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Calais, After the Jungle

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Calais Then (2016) and Then (2019) is a two-screen video depicting the former 'Jungle' camp in Calais, France. The film juxtaposes footage shot during a tandem bicycle tour of the camp in 2016, the height of the Jungle's activity, with footage retracing the same route in 2019, after the camp was shut down. By revealing the rewilding taking place amidst unused roads and uninhabited shelters, the film is a study into which kinds of life are permitted in a Europe increasingly hostile to displaced people.

In 2016, the Jungle camp was home to an estimated 10,000 people and was largely self-built by both displaced people and volunteers working on the site, with little state or NGO intervention. Before the camp was cleared in November 2016, I had set out to explore the ways image-making practices might be symmetrised between researcher and research-subject. To do this I made and deployed the tandem bicycle with cameras and interview equipment used in the film, which could be piloted and ridden by the camp's residents, volunteers and researchers to record an account of the lived experiences of displaced people in Calais, and the architectures that they had built. In the intervening years, the site has been turned into an 'eco-park', the landscape having been modified to be a home for birds and a tourist attraction. In this setting, 'natural' ecology (or perhaps more accurately 'green-washing') is cultivated to erase displaced people, their histories, and practices for survival. In the camp-become-eco-park, instead of finding those that populated the roads, shops and shelters that I had encountered before, evening primrose flowers have taken root, thick scrub, a community of horses, artificially constructed sand dunes, various small ponds, and a bird viewing hide. These new 'architectures' take on a new function as part of wider bordering practice in France. The ponds flood the area to prevent people from being able to camp in the space, and the bird hide and newly built board walks provide the regularly patrolling CRS police with vantage points for surveilling the area.

Calais 2019 is a photo essay documenting Calais — both the former camp and the city's wider landscapes and infrastructures.

Calais' most recurrent architecture has become the tall, closely knitted white steel fences and concrete walls designed to enforce the UK border, including the port and Eurotunnel terminals. These also surround the now defunct camp and are emerging in several other parts of Calais where new, much smaller improvised camps spring up. These barriers also serve a second function — to obscure and 'invisibilise' displaced people from everyday (French) life. Indeed, invisibility is in part important to displaced people in Calais, their aim often being to cross the border undetected. While highly punitive measures ensure that another camp is not built on the site of the Jungle, Calais is still home to a large number of displaced people who are not allowed to 'install themselves' — they cannot sit or lay down. Instead they are forced into a constant movement, hiding in bushes and wooded areas, silently occupying unseen, obscured and fenced-in parts of the city and its suburbs.