

EVERYTHING MUST DISAPPEAR

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	5
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Introduction	6
--------------------	---

I. Managing what is undesirable 9

What is undesirable?	10
How is it managed?	14

II. Refusing what is undesirable 19

Act to refuse	20
Charitable organisations	20
Humanitarian design	25
Transforming what is undesirable	28

III. Making what is undesirable disappear..... 33

An ephemeral situation	34
How could designers act?	37

Conclusion.....	41
-----------------	----

Acknowledgments.....	43
----------------------	----

Bibliography.....	44
-------------------	----

Summary	48
---------------	----

FOREWORD

As I was more and more interested in social and humanitarian design, I wanted to work for migrants and humanitarian aid. In fact, I think that designers have to consider people who most need their action and their reflection, because as Alain Findeli says:

“The point or the goal of design is to improve or at least to maintain the habitability of the world in all its dimensions.”

To initiate my research and be aware of the reality of this domain I did an internship of two months at Humanitarian Design Bureau the only French humanitarian agency, and one month at L'Auberge des migrants, one of the major association working for the refugees and migrants in Calais.

INTRODUCTION

1. Number of the HCR (2015)

Today, more than 65,3 million people¹ in the world have endured forced displacement. If they formed a nation, it would be the 21st most populated country in the world. Most of these people live in camps which have appeared everywhere in the world, and in which the living conditions are often appalling. For this dissertation, the focus will be put on transit camps like the camp of Calais. These places are isolated and do not appear on any map. They are located on the outskirts of cities, out of sight in order to be easily forgotten. Moreover, everything is done to dissuade migrants from coming. For example, sometimes there is no waste management and it can cause a lot of problems, which could be avoided or reduced if they were treated. Camps are ephemeral, they are built to disappear, that's why helping people and migrants means coping with planned instability and repeated dismantling, which contributes to creating a lot of waste. So, designers do not master the constraints linked to this situation, but they may find a solution to this situation. In fact, their job is to find solutions to problems. To do so, they study the whole situation to understand the issues of the project and the different stakeholders involved. Design could also contribute to transforming social relationships. According to Stéphane Vial², design has three effects : 'callimorphique, socioplastique' and 'ontophanique'. The 'socioplastic' effect remodels society and invents new ways to exist together. In a context where the quantity of migrants will increase, where landfills are nearly full and where the resources are going to dwindle, it seems

2. **Stéphane Vial**
is a Doctor in philosophy
and a lecturer in design
and digital literacy at the
University of Nîmes

Court traité du design,
Stéphane Vial, 2010

important to take into account the potential of the "revolution" of design, as Ettore Sottsass could say. In fact, designers create objects and so potential waste. They are consequently well placed to think or act about waste. Stéphane Vial considers that design does not consist in creating "things that are" but to create "things that happen".³ In this way, designers could create solutions adapted to the temporality of camps.

3. Ibid.

In this unstable context of humanitarian crisis, where stakeholders are diverse and constraints are numerous, are designers quite capable of meeting the issue of waste management in camps in order to take into account the environmental impact of camps?

First, the question of what is undesirable and how it is managed, and the influence of waste on the consideration of migrants will be studied. Following this, we will get interested in people who act to refuse what is undesirable and we will wonder if acting is always right. Then, we will see how what is undesirable can be transformed, and finally, it seems necessary to examine how to make it disappear and to reconsider it in this ephemeral context.

MANAGING WHAT IS UNDESIRABLE

WHAT IS UNDESIRABLE ?

1. **Zygmunt Bauman**
is a sociologist

Vies Perdues, 2004

2. **Marc Augé**
is a French ethnologist
and anthropologist

*Non-lieux, Introduction à
une anthropologie de la
surmodernité*, 1992

3. **Michel Agier** is
an anthropologist and a
researcher at the «Institut
de Recherche pour le
Développement»

Un monde de camps,
2014

Undesirable means not desired, with a presence that is not wished. People or things become undesirable when they are too many as Zygmunt Bauman¹ said, and in the case of a humanitarian crisis, nothing is desirable, neither migrants, nor camps, nor waste, not even humanitarian assistance.

First, migrants are seen as numbers and as similar individuals despite their different cultures and origins. Because of their limited integration potentials, they are considered as human waste, they are redundant, like a disposable population that we do not need. Besides, these populations live in camps which are “non places” according to Marc Augé². Camps are isolated and all is done to forget the existence of these places. For Michel Agier³, turning the world into camps is a way to manage the undesirable ones. There is no map which lists the refugee camps, they are supposed to be transit places but, most of the time, they last longer than expected.



Italia, © Massimo Sestini, 2014



Forest of Basroch in Grande-Synthe, © Gaël Turine, 2016

So, these places are not meant to last, and camps can become real landfills if there is no waste management. Consequently, it can cause a lot of problems like pollution, sickness, or sanitary problems for example, and their occupants' self-esteem could be affected as well. In fact, people are heaped at the same place as waste, and it may influence the representation that we can have of migrants as human waste. For Zygmunt Bauman:

“Every waste, including human waste, tends to be heaped without any discrimination in the same landfill.”⁴

Therefore, waste could make migrants even more undesirable because the disqualification of waste reinforces the aversion toward the occupants of camps.

4. Zygmunt Bauman,
op. cit.



Calais Camp, © Help Refugees, 2016

HOW IS IT MANAGED?

5. *Le déchet, le rebut, le rien*, Jean-Claude Beaune, 1999

First, the focus will be put on the management of what is undesirable by the state, but a lot of other stakeholders are acting in other ways like NGO or associations. Managing in this case can consist, -when it's for something not desired,- in discarding, moving, preventing something from happening, but also making disappear out of sight to forget their existence. Moreover, waste is linked to a waste-place, which highlights the least appropriate areas of the social space and reveals the most discredited places.⁵ Camps are just like landfills, a solution to put what is too much apart. So, there is a logic of invisibilisation of what is undesirable, but it contrasts a lot with the media coverage of migrants and camps. In fact, for a few years the humanitarian crisis has taken a big place in the news and, if it may have contributed to dissuading migrants from coming, it may also make migrants visible and help them out of their predicament. So the media coverage can sometimes force public authorities to act and to find accommodations for example.

In Calais, the management paradoxically implied non-management and dissuasion, because there was no waste management for a long time. However, after a sentence by the State Council in January 2016, the state had to act to improve the living conditions on the camp of Calais by building toilet facilities and collecting waste. So, the state installed a camp made of containers and commissioned ACTED⁶ to take care of the waste management of the camp.

6. **ACTED**

is a French NGO, present on 4 continents and working in 35 countries.

The government relies on associations to make up for the failure of its public policy. So, there is a duality of the political strategy between security and humanitarian aid.

The management mode organized by the state is also motivated by their responsibilities and by national, European or international agreements. All of this influences the French policy, particularly for “Le Touquet treaty” because, the frontier is on the French soil and migrants are often blocked in Calais although they would like to go to England. France has to manage this situation, that's why the Calaisian camps are often dismantled.



Camp made of containers in Calais, © All rights reserved, 2016



Camp in Paris, © Benoît Tessier, 2015

REFUSING WHAT IS UNDESIRABLE

ACT TO REFUSE

Face to face with this, the most efficient way to refuse what is undesirable is to act and to try to change things.

CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS

The charitable organisations refuse the living conditions proposed to migrants, so they take care of camps and try to provide for the needs of these populations by understanding their cultures and habits in order to make appropriate donations. They sometimes act with migrants and community leaders to prepare necessary donations. However, donors can give things without knowing where their donation will end, or without knowing the habits and culture of potential recipients. So, charities receive everything and anything, and all of this can contribute to increasing the quantity of waste in camps, because mistakes of sort can happen, and unadapted donations can consequently end up in camps. A tent with holes which will leak when it rains, a pair of jeans without button or with a broken zip, dirty underwear are as much potential waste which is not supposed to be in the camp and which could lead to more tension and a decline of self-esteem. These inappropriate donations could be explained by the fact that there is no visual or verbal contact with the beneficiaries. This may drive some donors to be less thoughtful regarding the quality of their donations.

In fact, charity donations do not imply any exchange with the beneficiary, and it may influence the quality of what is given. However, the exchange is a part of the triple obligation defined by Marcel Mauss¹ and which is to give, to receive and to return. He criticizes charity which, to him, is humiliating for poor people because they cannot give back even if they know the donor's identity. They feel they have to donate in return but they cannot do it, so they are likely to feel degraded. Nevertheless, according to the sociologist Florence Weber², less humiliating generosity would be possible if beneficiaries did not know the identity of donors, because they would feel less involved. This kind of donation is applied in humanitarian aid, but as seen before, this method may lead to donations of lesser quality.

1. **Marcel Mauss**,
is a French sociologist and
anthropologist

Essai sur le don, 1924

2. **Florence Weber**
is a French sociologist and
anthropologist



Rejected clothe bags, Warehouse of l'Auberge des migrants,
© All rights reserved, Calais



Sorting place at l'Auberge des migrants in Calais, © David Schalliol, 2016

Besides, charitable organisations work in emergency situations and are eager to find quick and effective solutions that can match with their budget. They could make choices and prioritize their interventions by selecting the problems they want to address. However, these choices could have other repercussions. For example, the association L'Auberge des migrants used in Calais a considerable quantity of disposable items during meal distributions. They distributed a polystyrene container and a plastic spoon to each person, which would be thrown immediately after use. Thus, these disposable and non-recyclable objects were the first source of everyday waste in the camp. Here, by choosing the economical solutions, these structures neglected other points like the environmental footprint of such solutions. I think that designers could study both economic and environmental issues and deal with the situation in a comprehensive way. Designers might also examine the functioning of the management of donations by the associations in order to limit the quantity of waste or to improve the quality of donations.

HUMANITARIAN DESIGN

Designers could also create objects for the humanitarian organizations that could anticipate some needs to improve the daily life of people who need help. Yet, only a few humanitarian design projects exist and fewer of them are actually implemented because it's a complicated field with many stakeholders and constraints. Costs, norms or production issues may easily hamper a project. To overcome such difficulties, some associations, who want objects adapted to their everyday needs, get together or create their own research and development hubs. For example, the UNHCR joined forces with Ikea Foundation³ to create the *Better Shelter*. It's a shelter stronger than tents and that could easily be dismantled, moved and reassembled to change some components if needed.

3. **Ikea Foundation** is the charitable foundation of IKEA.



Better Shelter, Ikea Foundation - UNHCR, © All rights reserved

Moreover, this shelter was designed to be mass-produced, so it could be quickly manufactured at low cost in order to be deployed in case of emergency. But all of this contributes to giving identical solutions to migrants, which could fuel the idea of a mass of similar people but could also make the camps better-looking. These solutions highlight migrants' precarious position but seem to be coherent compared to the wish to remain ephemeral. This standard module does not really allow occupants to feel at home but it enables them to use this place for different uses, from a school, or a drop-in center to a health center for example.

This kind of solution permits charitable organisations to anticipate their needs, not to be dependent on donations to act and to control the quality of what they want to import on the camp. Integrating designers in such structures seems to be a good idea because they need to be in contact with the reality, however, we can wonder if it is enough and if it necessarily means this reality is better understood. In 2007, designer David Stairs⁴ noticed in his article "Why design will not save the world" that a number of answers are not always relevant. He thinks that :

4. **David Stairs**
is the founder of *Design Without Borders*

5. *Pourquoi le design ne sauvera pas le monde,*
David Stairs, 2007

“too often solutions of designers are remote solutions, even for these who worked for years in developing countries.”⁵

He took the example of *OLPC*, a computer made by Yves Béhar supposed to be sold \$100. This computer was finally sold \$195 and the minimum order was of \$250,000.



One laptop per child, Yves Béhar, © All rights reserved, 2007

To David Stairs such an object is unaffordable for organisations smaller than OXFAM⁶, so there is a problem between humanitarian projects and the economic reality of camps. Could inclusive design provide designers with the necessary distance so that their answers could be adapted to real life?

In front of unadapted donations and their consequences, it seems necessary to question the limits of aid and we can wonder if acting is always right. Every action has an impact that is important to take into account and to control. Are all the initiatives good to improve the living conditions of migrants.

6. **OXFAM**
is an international confederation composed of 19 organisations working together, with partners and local communities in more than 90 countries.

TRANSFORMING WHAT IS UNDESIRABLE

7. Victor Papanek

is a designer who wrote about social and eco-responsible design

Design pour un monde réel, 1974

Refusing what is undesirable can consist in transforming it to try to increase its value. To find a solution to the quantity of waste produced, we can make sure that they become resources and change their status. Some designers want to create with such resource, like Victor Papanek⁷ with the Tin Can Radio. The object was created to use cheap local recovered resources available on site like cans, fruit juice bottles, wax or cow dropping for example. It is a Do It Yourself approach and the beneficiaries can create their objects themselves instead of simply receiving.



Tin Can Radio, Victor Papanek, © All rights reserved, 1962

In the same way I worked on how to reuse the waste of a camp, because it can also become a resource. It could be interesting to propose solutions and instruction manuals to charities and migrants in order to create objects with plastic bottles or cans or with old clothes for example. This could change the consideration that people could have for camps and for migrants.

In fact, waste can have an impact on the vision and the consideration that we may have of people. It permits us to study our lifestyles, because according to Jean Gouhier⁸, waste is “a social indicator, a photograph of our lifestyles.” This idea could be illustrated by the project *Autopsie* by Bruno Mouron and Patrice Rostain, because they wanted to show that “we are what we consume, we are what we throw away.”⁹ So they took photos of bins in different parts of the world which reveal social and behavioral differences depending on where they were picked up. If our waste defines us, it could influence the vision that people have of us and it can cause problems in the case of migrants because most of the time they are assimilated to their waste and are seen as human waste. Could a change of nature of waste have an impact on how migrants are regarded?

8. Jean Gouhier

invented the concept of “rudologie” which is the study of downgraded places

9. *Des débris et des hommes*, Les Arpenteurs



Kate MOSS, 2012 - Autopsie, © Bruno Mouron et Pascal Rostain



The Gipsy (Magna), © Vik Muniz, 2008

Vik Muniz also worked on people and waste with his project *Waste Land* and made portraits of waste sorters on a landfill in Brazil. He proposes to spectators a new viewpoint on waste by taking distance for example. Besides, by integrating waste in his works of art he gives value to it and it seems to have an impact on the “catadores”¹⁰ who were part of the project because their vision and self esteem changed along the course of the project. So, it confirmed that there is a link between waste in a place and the way people who live there are considered. Could design have the same impact on people as art ?

10. « Catadores » is the name of waste sorters in Brasil

**MAKING WHAT'S UNDESIRABLE
DISAPPEAR**

AN EPHEMERAL SITUATION

As seen before, camps are built to disappear, so it seems necessary to think about how we can make them disappear. The main problem is that the lifespan of camps is not exactly known, so, it's difficult to make appropriate objects. Moreover, when these places are destroyed, everything has to disappear, the objects and the shelters are discarded, people who were living there have to go, and all the marks of their passage have to be erased. Nothing is kept to be reused somewhere else. So could designers propose solutions to this problem to reduce the quantity of waste? Would it be better if associations or migrants themselves did the dismantling? All these objects continue to have an impact on the environment because they are just put somewhere else in a landfill, and they don't really disappear. It seems important to take this disappearing into account from the creation of the camp. Is it possible to create ephemeral solutions which could provide for the needs of migrants while respecting the environment? As the lifespan of a camp is not known, could designers create solutions adapted to a variable durability?

Designers could draw inspiration from eco-design and particularly from the “cradle to cradle” approach which is a virtuous cycle as opposed to the concept of “cradle to grave”. The latter programs the end of life of a product “as waste thrown (or burnt) and so lost forever for the industry.”¹ On the contrary, the C2C concept proposes to increase our positive impact on the environment in doing well rather than doing less bad. Could the erasure of what is undesirable have a virtuous impact on the environment and on migrants?

1. *Cradle to Cradle, Créer et recycler à l'infini*, Michael Braugnart et William McDonough, p 13



Camp of Calais, © AFP, août 2016



After the dismantling of the camp, © AFP, octobre 2016

HOW COULD DESIGNERS ACT?



Dismantling of the camp of Calais, © Marie Magnin, mars 2016

Landfills are nearly full, so it seems important and urgent to avoid disposable material which will end up in a landfill. It could be interesting to work on reversible solutions which will have no impact on the environment, because as Stephane Vial said, design is not “things that are” but “things that happen”. If design is something that happens, it has to exist but also to disappear. Could objects of camps disappear or be reused somewhere else when they are no longer needed?

Concerning camps, designers could work on two types of disappearance. First the final disappearance; when migrants leave the camp or when the camp is dismantled. It could concern shelters, furniture or also the place arrangement. Therefore, sand may be inspiring because this material has a reversible action. You can model it, use it and destroy it and it could return to its original state with no impact on the environment. In the camp, the refugees used sand to fill the tent bags and make some weight. So I was inspired by this to produce something that could be filled with sand and emptied when it is not needed. This could be combined with the idea of the *Better Shelter* project as the shelter can be deconstructed, rebuilt and reused somewhere else. But, the departure of a migrant is not always linked to the dismantling of the camp. This leaving could be problematic because migrants settle in transit camps to try to go elsewhere. They try to pass to another country but do not know if they will succeed. How is it possible to organise the waste management when people are not gone for sure?



Master Plan, Studio Chad Wright, 2013, © Lynn Kloythanomsup

Designers could also work on the disappearance of everyday life objects, by trying to remove waste created each day. This idea can be illustrated with the project *Edible cutlery* by Bakeys. In fact, Narayana Peesapaty wanted to propose an alternative to the considerable quantity of disposable objects used in India thanks to edible and biodegradable cutlery. The challenge of the company was to produce edible cutlery as cheap as plastic cutlery. In fact, it's not enough to produce attractive eco-friendly solutions, especially in the humanitarian domain, it also has to be competitive to have a place on the market. That's why I worked on mealtimes because the quantity of disposable material used in the camp is considerable, principally during meal distributions. There are a lot of containers in polystyrene and plastic spoons distributed every day and thrown immediately after use. So, I worked on edible containers made of pitta bread, which could be the container and also the tool to eat if the bowl is broken. So at the end, you can eat the object or if you want to throw it away, it will biodegrade and it would considerably reduce the quantity of waste.



Edible cutlery, Bakeys, © All rights reserved, 2010

CONCLUSION

Building upon what was studied before, designers could propose a virtuous disappearance of the objects destined to camps in order to contribute to a positive evolution of waste and to more consideration for migrants. It is a project more attractive, efficient and financially viable that could have a real impact on the life in camps. Following this, I noticed two different possible disappearances that I would like to develop, once for everyday life objects and the other linked to the departure of the migrants or the dismantling of camps. It seems very important to be aware of the reality of humanitarian aid. That requires economical and quickly available solutions. Only then can a solution be found that could improve the living conditions of refugees and treat them with dignity.

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SUMMARY,

With the humanitarian crisis, a lot of people live in camps, in which the living conditions are most of the time deplorable. These places are just like landfills, a solution to put what is too much apart, to leave all kinds of waste. In fact, when there is no waste management, it can cause a lot of problems and also have an influence on how migrants are considered. Besides, camps are built to disappear, so it seems to be necessary to think about how a designer takes into account this disappearing in his humanitarian creations.

In this context, how could designers act ? How can they meet the issue of waste management in transit camps to improve the living conditions of migrants and the environmental impact of camps?