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Art Refuge UK

The Calais Winds took our plans away: art therapy as shelter

*The wind got up in
the night and took our plans away*
(Chinese proverb)

KEY WORDS

Calais, refugees, art therapy, shelter, story, group

ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of construction materials, story and group as alternative forms of shelter and crisis relief for refugees in transit in Calais, northern France. It draws on examples from an ongoing art therapy project delivered by Art Refuge UK since Autumn 2015, first in the large makeshift refugee camp known as ‘the Jungle’ and since in various settings in and around Calais, including a day centre for unaccompanied refugees.

INTRODUCTION

A sunny morning can shift into a cold afternoon, caused by the north winds that blow in off the English Channel. While it is challenging to keep warm in some form of physical shelter, for those without shelter the winds are even harsher. The Calais Winds have become a metaphor for the work delivered by a team of visual artists / art therapists with refugees stuck on the France-UK border town of Calais, while trying to reach the UK. The rapid weather changes mirror other external factors beyond people’s control which include arbitrary new rules and recurring violence. The disruptions in the Calais area have echoed the lack of status the refugees experience, with the vast majority existing in a state of limbo, fear and uncertainty, their plans thwarted.

When considering writing for this journal on ‘arts-based disaster relief’ we questioned whether this work with refugees in one of the world’s largest economies could be considered in disaster terms. However, across its lifespan, the camp, just one manifestation of the so-called refugee crisis in Europe, was described variously in the press as frontline, a shanty town, lawless, a crisis, living hell, ‘a complete legal aberration’, ‘a powerful symbol of Europe’s current dysfunction in its own right’, a disaster zone.

Across the two years, we have been aware of the dangers that refugees encounter - violence, trafficking and exploitation, physical and sexual abuse of women, children and unaccompanied minors. Our work grew out of an acknowledged need for psychological support for residents in the Calais camp, many presenting with mental health needs to the camp doctors. A survey carried out by Médecins du Monde (Jardin 2015) in the early months of the camp’s life found that, while 60% of the population had been subject to rape, violence or torture in their country of origin, the Calais situation itself was traumatising including reports of PTSD, anxiety, depression, poor sleep, suicidal tendencies and self harm.

Refugees have told us of regular, violent attacks by the police while they attempt to sleep under trees or in the open, amounting to active denial of access to physical shelter and deprivation of sleep. 89.2% of respondents reported being at the receiving end of police brutality (Refugee Data April 2017: 9). Unaccompanied minors face life-threatening dangers on a daily basis, and many have expressed their surprise, shock and disbelief at their treatment by the police in a European country they imagined would respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

So, indeed, this work can be described as both disaster-relief and crisis relief, made more disturbing in its setting in and around a popular European port and tourist town. From choosing or having to leave home due to war, poverty, discrimination and political violence, to experiences of multiple traumatic incidents on route across Europe, to arrival on a border in search of a safe route to sanctuary - to find you are not welcome, and increasingly not tolerated - struck us as a new form of crisis. In Calais there is very little relief for refugees, and often despair. Forced removals mean that beds and bedding are frequently taken away; a bed in the camp, a temporary structure to sleep under, a room in a day centre are removed, leaving refugees to sleep in snatched

moments. Connections are broken, separations multiply and even mobile phones are actively destroyed. As Samer, a refugee who participated in our groups in the camp in 2016 and has subsequently claimed asylum in the UK put it, '*Your home is not where you come from. Your home is where you feel you are safe*'.

THE ART THERAPY PROJECT

The Art Refuge UK team operating in northern France consists of experienced United Kingdom (UK) registered art therapists, all also practising artists with expertise in trauma. The team is kept small and focused to allow for consistency of delivery, building of trust, knowledge accumulation within the work and with our partners, and to ensure effective peer support.

The work in France takes place two days each week and began in September 2015. The team travels to France on Thursday morning and returns to the UK on Friday evening. The team members work in rotation with at least one core member acting as the cultural carrier of the work across weeks. Working across cultures, Art Refuge UK was one of the few services in the Calais refugee camp which offered a psychological space open to all people, regardless of ethnicity or age. The work took place in partnership with two long established French non-governmental organizations (NGO's), Médecins du Monde and Médecins Sans Frontières within their psychosocial programmes in the camp; and following the camp's eviction, in the day centre with the association Secours Catholique.

Our intention as a charity is to deliver a consistent, responsive programme of art therapy group activity for refugees in the area for as long as it is relevant, needed and requested by our partners on the ground. Arts Therapies and arts interventions have been identified as being significant in supporting resilience in refugee camps (Andemicael UNHCR 2011, Clair 2017). The organisations working alongside us have been stretched to capacity in terms of providing the basic needs of food, clothing, medical care, washing facilities and, in the camp, shelter. Psychological spaces are rarely provided even though the need has been identified as urgent. This is evidenced by the consistent flow of attendees throughout the various spaces in which we work. Over fifteen months in the camp the team recorded 1,200 individual contacts.

Our work is framed by continuous assessment and evaluation. It is a symbiotic, interpersonal and improvisational response which has necessarily adapted to the continually changing political climate and local context. Changes are frequently made on a day to day basis challenging us to continue to respond. What has remained consistent is our presence of delivery week after week which has been acknowledged as valuable by individuals using the spaces and by partner organisations, allowing for psychological safety and trust to develop. This has enabled some individuals to return weekly whilst others have used the spaces only once or sporadically, with different individuals making up the groups each week.

The therapists have been supported by the notion of the Portable Studio (Kalmanowitz, Lloyd 2005, 2011) which has provided a frame within which to hold the Calais Winds. A crucial element has been the recognition that each individual engaged in art-making possesses *'internal resources rooted in experience, resilience and culture rather than being a powerless victim for whom the therapist holds all the solutions'* (Kalmanowitz, Lloyd 2005: 108).

CALAIS REFUGEE CAMP

'The poor live with the wind, with dampness, flying dust, silence, unbearable noise' (Berger 2008: 92). Makeshift refugee camps have existed in the Calais area since 1999, arising in part due to strict immigration laws and, for the majority trying to get to the UK, almost impossible asylum application processes. In April 2015, following the closure of smaller makeshift camps and local facilities for refugees in the area, a larger unofficial camp known as 'The Jungle' started its life on sand-dunes and an abandoned waste dump on the edge of Calais, sprawling across this inappropriate landscape until October 2016 when the camp was destroyed. At its height, it was the unwilling temporary home to around 10,000 refugees - 95% men and unaccompanied teenagers, the rest women and children - most of whom had fled war and conflict largely from across Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan. While the camp grew to operate as a mini society or groups of villages and there was at times a strong sense of community, living conditions were unhealthy, uncomfortable and often violent.

EXTRACT ONE - NOVEMBER 2015

'It is in the shelter of each other that people live' (Irish Proverb)

In November a new French government shelter-building programme started in the sand directly outside the psychosocial tent. The same week saw refugee protests and heavy police retaliation in the camp; asbestos was found and a large accidental fire destroyed 40 Sudanese tents on the Friday night. Later that same evening, the Paris terrorist attacks took place 180 miles away.

Much of the camp landscape had an unstable sand base. The day before the fire and the Paris attacks we had started to build in the sand on the tent floor, inspired by a young boy who had made sandcastles there a week earlier. Soon six men were building alongside us, creating chimneys, fencing, a housing complex, a castle. Objects were packed in, buried, concealed. Fresh flowers were brought in from outside and used as decoration by a Sudanese man for his family farm.

Insert figures 1. and 2. here

A three-tiered building inspired a teenage boy from Syria to build his own before knocking it down. He spoke no English but others helped him communicate that his home in Damascus had been like this - three stories high, now reduced to rubble having been bombed, his father killed in the attack. He sieved the sand with his hands, reconstructing his home over the small piece of land he claimed as his own. Initially his sand towers crumbled and he was forced to start again. He worked meticulously, selecting materials from inside the tent and outside. All the while his mobile phone sat by his side with incoming comments from his sister in Damascus. She had joined the conversation because he wanted her to translate for him from Arabic into English so that we could understand. 'I am so happy to see you, my brother' she texted; followed by translation of his words: 'This was once our home and then in one moment...' He sent photos of his sand buildings to her as he worked. His resulting memorial garden was left by him in the space after he departed.

Insert figure 3. here

EXTRACT TWO - OCTOBER 2016

Finding space - Inside and Out

This week over five thousand former residents were dispersed on buses to reception centres across France, while the Calais camp itself was largely dismantled. Police presence was heavy, and around 1,500 unaccompanied minors remained in the camp. Tensions were high due to confusing and often conflicting information. Throughout the two days we were unsure what spaces we would or could inhabit, and if they would be available or safe, mirroring people's experiences.

On Thursday morning we found that large areas of the camp had been burnt to the ground, including the main high street that had once inhabited restaurants, the Kids Cafe and other communal spaces. Left behind were charred timber structures and remains of cooking utensils, furniture, personal belongings, the remnants of previously occupied and activated spaces.

Insert figures 4. and 5. here

On Friday morning we walked across most of the camp, revisiting the now empty spaces we had worked in for months with Médecins du Monde and Médecins Sans Frontières. We tried to make sense of the vast swathes of tents, caravans and shelters further destroyed by fire. Unlike the day before when offering art making had seemed inappropriate, even impossible, we decided to set up a table in amongst the police vans and groups of teenagers and workers clustered around on the sand bank. Demolition trucks and tractors pulling vast skips filled with tents and shelters passed by in a steady stream, with police on all sides.

Insert figures 6. and 7. here

Bringing boxes of simple art materials and a trestle table, we set up a space for four hours during which time up to a hundred teenage boys came to draw, make plasticine figures or engage in conversations about their progression to asylum. Boys jostled for space at the table, trying to find room. Images depicting flags of different countries were united on one page, vehicles and words expressing hope for a more united and tolerant world or access to the UK were taped by us to the fence behind the table. The mood was initially frenetic and objects roughly made, but this gave

way to more careful, symbolic work and intimate one-to-one conversations in which space was given for boys to express their fears about the process of finding places of safety.

Insert figures 8. and 9. here

One boy made a camel equipped with everything its rider might need for the journey ahead, including bedding and sustenance. The teenage artist spent time adding additional layers to ensure there was enough of all the things necessary. Another young man made a ladder, each rung representing a country he had travelled through to get to France.

CALAIS DAY CENTRE

Following the closure of the Calais camp, October 2016, and the dispersal of the population across France, numbers of individuals gravitating back to the France-UK border increased week by week. The French state would not tolerate any sign of small camps, and the refugee population was forced to remain largely hidden. Restrictions on refugee movement, distribution of food and clothing, access to showers and support by volunteer groups and NGO's made operating in and around the town particularly challenging. As a result, many NGO's left the Calais area, leaving services depleted to a critical level.

Against this backdrop, Art Refuge UK was asked by Secours Catholique to work alongside its team in two settings where support for the basic needs of unaccompanied minors and adults was being offered as part of their ongoing remit. Psychological support was acknowledged as urgently needed and our team became one of the only services offering a consistent psychologically oriented space.

From February 2017, we started to offer an open art therapy group in a day centre at the request of the activities manager who was familiar with our work from other settings, and struggling to offer regular formal activities. The centre daily receives up to 100 unaccompanied teenagers and adults between 9am and 5pm, before they are turned outside to fend for themselves, the majority from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan. The young people, including a handful of girls, were initially offered hot meals and a space to sleep on the floor during the day until new external

rules prevented this. Exhausted, vulnerable and scared, they spend their nights either hiding from local vigilante groups and the police at whose hands they continue to be regularly tear-gassed and beaten, or trying to get into the backs of lorries to reach the UK where many have family.

EXTRACT THREE - MAY 2017

**‘I am the one,
who always goes
away with my home
which can only stay inside
in my blood - my home which does not fit
with any geography’**

(Bhatt 1997: 105)

Insert figure 10. here

As we arrived we found a nest of abandoned bedding nearby in the local nature reserve, a place visited by the police to sniff people out from the undergrowth. Boys as young as twelve mingled with middle aged men - individuals from Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Bedoon from Kuwait, Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan. We sensed that the minors were being pushed out of the space or were not finding it safe. People talked about returning to their country, making different plans - ‘it’s so hard here’.

Insert figures 11. and 12. here

As the weeks pass, we have gained a more acute awareness of the seriousness of police scare tactics: ‘none of us slept at all last night’. It’s been raining all week and the dehumanising

measures employed by the CRS police now include firing tasers on legs to temporarily paralyse; spraying teargas on clothes hanging out to dry making them unwearable, in a context in which there are no clothes washing or shower facilities, and spraying teargas directly into people's eyes at the start of the morning shift.

Everyone was exhausted and on edge - many had a haunted look in their eyes; some had sunburnt faces, several were dropping off to sleep in their chairs. Many appeared to be on alert, fractious, ready to snap. One man told us that if he read in Pashto he would start to cry.

Despite exhaustion, men and boys, largely from Afghanistan, sat down at the table and made art. They built with a large box of clay bricks we had brought with us. Over the period of two hours individuals joined the table, taking turns to sit in front of, and add to the house models being carefully, expertly constructed. Poignantly, the roofs proved the hardest to build, the mini tiles falling through the rafters. There was a small queue of young men waiting to have their turn. We witnessed care and attention towards one another.

Insert figures 13. and 14. here

One man was meticulous about his brick courses being in line, protective of his building, not wanting help with his structure. His friends instead gave ideas or made furniture, perhaps aware of his volatility, brought about, as he told us, by lack of sleep and living over so many months in this challenging environment. One of the desired things he listed for the dream house he was building was water. There were significant moments at the table, people trying to balance the sense of being knocked off an axis.

DISCUSSION

The above extracts, adapted from our weekly Facebook posts, were written at key transition points in our work and in three different physical spaces, against the backdrop of temporary homes being destroyed or no physical shelters tolerated. We have often asked each other and have been asked by others, what are these spaces we create in these settings when sometimes they have don't even have walls?

This discussion considers how the work itself acts as a shelter for people existing in chaos, complexity, toxicity and states of limbo, at times offering a means of protection and survival. These virtual shelters are made by what has often felt like an unconscious but collective desire to collaborate, to create space, on the part of both the therapists and the group participants. These are made possible through our consistent presence and that of the group members as active witnesses and visual storytellers.

DE/RE/CONSTRUCTION - PROVIDING SHELTER

Across the work we have witnessed the lack of security and safety, scant consideration of the needs and circumstances of those seeking refuge, and serious human rights violations. The latter has been carefully documented by the Refugee Data Project in the Calais area (February 2016, April 2017) and mirrored in their nine other refugee surveys in different parts of Europe. 75.9% of respondents in the camp said they had experienced violence at the hands of the police, including use of dogs, beatings, verbal abuse and teargas (Feb 2016: 15). 76.41% of respondents said they did not feel safe (2016: 9) while 85.4% said they could not return to their home country (Data Rights, February 2016: 33).

Early on we introduced sand, plasticine, clay and found objects into the work, and later we added small building blocks - clay, concrete - as construction materials. The work is often led by the materials we provide, adapted to the nuances of context, weather, politics and mood. In the first extract we dug with people into the structure of the sand underfoot for use as material. We describe a busy working construction site within the therapy space, which was on that day a canvas tent. A teenage boy built and rebuilt with sand, making structures, at the same time talking to his sister in Syria on his mobile phone. Through the process of building, destruction and rebuilding - the witnessing and making of an object seemed to hold resonance. The therapy space and materials bridged a gap between the boy, his sister, their experiences and us.

The art therapists' presence, the materials, and the participants' focus provided points of reference, a space where emotional shelter could occur. One may have not imagined that in such a state of crisis a trestle table with art materials could offer relief and containment, as described in the second extract. A young man made a camel which held all the things he would need for his

journey. A group of boys drew vehicles, creating and constructing a potential, future space. Artist Yinka Shonibare's words on a BBC Radio 4 interview resonate here when he described how art itself saved him, and acted as both a form of therapy and '*a way in which I could transform the world in my own way. I could also create impossible realms - you know things I wasn't able to do - I could travel through the art*' (Shonibare 2016).

In the third extract, the building and rebuilding offered an imagined space, a zone between inner and outer reality. The tactile elements of the materials were significant. Holding a substance, moulding and placing it on the map tablecloth gave a sense of ownership and enabled a world to be created, a landscape which one could have more control over. Play is work and serious work at that, it provides an ability to lose oneself, become immersed, but also allows for processing and reprocessing, moulding and reforming of a narrative. It is not about making sense of an experience, as this is not always possible, but allowing a possibility of looking at the experience in a number of different ways. The hope here is that one is able to live alongside a difficult experience, allowing it to be formed into something palatable. We make the art making significant collectively because we believe in it. And as art therapist Chris Wood wrote, '*Human beings seem to have a basic need for absorption. Absorption is the opposite to alienation*' (Wood 2000: 40).

The art materials we provide offer a form of sustenance. We need to choose the art materials with care, not providing too many different things, but enough and of the right quality. Working directly with the environment has at times been important, using the sand on the tent floor worked at that moment in the life of the camp. We have attempted to realistically match the art materials we offer with people's needs. Invited to the food and clothing distribution one evening, we noticed the care the young men were showing each other in getting the right jacket to fit, supporting each other to find the best option, to match the combination of it needing to be weatherproof, warm, the right size, a practical colour. The volunteer helped by trying to bring out appropriate choices.

Considering the right art materials has meant being interpersonal, curious, interested, responsive - subtly shifting and tweaking. We have had to consider what we can tolerate: watching a building

emerge with the use of bricks, could the structure hold the roof? Our instinct was to rescue and bring some sticks in the next week for beams, rather than sit with the uncertainty.

With this nuanced way of working, we have had to have the confidence to work without prescription - getting the balance of simplicity but not over-simplifying. Much as refugees need to consider finding the right jacket, as a team we have had to consider the weather changes, political temperature, the most recent police tactics. When an art material hasn't worked it has been crucial to acknowledge and adapt. For example, the wind may have been too strong for use of kites, and we have had to change materials. The resilience of our response has felt significant: we can own our mistakes without it all falling apart. Like those we work with, the strong winds make us change route. Resilience allows one to adapt and change aims and aspirations in order for healthy survival. For some refugees this has also meant letting go of their plan to reach the UK and deciding instead to claim asylum in France.

The idea of virtual shelter supports this; a tacit acknowledgement that someone's personal narrative is profound and meaningful. The virtual shelter has needed to be an interpersonal space, negotiated with the refugees and the support workers as well. It has been necessary to allow ourselves mistakes and sometimes set up, dismantle and move to a better space. With all the dissonance, the consistency has been crucial. The ritual and repetition of the team bringing out the materials has allowed the young men to metaphorically hang their hats in these spaces, and through this, alongside the regular workers, each other, ourselves and the art materials, find a way to turn them into temporary shelters.

In the extracts above the art therapists carried a symbolic pole that they stuck firmly in the ground - this was the camp for now. It was not always clear where it was best to place it and root ourselves for the group. Once the pole was planted the construction could begin. Structures and homes appeared that straddled a cultural divide. There seemed to be an urge to construct in a place where nothing made sense. The materiality of the simple bricks seemed to evoke something primeval. Catherine Moon (2010) recognised the significance of sensory elements in the materials used which reminds people of their previous way of life.

The active, embodied, sensory experience of engaging with materials evokes associations to both personal and cultural histories. The sight, sound, touch and taste of materials, as well as the artist's physical, embodied encounter with the possibilities and limitations of that material all influence the meaning and the significance attributed to it (Moon 2010: 60)

There was a symbiotic relationship between the art materials we provided and the people using them. The physicality of being able to manipulate something seemed to elicit embodiment, often not needing to be explained or be put to words. This physicality enabled intentionality - you have control, you can knock it down, build it up, place it where you wish to. Crucial to the group is allowing the image or construction to hold meaning at many levels. These meanings may or may not be understood by the maker at the time, but with the presence of others, ours and their attentiveness can hold and contain these meanings and potentiality. In these spaces we have hoped to allow the digesting of narratives by being able to tolerate the uncomfortable spaces and letting something occur.

STORY AND GROUP - PROVIDING SHELTER

We often inhabit the spaces by placing a large world map as a tablecloth on one of the tables. The group can then begin. Even though there is a changing tableau of people seated around the table, there is a sense of repetition, habits, and something familiar.

John Berger (1984) in his book, *'and our faces, my heart, brief as photos'* wrote about the loss of the traditional dwelling as home, a place where the two life lines crossed, one that reached the sky, the other representing the world's traffic.

After the migrant leaves home, he never finds another place where the two life lines cross. The vertical line exists no more; there is no longer any local continuity between him and the dead, the dead simply disappear; and the gods have become inaccessible. The vertical line has been twisted into the individual biographical circle which leads nowhere but only encloses. As for the horizontal lines, because there are no longer any fixed points as bearings, they are elided

into a plain of pure distance, across which everything is swept (Berger 1984: 65-66)

In this writing we observe a resistance to stuckness, perhaps as a form of survival, manifested in physical movement - nightly attempts to get into lorries, get to the next stage in the journey. Keeping the narrative alive is perhaps also like holding onto the horizontal line - our art therapy spaces being just one point on this trajectory - acting as '*fixed points as bearings*', virtual and emotional shelters or even temporary homes. This has allowed for both repetition and improvisation, a cultural carrier passed week by week by ourselves and the group. Some people have accessed our different spaces along their horizontal route, first in the camp, then in the day centre or safe house, and subsequently in the UK. People's narratives have been heard and remembered, '*and then the substitute for the shelter of a home will not just be our personal names, but our collective conscious presence in history, and we will live again at the heart of the real*' (Berger 1984: 67).

We think of the boy in Extract Two who made the ladder with rungs representing all the countries he had travelled through along the horizontal line. Or, a young Eritrean boy sitting at the table in the day centre who told us he had reached Calais a few days earlier and was already considering turning back home - Europe was not the place of safety he had imagined. Taking a piece of paper, he drew two lines crossing at his village where his mother still lives. She would be so surprised to see him again. From the shelter of the table he could imagine this space. He then wrote his biography down, his attention now directed onto the object.

Ravi Kohli (2014) wrote about home as co-construction and, although referencing a comparatively more stable situation of arrival at a destination, he captured something of the spirit of what we do:

It is dependent on the traveller and the host recognising the ways in which they negotiate over time to generate an experience of being "at home" as a mutual shelter from harm, where reciprocal and safe relationships can be situated, and rituals of daily living practised, allowing confirmation of one's place in the world, and importantly, supporting sustainable evolutions of one's sense of self over time (Kohli, 2014, 94)

Having made a plasticine boat and placed it on the map on the sea between Libya and Italy, another young man told us that nothing could be more terrible than his home country of South Sudan - his family killed, war, extreme poverty, hunger - and that he was aiming to go to Oxford, with a dream to study there, or even just to see the beautiful city. This young Sudanese man told us his story and created within the shelter of the group an imagined, potential space that was perhaps made more real by his interaction with one of the team who had studied at university in Oxford. “..... *there is this almost physical sense of shelter where the story represents a kind of habitation, a kind of home.*” (Berger, 1983: 01:56 -03:08 within the video)

A second Sudanese man, who was physically disabled, told us that he had decided to claim asylum in France and was now living at some distance from Calais. He had made the journey back to the day centre to touch base with the staff there whom he had got to know and felt safe with when he lived in the camp a year earlier. During this conversation his mother called him on his mobile phone from Sudan. The stories told by these individuals referred to locus points on their journeys, past, present, future, including hoped-for next steps.

From this point we are no longer concerned solely with the witnessing of who we have been and are, but of the opening of possibilities and choices about who we are to become. If one subject matter of therapy is suffering, then another is to do with change and hope (Learmonth 1994: 22)

In this work we inevitably become witness to the devastation. But the active element is not just about bearing witness. The art therapy spaces allow journeys, stories and experiences to be reformed and regrouped, helping connect narratives, imagined and real, with the aim of instilling resilience. Judith Herman (1992) identified the importance that groups can play in both providing resilience and in relating to others who may have had similar difficult experiences. ‘*The feeling of being recognised and understood for the first time, such strong and immediate bonding is a predictable feature of short-term homogenous groups*’ (Herman 1992: 224). This is true of our work which continues to recognise the rich cultural heritage from which group members draw and seems to be manifest in the group as shelter. The art makers turning towards each other, creating a sense of community and care, the huddle around the table has the capacity to hold more; protected from the outside.

It is through imagination that we can examine and question, reflect and connect. Imaginative work can open up new avenues for an individual, rather than closing them down, can lead the individual to unexpected, sometimes surprising results. It can also spill over into the life of the individual (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd 2005: 107).

In other words, it can act as a means of survival.

CONCLUSION

Heightened border security has been a priority for the UK government which has invested millions of pounds in floodlights, security patrols, CCTV and fencing that we have watched proliferating around the Calais area. Oddly timed following the camp's closure, in November 2016 a contentious kilometre-long UK-funded wall was erected near to the camp along both sides of the main road leading to the port. In the period since, when no informal settlements have been tolerated by the French state and several hundred people have gravitated back to the area, we have witnessed new fences going up around wooded areas and other places where people might shelter. This has gone hand-in-hand with changing official pronouncements in relation to food distribution and access to water and showers.

The Calais Winds have taken people's plans away. Finding shelter from the rapidly changing political climate, rules and weather, has needed a constant process of adaptation on the part of the refugees and those striving to support them. Our work has needed to adapt and change. By being present week by week, bringing in materials, working alongside colleagues, actively holding the boundaries of the work, we aim to provide a structure within which some form of shelter can be temporarily found, physically externalised by the art materials and held by story and group. And when there is no physical structure to work inside, there can still be a table.

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