

## OVERVIEW DOCUMENT (v01)

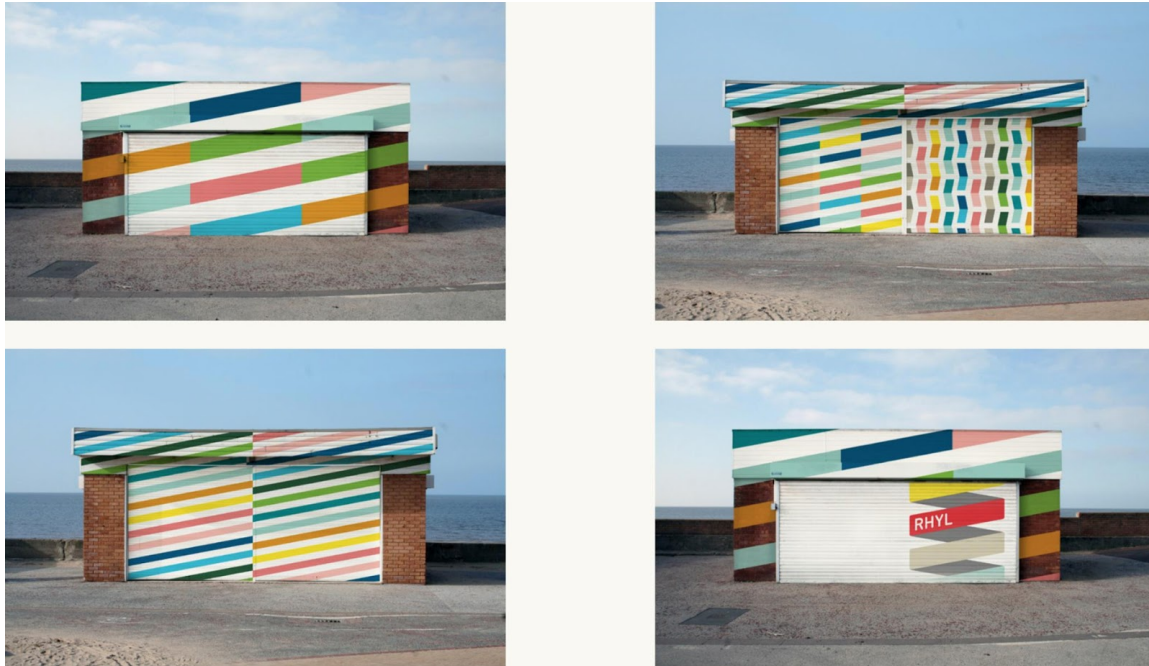
Project Proposal: The Illegal Town Plan

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### THE ORIGIN STORY



[An Identity for Rhyl's Regeneration, Proud Creative]

This project started with an email from a friend; in Nov 2013 Matt Jones sent his fellow Welsh designer, Jimmy Loizeau, a news article detailing the planned redesign of Rhyl, a small coastal town in the North of Wales. Incensed by the design agencies' audacity to redesign the identity of his hometown, Loizeau started a plan of his own. What began as a knee-jerk personal reaction, a form of creative territorialism, gave life to a project that has involved dozens of people, over several years and multiple locations.

The Proud Creative's 'rethink', wasn't malicious or mean-spirited, but it felt insensitive (tone deaf) to the residents of Rhyl. The colour palette, although linked to Rhyl's glorious Victorian past, felt like a superficial veneer, an elastoplast, covering the dark social and economic realities of poverty and deprivation. The project was a paint job, a thin coat aimed to mask the cracks in the social fabric, but Rhyl needs something more than stripes, it needs an alternative future.

If Design is going to harness a collective vision, urban in scale, then it's going to need to understand the nature of the 'knotty' and 'wicked' problems that we face; in this context, the complex identities created through the changing nature of the once glorious coastal holiday destination.

## RHYL THE PHOENIX: LIFE AFTER BREXIT

Forward to 2015. During a casual conversation with the Labour MP Chris Ruane, in the Cob and Pen Pub near Rhyl's train station, Jimmy Loizeau and Matt Ward were confronted by a growing realisation that there was a deep problem at the heart of regional development. There was a gap, a schism, between the community and those charged with the future of their economic prosperity.

Due to its dire and complex social and economic circumstances, Rhyl has received millions of pounds in regeneration investment (from the Coastal Communities Fund and the EU Development Fund). Sadly, the men charged with the task to imagine a future, failed to deliver any lasting positive impact.

We don't need to worry anymore. The money has dried up. Our ties to the EU have been (nearly) severed. The possibilities and opportunities for investment in our coastal futures have been sacrificed for the myth of better shaped bananas and the nationalistic desire to 'take back control'. But what happens to Rhyl in a post-BREXIT reality? How does a community, stripped of agency and hope, imagine a world where wealth and opportunity flood to the north Welsh coast line.

This project aims to understand and develop community based futures for economic development. It engages communities, stripped of power, to present a vision of a new (illegal / illicit) town plan. Throughout the project we have been developing strategies, ideas and possibilities with the people who rejected a European future. The project proposes a form of economic and architectural speculation that aims to reimagine regeneration in a post-BREXIT Britain.



[Don't blame me, I voted remain, MW 2018]

## ACTIVITIES SO FAR

### *Initial speculations*

The project started with a series of semi-architectural drawings made by Jimmy Loizeau, these speculations stemmed from a desire to re-engage with Jimmy's home town, a chance to reflect on his memories; inserting alternatives into the timeline of Rhyl, breathing new life into the town through an ambitious redesign.

Each of the drawings took a memory of a place or experience and imagined a different future where the decay of Rhyl didn't occur; where the former infrastructure was super-powered or adapted to the 21st Century to regain a sense of optimism. These drawings laid the foundation for the project by looking to the past, personal memories and nostalgic imaginations to understand different possible futures.



[Off Shore Pier, JL, 2014]

### *Putting the Rhyl back in Rock*

On the final day of our first field trip, we stopped at a seafront shop to purchase some rock. We were dismayed to discover you could no longer buy rock with the word 'RHYL' running through it. The shop owner informed us that it was 'no longer economically viable to make Rhyl Rock'.

An action, meant to defy the continued decline of Rhyl's past - an act of foolish generosity - we decided to get some Rhyl rock made to give back to the town. We set off to John Bull Candy Kingdom in Yorkshire to get the [rock made](#). Once we had a stock of rock we decided to use it as a form of social currency.

We delivered it to various shops around Rhyl, with a single request; that 50% of the proceeds go to a local charity. We hoped that this reinsertion of a sickly souvenir could act as a way to connect different people across the town, a way to remember Rhyl's past through the care of local hospices, charities and organisations.





[Putting the Rhyll back in Rock, MW 2018]

### *The University of Culture, Music and Media*

At the heart of this project, is our desire to foster and take seriously the ambitions of normal Rhyllians. This approach started in the Wetherspoons on Sussex St, during a conversation with local punk and impresario, Neil Crud.



As an active, long time, member of Rhyll's music scene, Neil spoke to us about Rhyll's music culture over the last 30-40 years. When asked about his ambition for the town, it was no surprise that he suggested the development of the music scene. Gesturing towards the sea, Neil declared that he wanted 'the world's longest pier, starting here [the Wetherspoons], to house a new University of Music'. This simple act of (unrealistic) ambition started a project that is currently ongoing.

Through imagining a different reality for Rhyll, based on his desires and interests, Neil set up a trajectory for us to follow; a future that needed furnishing, validating, scoping and planning. The Pier has become a central 'object' of the Illegal Town Plan - it acts as a discursive device, a 'mythical end game', a social and architectural ambition, an alternative reality to gather people and their ideas around.

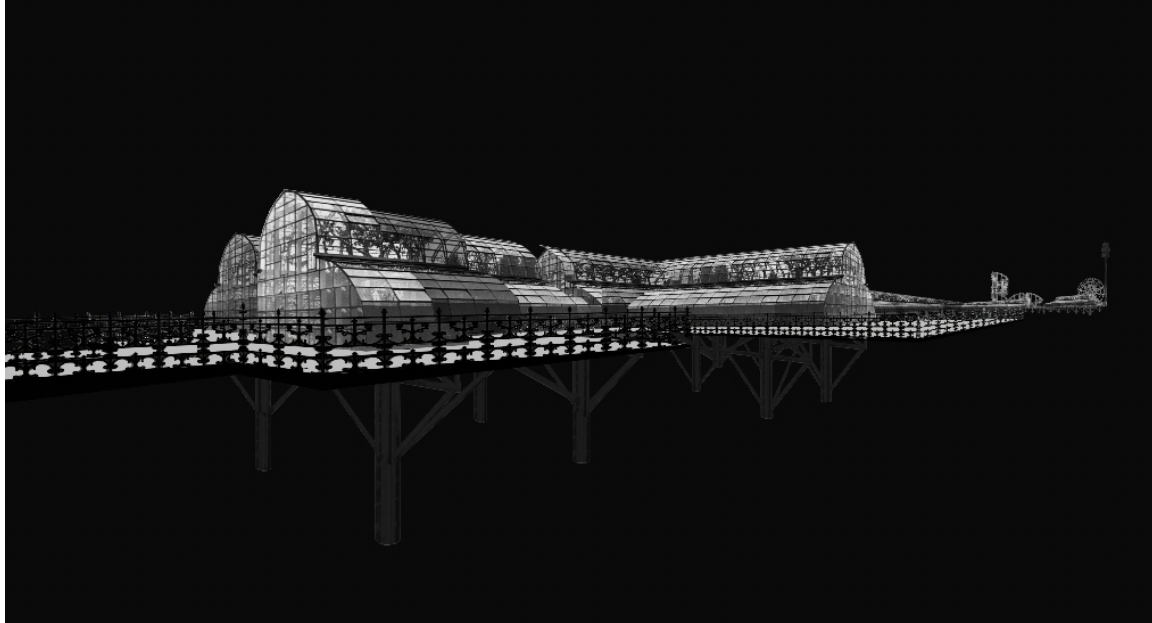
The near term reality of the construction of a new pier to house a university is unlikely, however, we've decided to bring the development forward through the production and launch of an album. The inaugural album of the University of Music, Media and Culture is currently being pressed in vinyl and launched in Rhyl in Jan 2020. Each of the contributing bands, local to Rhyl, has donated tracks to support the albums creation.



[Keeping it Rhyl, Album, 2020]

As with many 'speculative fictions', their effects often ripple in time; they impact the here and now as well as inform decisions and expectations about the future. In this project, we try to plan and predict these 'ripple effects', strategically manufacturing 'affective triggers' to shift and support the social imaginary; bring groups together to discuss, plan and re-engage in a different future for Rhyl.

Since its initial genesis the University of Music, Media and Culture (as it's become known) has gathered interest and momentum. Jimmy and Matt have presented the work in Parliament and are currently in discussions with the MP of Vale of Clwyd, the Welsh Assembly Member and local councillors, as well as numerous charities and business leaders to think through the realities of the development.



[University of Music, Media and Culture - Floral Hall Pier sketch, JL 2018]

*Twin Towns; Delirious doughnuts & fantastic futures*

Our MA Design Expanded Practice aims to reconfigure the relationship between research and teaching. With this in mind, in 2018, we turned the Illegal Town Plan research project into a brief for our Masters students. The project, *Twin Towns; Delirious doughnuts & fantastic futures*, took 35 international MA students for a field trip to Rhyl to think about ways to engage with its communities.

The brief asked our students to engage with a diverse set of people in Rhyl and consider how, through the act of twinning (with other countries, entities or corporations) Rhyl could find 21st Century prosperity. Throughout the 11-week brief, students designed new ways to engage, discuss and promote activities to think about different political and economic futures.





[Promenade and Pavilion, 1975]

We took the concept of the 'twin town', or 'sister town' - initially conceived of after World War II as a way to unite differences across Europe - to give the students an external 'other' to Rhyl's current culture.



[Pavilion Sandbucket by Amira Elshwarby]

The aim of the brief was to allow students to engage in broad conversations about the changing nature and role of design at a large scale. The brief saw students produce a wide range of outputs; from the design for a historical architectural sand bucket as a means to engage children in discussions about Rhyl's future architecture; an exchange between Wuzchen (China) and Rhyl (Wales) to create cross-cultural hybrids - from new folk songs to alternative recipes for doughnuts; to a policy proposal that inserts individually made bricks, inscribed with the hopes, dreams and opinions of locals, into the material fabric of the town.

### *PUNK PLAN*

After the first successful integration of our research into the MADEP curriculum, in 2019 we decided to run a second project; 'Punk plan - delirious doughnuts and meaningful nows'. Punk Plan started to formulate a method (in our madness) to use fiction as a means to invent, stimulate and provoke alternative futures. The students, once again, engaged with a diverse public in Rhyl building new networks and new relationships. For this project we pushed students to think outside entrenched solutionism, to find the 'weird and the eerie' (Fisher, 2016).

### **DEVELOPING STRATEGIC METHODS, MULTIPLYING THE CONE[S] OF POSSIBILITY**

At the heart of the project is how we, as designers, evolve and develop processes and practices (popularised through the evolution of Critical and Speculative Design) to think through alternative social, political, economic and technological futures beyond the narrow views of privileged few. The project utilises open, interdisciplinary, multi-professional, diverse dialogues with the intention of building a heightened notion of engagement, speculation and agency; by focussing on communities and areas which have been negatively affected by economic downturns, unemployment and social challenges, we hope to unearth a set of principles and practices that allow speculation to become democratised away from the gallery and into the world.

As CSD or Design Fiction techniques become less impactful - due to the shifting context of global conditions, the increasing complexity of the 'materials' and 'processes' of design and a heightened awareness of the politics of representation - this project aims to build a new language and discourse of speculation; where underrepresented voices become key to the ambitions of a community; where the outlier is valued for opening alternatives that the 'mean voice' could never offer.





## **NEXT STEPS:**

We are currently seeking funding and support to enable the next steps of the project. More specifically, over the next 6 months we intend to carry out some key activities;

Album launch - having pressed the inaugural album, we wish to throw a launch party in Rhyl.

Exhibition - at the launch of the album we also wish to bring together work that has been produced over the last 3 years, by staff and students, to celebrate and disseminate ideas that have been produced. The public dissemination of the work will enable the various stakeholders to come together to view, contribute and discuss the next steps for the town's future.

Publication - we're currently working on a publication, published by [Goldsmiths Press](#), to document and articulate the ideas, projects and findings that have been developed under the banner of the Illegal Town Plan.

Rockumentary - in order to document the impact and life of the album, we're developing a rockumentary examining how music acts as a tactic to face difficult social conditions.

Goldsmiths North - the long term ambition of the project is to set up a pop-up department of Goldsmiths in Rhyl. During the project we have seen than the communities' ability to 'speculate' is hampered by the difficulty of the circumstances that they occupy. At the core of regional development is the development of the educational infrastructure local people have to education. Over the next 6-12 months we will be trailing free workshop and short courses aimed at giving agency to local people. This part of the project has support of the Welsh Assembly Member and the Welsh Minister of Education.

Seminar series / colloquium - throughout the project we've been reflecting on the change role and practices of CSD. We wish to bring together people across the field to discuss how speculative methods move into policy, corporate technology research and community development.