informal migrant camps created for this purpose, also known as ‘Jungles’ (Agier, 2018; Ibrahim and Howarth, 2018; Reinisch, 2015) The word is generally thought to derive from the Pashto, *dzhangal*, meaning ‘forest’. It indicates life in a wooded area, hidden from sight of the police. These often hidden settlements were dotted around the city since the 1980s, but the famous Jungle of 2015–2016 turned out to be different in both scale and visibility. It was created after the local police began forcibly clearing the many smaller camps in Calais, making it known that their presence would only be tolerated in the sandy, tufty land at the east of the city. The informal deal was presented as an opportunity for settlement with some limited services provided by a local organization, but it was also because the migrant presence could be more closely monitored and controlled if everyone was concentrated in open land. The territory had previously been a city dump, and it was situated next to a walled compound once used for municipal summer camp, where some basic services such as meals and showers could be provided.

There were two main ways to get to the camp from the city of Calais. The first route was to follow a long, straight road that headed east out of the industrial part of town, past factories and business parks, finally going under the large highway to the wasteland itself. This underpass had concrete pillars that were daubed with Arabic and Pashtu slogans as well as a Banksy image of Steve Jobs carrying a sack and early Macintosh computer (the Apple founder’s biological father was a Syrian immigrant from Homs). The second route involved passing over the highway a little further south, taking a bridge that led from the suburbs out towards the countryside. This marked the Jungle’s southern extremity, where the sandy wasteland of the site became farmland, where brownfield seeped into greenfield. It was obvious, when entering the Jungle from either of these points, how the camp had become framed by the city. Here the migrants could remain out of sight and out of mind for the majority of the city’s inhabitants, while the police could monitor their movements.

When I began conducting research in the Jungle during 2016 I stayed in a room with a French couple in the centre of Calais. It was quickly clear that they knew very little about the camp. On the first morning my middle-aged host offered to drive me there – out of curiosity, as he put it – but when we arrived he expressed shock and concern about the size of the place.

The camp had begun its life as something small, hidden and sparsely populated. Dome tents were put up under scraggly bushes, plastic sheeting was thrown over the branches of small trees, and there a few hundred people at most spread across a wide area of the sandy wasteland. Perhaps this was what my host had expected. But by the summer of 2016 the settlement had grown into an overcrowded and bustling area on the edge of town. Large structures had by then been built from wood and tarpaulin and entrepreneurial migrants had opened shops from the front of temporary shelters. Community life had followed the people, and Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees had constructed an Orthodox church, made from a tall wooden frame topped by a cross and wrapped in white tarpaulin. Mosques had been established in larger marquees, donated structures as one might find at a festival. Restaurants were opened, many placed next to ponds and trees so that customers could eat on battered sofas placed on carpeted decks made from pallets, wedged by the water's edge. Throngs of migrants and volunteers moved through the streets to collect or distribute clothing, to cook food, to drink tea and socialize, to watch sports or pray.

The look of surprise and concern on the face of my host as he drove to the edges of this settlement was remarkable, generated no doubt by a combination of its mess, mud and the throngs of people who looked nothing like he did. It underlined a certain kind of isolation from the city, but the camp nevertheless existed at the hub of social networks, located at the heart of many journeys. It was not only a place of transit for refugees and other migrants trying to travel from the continent over the English channel, but it had also developed something like a social support system, staffed by amateur humanitarians from across the continent, giving out food, clothes, blankets and building materials (Doidge and Sandri, 2019; Sandri, 2018). More formal NGOs mapped the camp, installed standpipes, undertook regular surveys and monitored unaccompanied children. Schools and libraries started to appear, some established by foreign volunteers, some by refugees themselves (Bouagga, 2017). The police soon tried to prevent the arrival of more permanent building materials, but volunteers and activists had from the start brought in generators, bricks and old dented caravans. Soon the camp became a regular destination for artists, with murals and sculptures dotting the settlement and coloured flags fluttering above tents in the breeze. One of the strangest experiences of visiting the Jungle was stumbling across a series of micro-neighbourhoods amidst the tangle of shelters: dome tents arranged in circles in the Sudanese style; legal clinics staffed by eager French students; neat lines of identical blue canvass tents installed by the state; commercial zones complete with shacks and padlocked grilles; the metal remnants of British seaside resorts in the form of rusty caravans, complete with flowerpots, deckchairs and fenced off areas for cultivating vegetables.

The French state intervened from the very beginning in the settlement, and not just by creating the tolerated zone in the first place. They set up tents provided by the Sécurité Civile – the Department of Emergency Preparedness – and paid for a substantial aid operation out of the old municipal summer camp. This space, called the Jules Ferry Centre and informally known as *al-Salaam*, was located on the edge of the Jungle and eventually hosted thousands of people each day. It was run by a French organization called La Vie Active, and it offered meals in cardboard trays with plastic cutlery, hygiene kits and a place to shower. It also had a fenced section for families, children, and the more vulnerable. Visitors to the Jungle, like my middle-aged host, often expressed their surprise at the simultaneous disorder and order that emerged in the dunes outside their city. On the one hand, the place resembled a slum in the developing world, with its makeshift shelters, muddy streets with appalling sanitation, its overcrowding and noise. On the other hand, the Jungle seemed to function surprisingly smoothly as a social space, as thousands

of people got on with their lives and a basic infrastructure of electricity, water and food were provided with minimal bureaucratic friction.

Infrastructural immobility

Larkin (2013: 327–29) has defined infrastructure as ‘matter that enables the movement of other matter’, a material form ‘that allows for the possibility of exchange over space’. The aim of infrastructure is to facilitate movement – of electricity, of water, of people – but it is rarely acknowledged that the matter that facilitates movement *has to remain immobile*. Infrastructures, in other words, are characterized by immobility as much as by mobility. To carry cars, our roads need to stay fixed and they must not shift, rupture, buckle or break. To channel water, pipes need to be sealed and secured, remaining stationary and solid without letting other matter in or out of the pipe. To carry electricity, pylons need to be erected securely: the wires may sway in the wind, but the infrastructure itself has to be immobile. All this points to a central dynamic in infrastructural systems: that the smooth movement of one type of matter can only happen when another type of matter – the infrastructure itself – remains firmly fixed in place.

Xiang and Lindquist (2014: 124) have described migration infrastructures as the ‘systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility’. In developing the idea, they focused on the transformative aspects of migration infrastructure, the dynamic accumulation of new commercial, technological, regulatory and social systems. Yet there is also something more mundane involved through the immovable and physical foundations for travel, which above all need to be kept stable. This includes the roads and runways, the ports and airports, the arteries of movement that are maintained and protected as a central role of modern government. Just as a network of clean water pipes must to be sealed from leakages and impurities for the flow to be useful and effective, roads and transport arteries are also made stable by sealing and clearing them. This is not just a matter of removing rubbish and blockages, it is about creating exclusions and immobility around the edges through mechanisms of security, such as fences around an airfield, banks of earth protecting a roadway, or bollards demarcating one lane of traffic from another. Ensuring smooth and regularized movement of some people, in short, requires keeping other people and things at bay.

Larkin has argued that one of the key features of infrastructure is its relative invisibility. As he puts it, infrastructures ‘are present to the senses, yet they are also displaced in the focus on the matter they are moving around... We see computers not cables, light not electricity, taps and water but not pipes and sewers’ (Larkin, 2013: 329). There are exceptions to this, of course – many spectacular infrastructural projects can stand as high profile statements of progress and governmental intent – but in the study of migration Larkin’s point tends to hold true. Many commentators focus on the people moving from place to place rather than on the material worlds that surround them. We see the people not the roads. We study the humans not the boats. When such objects do stray into analysis it is as a supporting actor, illuminating human stories through bottles and backpacks, passports and permits rather than treating them as objects of social study in their own right (Yi-Neumann et al., 2022). It is only when people completely disappear – such as in the wake of the Jungle’s final destruction – that objects move into the foreground as poignant reminders of the role this material infrastructure can play.

One exception, perhaps, is camps, whose highly visible and spectacular scale has become something of a cliché in journalistic reports of migration. Issues of architecture, design and material form, similarly, are a core part of the scholarly literature on camps. This has included studies of self-

constructed shelters (Mould, 2018), prefabricated shelters (Katz, 2017a) and flat-packed shelters (Scott-Smith, 2019). It includes studies of repurposed shelters (Doraï and Piraud-Fournet, 2018), grand architectural shelter designs (2020a) as well as more mundane considerations of engineering (Scott-Smith, 2020b). The Jungle itself has generated a range of interesting literature focusing on physical forms, which includes studies of material precarity (Mould, 2018) its relationship with nearby cities (Mould, 2017), and the spatial dynamics of migrant journeys (Davies and Isakjee, 2015). The Calais Jungle, like many other camps, had its own material networks that kept things running: the systems that brought shelter, food and water into the site, whose remnants ended in the sand like onions and bedsprings and linoleum. Yet the Jungle could be seen as a whole, as one part of a bigger network of other places, junctions and stopping points for migrants. In this respect it was a combination of staging post and quicksand. It was a place where people gathered contacts, resources, and knowledge for their onward journeys, yet also where they got stuck once those journeys had been thwarted.

Anita von Schnitzler (2013, 2014) has shown how infrastructures in South Africa never simply facilitate mobility, but also impede, restrict and proscribe forms of movement. This has a long history, with labour bureaus, rail tracks and passbooks all concerned with questions of who can go where – both allowing and blocking types of movement. This is relevant for the Calais case, too, where the infrastructures that facilitate movement for some people are also used to prevent movement for others. Larkin (2013: 332) may have pointed out the inherent modernism behind many infrastructural systems – the idea that ‘by promoting circulation, infrastructures bring about change, and through change they enact progress, and through progress we gain freedom’ – but von Schnitzler emphasizes how, in many cases, infrastructures have more complicated effects, blocking some kinds of circulation while facilitating others, enacting progress for some but not for all.

Infrastructural immobility draws attention to this dynamic. It reminds us that facilitating movement involves blocking movement, and that promoting the movement of some things requires preventing the movement of others. It is only by taking a resolutely symmetrical approach to the study of infrastructure that we can see how this works, examining the things that move as well as the things that stay in camps like Calais. This is a version of that ‘generalized symmetry’ widely found in science and technology studies: a flatter, more inclusive study of objects and people. In what follows I look in turn at two materials that remained wedged in the sands of northern France after the Jungle had been destroyed, using these to open up further discussion of infrastructural immobility. First I consider fencing, which was used primarily to render some people immobile while allowing others to move. I then turn to shipping containers, which were used to facilitate the movement of objects but also to keep people fixed in place.

Fencing

By 2016, around a year after it had been formed, the Jungle had gained a degree of internal stability. The main paths had been graveled, a stout row of street lighting had been installed under civil society pressure, banks of portable lavatories stood at the camp’s perimeter, and steel troughs delivered fresh water. The Jungle certainly *had* infrastructure, therefore, and it came in many forms, with some sections put in place by the state, others by migrants and NGOs, and with each designed to facilitate different kinds of mobility, yet it was nevertheless a temporary, semi-independent infrastructure that was nothing like the solid infrastructures of state. The vast concrete edifices of the port and its surrounding network of barriers stood in stark contrast. These were formidable, fixed and lasting. They had been erected precisely to keep the movement of regular travel contained

from the disruptions of the camp, and they were also growing in size and complexity. They prevented the inhabitants of the Calais Jungle from circulating, from migrating freely and travelling to the UK, and they left migrants dependent on the far more fragile infrastructures of the camp for their daily life as they waited for an opportunity to travel.

To succeed in their journeys, many Jungle residents had to disrupt the 'regular' movement of travellers to the port. They did this by creating what they called a *dougar*, a blockage or traffic jam on the highway, which was caused by lighting a fire or placing an obstacle on the road that forced lorries to slow so that migrants could climb aboard. The use of a *dougar* demonstrated the close, mirrored relationship between mobility and immobility, and proved why highways and arteries had to be sealed from the side to ensure the movement of 'regular' journeys. Yet it also showed how this relationship could work both ways. The movement of regular traffic, after all, could also be stopped to create opportunities for irregular migration. In both cases, one form of movement was dependent on the prevention of another. The notoriety of the Jungle was based on regular footage of this struggle between different forms of mobility, with migrants disrupting traffic, throwing objects and lighting fires, and the police in turn firing tear gas canisters and rubber bullets to drive them back.

Meanwhile, security in the camp was generally neglected. The police focused on protecting the highway with barriers and patrols, ensuring that the flow of regular traffic kept moving. They remained at the edges of the Jungle, along the roads, and they seemed to express more interest in the integrity of the fencing that bordered the highway than with security in the camp itself. Throughout 2015 and 2016 this fencing along the main road was extended, its height raised, its length stretched southwards – all funded by the British government, who were concerned with preventing disruption to the flow of commodities and people along the most important trade route from Europe to Britain. Millions of pounds were spent on what became known in the media as the 'Great Wall of Calais', which remained intact after the fragile camp had been destroyed. This focus on roads and the infrastructure of fencing became a pretext for spectacular acts of destruction. In January 2016, about a year into the Jungle's life, the police cleared a 100 m buffer zone between the camp and the bank that rose to the road, giving them a strip of clear land to patrol. A month later they cleared the entire southern section of the camp, leaving smoke-filled skies and crackling wood alongside riots and protest.

With the exception of the churches, mosques, schools and other communal structures, which were protected by a judicial ruling, the police were gradually forcing the inhabitants of the Jungle into an ever-smaller patch of land to the north. They would raid this area periodically to harass makeshift restaurants and businesses without a permit – raids that were often thwarted by an impressive chain of communication. If one was sitting in a restaurant or café the whole street would suddenly shut down from the inside: boards put up, grilles lowered, the clientele sunk into darkness as a patrol moved by in one of their periodic sweeps of the camp. Each moment of restriction was met with counter-moves, and the whole dance of mobility and immobility within this camp was played around barriers that were breached and defended in different ways.

Fencing has always been integral to the formation of refugee camps (Meiches, 2015: 482–4), and at the end of the Jungle's life, there were many sections of fence left stationed and scattered in the sand. These lengths of twisted and moulded metal spoke to a history of seizures and repurposing, of struggles for mobility. As well as the huge barrier along the highway there were strips of fencing that had been used as a grille to secure the hatched opening in kiosks, spiked remnants of cords clipped when trying to break through to the road, twisted wires used to hang washing, as well as new fencing installed around various compounds within the Jungle. A hundred petty obstacles

lay around the makeshift streets when the Jungle was occupied, created by restaurants who erected barriers to protect valuable stock, by voluntary organizations who defended goods that they wanted to distribute more systematically, or by groups of migrants from the same nationality who surrounded their compounds with barriers of grass and straw to guard their tents from disputes and encroachment.

All this suggests how the layers of infrastructure in the Jungle were installed and maintained by different people, each facilitating and blocking different kinds of movement. The camp and its material forms, in other words, were woven with the features of a carceral junction – especially in its barriers. These were never straightforwardly confining, nor were straightforwardly empowering. On the one hand, the very existence of this camp was the result of a shared sense that state restrictions could be surmounted: the stocks of tiny kiosks included things like SIM cards, dark clothing, and water bottles needed for migrants in their attempts to smuggle onto lorries, and people gravitated to the site in large numbers in order to gather the contacts and knowledge necessary to continue their journeys. Yet, at the same, the more that people arrived in the Jungle the more extensive the police presence became, which led to rising restrictions, clearances, and the growth of a complex network of barriers produced by the many different people who apportioned and governed parts of the camp for different purposes. These barriers were passable by different people. Those with money could gain access to fenced-off restaurants. Those meeting certain criteria of vulnerability could access the closed compounds of voluntary organizations. Those with wire-cutters could traverse the tall fences of the state. The camp was a place of many interfaces, with and a balance of restrictions and mobility between the agents that built it (Turner and Whyte, this issue).

Of these barriers, the most visible and inviolable was the large fence along the highway, but this was linear – compared to many other camps around the world, the Jungle was not properly demarcated at its perimeter. It was never surrounded by a single fence and its edges were always shifting, changing with police tactics and clearances. Despite harassment at police checks along nearby roads, migrants and activists could come and go from the main camp relatively freely. Interestingly, however, objects and building materials were more restricted. Bricks, concrete and metal were formally forbidden from the site, and the police would search trucks and cars nearby to ensure that none were being carried in. There were, nevertheless, many ways to smuggle such building materials inside, bypassing what was in effect a temporary infrastructure that had been created to block the production of a lasting infrastructure. Much of the camp, moreover, had been built before this rule was enforced, and as a result, the barriers around the site were as unfinished and convoluted as the camp itself. A fence might run through the middle of the Jungle. It might be broken and moved. There were shifting subdivisions and enclaves within the camp, with some parts of the landscape more effectively cordoned off as time went on.

As well as the highway, the informal compounds, the agency headquarters, the kiosks and the cafes, there were also fences around the container camp and the Jules Ferry Centre. The latter had been created out of an old municipal summer site to deliver food and sanitation, which was bounded by an old wall that had closed off the whole area – except, that is, for one gate. Each morning, and at mealtimes throughout the day, the residents of the Jungle would queue at this gate to use the showers or receive hot food. It was a time-consuming process. Much of everyday life in the Jungle involved waiting in queues for basic services and provisions like this, and it was the source of much frustration for residents. Places in the queue were often shared or traded to save time, but there was always the more direct route to avoid waiting, too, which involved circumventing the barrier entirely. In 2016 some migrants decided to destroy a section of the Jules Ferry Centre wall at the Western edge of the compound to ease their trip inside.

The wall was then rebuilt, and destroyed again. Next, a new section of temporary fence was installed inside: a cheaper and easier way of resealing the breach. A bigger fence was later erected to demarcate an area further inside the compound to increase security for single women. Realignment like this went on periodically as fences were cut, moved and rebuilt; areas cordoned off for medical centres, child-friendly spaces and essential services.

The fencing along the highway, too, was frequently breached and easily circumvented. In order to continue creating obstacles on the highway Jungle residents simply walked southwards at night, around the fence and onto a more distant section of road to try and mount lorries from there. At the end of one long day in the Jungle I left from the southern route, over the bridge to the suburbs and noticed that a section of fence simply stopped, impotently, at the moment the bridge began. The two had not been connected; the fence in effect was incomplete. It seemed that the huge barrier was more of a spectacle than an effective obstacle, although it could be understood as part of an assemblage of resources for the police, allowing them to redeploy at open sections and bottlenecks. Latour (2005) always reminds us that people and objects work together in this way, and that objects can be delegates for human action. He has written a particularly engaging account of the 'sleeping policeman' or speed hump, which echoes this process in the Jungle. Like the highway fence, the sleeping policeman acts on behalf of the law, enforcing the speed limit by placing an obstacle in the road (Latour, 1992). This balance of mobility and immobility combines the power of the state with the power of objects. What Latour did not mention, however, is how state power, when realized through objects like this, has limits. It may free up people for deployment elsewhere, but it only exists in punches and sparks and moments of spectacular explosion – like the grinding of the car's suspension on the speed hump after it approaches too rapidly. You can break the law, of course, and in the process you will break your suspension, but opportunity still begins once your penalty has ended.

Shipping containers

Another barrier that was frequently breached around the Jungle was that which surrounded 'container camp', formally known as the 'Provisional Reception Centre' or *Centre d'Accueil Provisoire*. This was, in effect, a camp within a camp. It had been established near the Jules Ferry centre to house 1500 people in 125 white shipping containers, which were stacked on top of one another and fixed in lines on levelled, gravelled ground. The land had been bulldozed and surrounded by a high fence, and to enter this compound one had to register and pass through a turnstile, where visitors were checked and residents used a machine that measured their handprint and approved their residence. Whereas the informal Jungle was open, makeshift and unplanned, oriented around winding alleys over undulating ground, the container camp was a space of linear modernist order. It was flat, grey and square. Once inside, the overwhelming sense was one of monotony. The light grey gravel on the ground matched the dusty off-white containers and silver metal of the lighting posts. There were fire points, wide paths, security lights and cameras. Life inside was safe and secure, but there was nothing to do. As a result, the residents of the container camp frequently vaulted the fence to get directly into the Jungle itself, where they could find shops, restaurants, schools and places of worship. Like the demolished walls of the Jules Ferry Centre, this was a matter of people creating mobility where it had been previously blocked, ensuring access to truly social spaces that were sorely lacking amongst the containers (Gueguen-Teil and Katz, 2018; Katz, 2017b).

The shipping container is a fascinating object, devised in the early 20th century to facilitate the efficient transport of commodities around the globe. The first standard sizes were created in the

1930s by the *Bureau International des Conteneurs*. The dimensions, usually 8 feet wide and either 20 or 40 feet in length, allowed the container to be stacked and moved with ease, especially between modes of transport such as from truck to ship, or ship to rail. As a result, the object is often known as an ‘intermodal container’, and it has become a symbol of globalized supply chains and international trade. Goods can be bundled into larger loads and packed tightly together in a container. They can be moved quickly and efficiently from place to place. The whole point of containers is to facilitate the smooth movement of objects around the world, which makes it particularly ironic that these objects have also been seemingly used to fix people in place and are used as a common source of accommodation for refugees (Baumann, 2020; Levinson, 2006; Martin, 2013, 2016; Ticktin, 2016).

Old or recycled containers have been repurposed for many years as offices and temporary sleeping quarters, right from the origins of the container in commercial and military supply chains. The so-called Conex Box was developed for US military logistics in the Korean war, and it subsequently became a common fixture in war zones long after its travel – as a place to store supplies and people in command posts (Baumann, 2020; Levinson, 2006: 186). Containers have also been seen on building sites due to the ease with which they can be transported and lifted into place, as well as in temporary or ‘pop up’ architectural interventions for cities. In more recent years containers have become increasingly common as a form of housing for refugees and other migrants – a use in which the idea of ‘containment’ takes on a new meaning. Shipping containers make movement more efficient because they seal a large number of irregularly shaped commodities in a standard, stable form. Like all infrastructure, the smooth movement in one direction relies on immobility from the sides. The goods are contained, and success comes from those firm steel edges, those predictable forms. Similarly, when used to house humans the aim of the container is to provide a fast, ordered accommodation that helps to monitor people, register them, stack them, process them, but certainly not to facilitate their movement around the globe.

Since the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe the use of containers as a form of refugee shelter seems to have proliferated. As well as their use in the Jungle (Katz, 2017b), shipping containers have become the basis for so-called Tempohomes in Berlin (Baumann, 2020), they have featured in camps across the continent, and they have inspired the creation of more adapted ‘Isoboxes’ in refugee camps throughout Greece (Ticktin, 2016: 31). They are generally used in lines to create regularised, closely monitored spaces, ringed by barriers, and internally end up being adapted with varying degrees of sensitivity. In the Jungle, the shipping containers were manufactured by a French firm called *Logistic Solutions*, lined with laminate floors, dotted with 12 bunk beds, and with a few windows cut through the sides. Each container had been designed with a personal drying rack for wet clothes, power sockets to charge telephones and a locker to keep valuables safe from others in the shelter. Collective life, however, was neglected. Cooking was prohibited inside the container camp as were smoking and taking showers. The few designated social areas outside the containers were devoid of activity, and many people who lived in the container camp complained about isolation and loneliness (Gueguen-Teil and Katz, 2018: 83–86; Katz, 2017b: 4).

It is tempting to interpret the container camp through the prism of Foucauldian surveillance – not least because the fences, CCTV, layout and morphological hand recognition system all appeared to prioritise visibility and legibility of asylum seekers (see also Fassin 2012: 109–157; Katz 2017a). Yet residents were free to come and go, and many spent much of their time – when not sleeping – in the main streets of the Jungle to meet people and eat in the restaurants. Miriam Ticktin has

commented on irony of migrants in this particular camp ‘being rendered immobile’ in ‘containers designed to travel’ (Ticktin, 2016: 31). Yet the dynamics of mobility and immobility were more complex. Migrants living in the containers were not rendered completely immobile, and many continued to leave at night to create a *dougar* in their attempt to move on and travel to the UK.

The very fact that the containers could be easily moved, most significantly, also indicated that they were in essence a temporary abode. They kept people in place, but they also signalled that residence would be fleeting. If the containers fixed people, therefore, it was only provisionally, and they were chosen for construction precisely because they were easy and quick to install and remove. In other contexts, moreover, the container has been used in a looser arrangement. Rather than always rendering people immobile when they wish to travel, these structures have, in other settings, also become homes for people at the end of their journeys – longer-term places of residence. The extent of containment always depends a great deal on how the containers are being used. It depends a great deal on design. As Baumann (2020: 19) has noted in another context, ‘container shelters can serve as a first step to integrating refugee housing into the wider urban fabric’ – so long as they are integrated properly into the city.

Conclusion

Many documentaries about the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’ involved graphics whereby migrants were portrayed as pulsating dots, coming together in common routes in their journeys from Turkey into Europe. There were various nodal points in these journeys: Keleti train station in Budapest; Idomeni at the Greek Macedonian border, and of course the Jungle at Calais, where migrants sought entry to the UK. Many of these places, which were often refugee camps as well, took the form of a carceral junction: they had become marked by restriction as well as mobility, by isolation as well as circulation. Such spaces emerged especially at bottlenecks, borders and transport hubs, where it was often the very fact of confinement that generated the irregular journeys. The inability to travel legitimately, in other words, created new networks of improvisation and information to facilitate onward travel.

Over the course of 2016 I watched the Jungle emerge, unfold and recreate itself several times, but it was only after the settlement had been destroyed by the state that I saw clearly the role of objects. By that point just a few things remained in the sand. Alongside the personal items – the toothbrushes, tampons and shoes – there were a few elements of lasting infrastructure that demonstrated the connection between mobility and immobility. The people had gone, the books and blankets were torn and tired, the more sentimental items had been taken by activists and artists, but the fencing and shipping containers remained as firm as ever. These demonstrated their continued utility for the state across the landscape of Calais, where the migrant presence never ended. True, many residents of the Jungle had been taken on buses from the smouldering camp to be installed in so-called *Centres d’Accueil et d’Orientation*, or CAOs (Reception and Orientation Centres). Yet substantial numbers simply melted into the countryside to begin a less visible existence, joined by newcomers who continued to take the well-established migration routes. Together, these people had begun living in smaller groups, in hedgerows and fields, sleeping in bushes and meeting in verges to try and stowaway on trucks, occasionally gathering in the long grass.

This was the next stage in the history of migration in Calais, in which a strange, invisible kind of camp emerged, a new infrastructure that facilitated mobility but left a very light material trace (Hagan, 2020: 112). Meanwhile the state continued to protect its concrete port with fencing, maintaining its shipping containers to provide a more formal type of camp, all in the name of protecting

the smooth movement of 'legitimate' travel over the channel to Britain. The result was not quite the form of infrastructural immobility that one might find in water pipes and electricity grids. Certainly, the state was sealing off the main transport arteries as far as possible from disruption, but there remained gaps, and this allowed a different and contrasting infrastructures to appear. Alongside the vast systems of state there were also informal infrastructures of migration – the networks of support created by migrants themselves in their search for onward journeys. The Jungle always contained elements of both these infrastructures, which were each designed to facilitate one type of mobility and prevent another.

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