

# “Act Natural”: Instructions, Compliance and Accountability in Ambulatory Experiences

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## ABSTRACT

This paper uses a detailed ethnographic study of an ambulatory experience, where participants were invited to explore the perspective of two notorious terrorists, in order to discuss the nature of instruction-giving and, most particularly, the methodical ways in which such instructions are complied with. Four distinct layers of compliance are identified, as are three different kinds of accountability, all of which stand potentially at odds with one another. The paper examines the tensions created by this, tensions that are further aggravated by instructions usually being delivered down a thin channel, with considerable surrounding contextual complexity and little opportunity for repair, and uncovers some core challenges for future design in relation to the provision of instructions for a range of possible activities.

## Author Keywords

Instructions, Ethnography, Ambulatory Experiences

## ACM Classification Keywords

H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI)

## INTRODUCTION

Ambulatory experiences employ mobile technologies to guide participants as they explore an environment, indoors or outdoors. Examples include interactive tours and guides [1][2][10][13][30], location-based urban games [20], and artistic installations and performances [3][7]. Such experiences are currently of great commercial and research interest, due in large part to the phenomenal spread of smart phones with GPS and QR code readers that make it possible to locate participants as they move around, and then deliver to them a sequence of instructions regarding where to go, what to look at and what to do. Previous research in general mobile and location-based interaction has explored a variety of issues that are relevant to ambulatory systems including dealing with seams in wireless communications and positioning systems [12], designing recommendations and mobile interruptions [5], the challenges of using mobile while moving through a complex physical environment [6], and managing the balance between personal and group interactions [2].

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However, ambulatory experiences also raise a distinctive new challenge that is not yet well explored within HCI – how to design a sequence of instructions that can be successfully followed by participants on the ground. While previous studies of satellite navigation systems have highlighted some of the challenges of following basic directions in cars or on foot [15][19][21][28][29], and there are numerous studies regarding the relationship between instructions and learning outcomes (e.g. [4][8][17][25]), the kinds of ambulatory experiences mentioned previously have additional characteristics that make the design of instructions a deeply challenging task:

- instructions typically come down a ‘thin’ channel such as an audio recording on a phone or a text message, placing constraints upon what can be said and how;
- ambulatory experiences are typically enacted in relatively open, unconstrained environments where the local context is often very complex and changeable with a wide variety of potentially unforeseen contingencies coming into play;
- there is usually little feedback from the participants’ world to the orchestrators about what is happening, limiting the scope for repair;
- the experiences are typically not repeated by the people who participate in them and it is not therefore possible to learn from your mistakes and do better ‘next time round’, putting a particular emphasis on them working well ‘first time through’;
- despite this the instructions are rich in the sense that they try to engage participants at a number of different levels, from the basic mechanics of finding their way to framing an appropriate engagement with the digital content and the wider environment.

In short, ambulatory experiences raise a profound challenge for interaction design in that they need to convey rich instructions about not only wayfinding but also compartment and role, in an unpredictable environment and down a thin channel, with little feedback to indicate how they have been understood.

This paper explores this challenge through an ethnographic study of an experience called Ulrike and Eamon Compliant [9] which is designed to prompt ‘engagement with political questions’ by inviting participants to assume the role of a terrorist, either Ulrike Meinhof or Eamon Collins, whilst they walk through a city receiving phone calls. The

experience is a complex ambulatory work in which participants are required to interpret and enact rich and multi-layered instructions with the sole delivery mechanism being a mobile phone. As such the paper adds to the existing HCI literature on instructions at a number of levels. First of all it provides rich analysis of the situated following of instructions in a real-world environment, rather than in laboratory or test conditions. Secondly it explores instruction-giving that is simultaneously ambitious and constrained, thereby leading to a novel technological challenge. Finally, it explores how people engage with instructions that seek to guide comportment and promote certain kinds of experiential outcomes. This is a level of instructed action that HCI has so far barely touched upon.

### **ULRIKE AND EAMON COMPLIANT**

Ulrike and Eamon Compliant is an ambulatory experience that involves steering participants around a pre-specified route with various experiences along the way. There are a number of reasons why it proved to be an interesting experience to study. First of all, it hinges upon the delivery of 'thin' instructions via recordings delivered to a mobile phone. However, it is an enormously ambitious work, trying to simultaneously inform and engage participants at a number of levels. So it is trying to do a lot with the thin instructions it is delivering. Secondly, the nature of the work, mixing ordinary locational instructions, invitations to role-play, and richly atmospheric pre-recorded stories and accounts, all on the real streets of a real city, enables study of the work to speak to a variety of other forms of experience, tours, games, performances, and so on. Thirdly, as the name implies, the work is ultimately about an exploration of compliance with instructions and the character of compliance proves to be of significance for what this experience might have to say for other experiences and guided activities.

It is important that our use of the word 'compliance' be understood here. There is, of course, a sense in which designers might go about designing certain technologies that will somehow 'compel' people to comply with the instructions they receive. This would clearly be a morally dubious undertaking and it should not be understood to be a part of what we are proposing. Our own interest in compliance is somewhat distinct. First of all we are using compliance not as a proposed *outcome*, desirable or otherwise, but rather as a device for analyzing people's situated practices: they receive instructions and they witnessably comply with the content of those instructions to varying degrees. We are interested in what such compliance amounts to as a matter of people's own methods for following instructions. Secondly, in the case of Ulrike and Eamon Compliant, the artists themselves are clearly exploring the notion of compliance as fertile territory. This is not because they want to make people compliant, but rather because they want to explore the nature of compliance – to create an experience that provokes people into confronting it. This is something that, by making people potentially uncomfortable about and

aware of their own compliance, serves to make their routine instruction-following practices more visible. This makes Ulrike and Eamon a particularly good target for uncovering what those practices might look like.

#### *The experience:*

The participants are first of all directed into a separate room where they can read more about the experience and watch a live video feed of another participant apparently sat in an interrogation room, being interrogated. They are then directed to pick up a mobile phone and are asked to make an initial call to describe themselves, choose which terrorist they wish to follow, Ulrike and Eamon, and told to pick up a pair of glasses if they do not have any of their own. After this the participants are told to go outside and await their first instruction. They are then guided by pre-recorded phone calls around the route step by step in roughly the following way: First of all they are given a direction to some specific location such as a bridge, a bench, a well in a square, the end of an alleyway by a canal, etc., e.g.:

*Now continue across the bridge and turn left towards the church towers. Start to stroll very slowly with the canal on your left hand side. You're going to walk to the next bridge. I'll stay on the line while you walk.*

Once they reach the specified location they wait until they receive the next call which is usually a recording describing certain events from the life of the terrorist they have chosen to follow, designed to build up a growing understanding of what it might be to see the world through their eyes, often in a quite emotive fashion, e.g.:

*Ulrike, you were on TV again last night. You sat at the end of a row of men, composed and alert. When it was your turn to speak you made your case against the Vietnam War with force and eloquence. When you went to the dressing room afterwards, you spoke easily with the make up girl. She complimented you on your hair as you left. Then you were in the taxi on the way home. Outside the window the streets were dark and wet. . .*

Once they have listened to this a further call gives directions to the next location. Often having first been issued with a further instruction to engage in some kind of reflection or provide some kind of input of their own, e.g.:

*As everyone else moves past you as you stand on the bridge, I would like to know how would you describe your ability to make decisions. Are you a decisive or a hesitant person, Ulrike? Now please record your answer. Start by saying "My name is Ulrike" and then tell me are you a decisive or hesitant person?*

On several occasions they are also directed to undertake some quite specific actions in order to trigger provision of the next element of the experience, e.g.:

*Now find a bench that is free and sit down for a moment. I want to ask you a question. When you take your glasses off and lay them on the bench beside you I'll know you're ready to talk.*

They carry on around the route in this way until they reach a point where they are asked to make a choice between going to 'a room where questions will be asked' or going 'home'. Their decision is indicated by whether they hang up or stay on the line. Once they have made their choice they are either issued with directions back to the starting point or are directed to a street with a disused chapel. As they go down this street a performer awaits them outside of

the chapel and, when they get near, the performer steps inside the chapel. Once inside the chapel they are accompanied by the performer into a small unfurnished cubicle constructed inside the main building with just two chairs in it. They sit down together, face to face, and the performer begins to pose them a series of questions where they are addressed as though they are the actual terrorist they have been following. After this they are shown outside the cubicle and invited to watch the next participant being interrogated through a window in one wall. Once they have done this and wish to leave the experience is concluded.



The Starting Point



Following the Route



Receiving Instructions



Being Interrogated

*Orchestration:*

Orchestration of the experience in Venice proved to be quite complex. Overall it was managed from a central command post adjacent to the disused chapel, from which point the underlying game system could be managed and the actions of various people on the streets coordinated. Participants were assigned to following the route on a staggered basis, 15 minutes apart, so that they did not cross one another or arrive in the same place at the same time. Upon their first call they were entered into the system with a physical description and an assigned mobile phone number. The first directions were issued from the command post. At each new location, however, they were sent pre-recorded messages, the dispatch of which was triggered by performers on the streets using PDAs. The performers used the initial description to identify the participant and manage the interaction with the participant, judging when to send messages and tracking participants by line of sight. The flow of people around the route was also managed this way such that, should someone begin to catch up on the person preceding them, they could be slowed down by delaying sending the next message. Each performer has an assigned territory and, as the participant reached the limit of their territory they handed over the participant to the next performer. This took the placement of up to 8 performers on the route in order to ensure that as far as possible participants couldn't get into blind spots where no one could see them. It also meant that performers had to stay

out of sight, seeing but not being seen. Coordination between performers themselves, the command post, and the front of house where people were first welcomed to the experience was managed via walkie-talkie.



Managing Participants



Orchestration

**THE STUDY**

The materials relating to Ulrike and Eamon Compliant were gathered during an installation at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Biennale festival in Venice in 2009. Here four different participants were followed throughout their engagement over a period of 2 days, with each experience taking up to two hours to complete. The participants were, respectively, an academic, an artisan, an opera singer, and a journalist. All were in their forties, three were women and one was a man. One of them (a female academic) took on the role of Eamon Collins and all of the others took the part of Ulrike Meinhof. In addition to the shadowing of participation, detailed observations were made of both behind the scenes and on the streets orchestration over the same period.

The analytic approach to all of the data gathered has been ethnomethodological. This approach demands rigorous attention to the *local* production of order, focusing upon the characteristics of in situ reasoning and accounts and the methods whereby human action and interaction is accomplished [14]. In this particular case it demands that we pay close attention to just how instructions are made manifest in particular situations and how those instructions are then worked with in accountably compliant ways.

**The Data**

A critical feature of ambulatory experiences is the manner in which participants are instructed regarding how to proceed through the experience, and how the participants in turn understand and respond to those instructions. In order to explore just how instructions are handled by participants as a contingent part of the experience they are engaged in we will look in detail at several aspects of how players were seen to respond to and comply with the instructions they were receiving during Ulrike and Eamon Compliant.

*Directional instructions:*

One of the most frequent kinds of instructions participants encounter in ambulatory experiences like Ulrike and Eamon is a direction to go to some particular place. Consider the following:

*The participant is stood on a bridge, looking up the canal, listening to a lengthy recording. At the conclusion of the recording she receives the following instruction: "Now, if you agree with me, I want you to step across the bridge to the other side." She drops the phone from her ear to hold it at her side and looks to-and-fro to either side of the bridge. The phone rings again and she answers it and receives the following*

*instruction: "Turn immediately right along the canal heading towards the grass." At this point she heads off of the bridge, turns right and walks purposefully along beside the canal towards a grassy area up ahead, with the phone still held to her ear.*

If we look at this example we can see that, in the first instance, the participant is somewhat confounded. She is asked to 'step across the bridge to the other side', but as she is stood in the middle of the bridge there are two candidate sides to be considered. However, the next phone call disambiguates matters because she is asked to turn right towards a grassy area and the grassy area is clearly visible from the bridge. Thus the core components here of crossing the bridge, turning right, and heading towards a grassy area, are all complied with.

*Awaiting further instruction:*

In the next example another participant has received the same set of directions we just saw and is now on her way to 'the grassy area':

*Whilst walking she is played the following recording: "Ulrike, I see you in the back seat of the getaway car. The window open. Broken sunlight scattering through the trees. You cross the line. You free Andreas and become a wanted woman. That friend, the teacher, is a bit surprised when you turn up on her doorstep without any warning! Andreas and Gudrun get everything sorted: passports, money. Within three weeks you're on the plane to Jordan. I see you in the back of the taxi, that drives through the desert to the camp."*

*She reaches the grassy area and leans back against the wall beside it, still listening to the recording on the phone. "I see you on your belly crawling through the dust under the barbed wire while the Palestinians fire shots all around you. Learn to shoot and learn to be shot at...."*

In this example the participant sets off following the same instruction in much the same way. However, as she reaches the grassy area the recording is still ongoing. There is nothing to expressly tell her what to do at this point so she simply stops and leans against the wall. This is not something she's been told to do. She could carry on up onto the grass itself, but she doesn't. This does not imply that she is not following the instruction she has received, but the instruction falls short of telling her everything she might need to do. This is the way with instructions: they never fully specify how they should be followed [26]. If she had walked a little slower, she might not have been obliged to stop and wait. But, in the circumstances, she finds within the overall context of where she is, what she is doing, and what has happened so far, an accountable way of proceeding: to stop and wait. There are numerous things she might have done: laid back on the grass; gone to look at the canal; carried on walking. However, some of these would have gone beyond the compartment one would ordinarily expect of a participant doing this kind of thing and others would require additional account in view of what has happened so far. The fact that she has been directed to the grassy area is taken to be pertinent, but she *has not* been told to go up onto it. She has already had other instructions that make reference to things in the environment without her being expected to actually go up to them. They have worked as waymarks. In the absence of

further instruction the grassy area might be where she is headed, but it also might be just a waymark, with different specification still to follow. Thus stopping and waiting is an accountably appropriate thing to do, even though she has not been told to wait in the instruction.

So, by not going up onto the grass here the locational element of the instruction is not being ignored, but compliance with it is seen to include something never directly articulated: treating locations as potential waymarks until you are told otherwise. What she *has* done, then, is found an appropriate place *to await further instruction*. Even though some instructions do tell participants to wait in various locations this does not imply that waiting cannot be done in other places as well, especially when awaiting the next instruction as a strategy for disambiguating the instruction you have just received.

*Instructed orders of action:*

As well as just directing people to certain places instructions also often imply an *order* of actions to undertake, for instance:

*Now you need to find the last bridge. Head back up the alley. Look for the red brick church tower and walk towards it. When you get to the tower turn left and walk towards the canal. Stop on the bridge.*

Here is how these instructions were actually followed by one of the participants:

*The participant turns and walks back up the alley with the phone pressed to his ear. He reaches the end of the alley and looks around the square in front of him, then turns left to go down a small road that opens out into another square, bearing right as he does so. He comes out into the square and slows his pace, looking around. Then he walks across the square towards a wall and a church in one corner. He slows his pace once again and looks up at the church, before changing his grip on the phone, but still walking. Then he heads left down another street in front of the church, with a wall and a canal in front of him. Whilst walking along he looks up again at the church. As he approaches the canal he looks up at the church yet again and starts to head towards the right. He stops a moment in front of the church and looks up, then carries on walking towards the foot of some steps leading up onto a bridge. Then he stops completely, looks at the door of the church and then up towards the top of it, before facing along the line of the footpath towards the bridge. He meanders around a little and then slowly heads up the first few steps on the bridge, still listening to the phone. He stops on the third step, looks over the wall to the canal, then turns round and faces the church, standing and listening. He looks up some more at the church and leans against the rail on the bridge steps. He looks down and then up again several times. Then he drops the phone to his side, faces the opposite way, turns around, and walks slowly up onto the bridge, looking to the right and then to the left. Then he turns towards the right and faces down the canal in that direction.*

It can be seen that to comply with the instruction involves significantly more than what is covered within the instruction itself. Certain parts are missing altogether, for instance turning left at the top of the alley. What is also missing is the work of verification following such instructions involves: he continually checks the church and its tower. In fact, his glances make visible that each step of the sequence involves this order of verification. Where is the church? What amounts to 'getting to the tower'? Where is the canal? Which bridge? What counts as actually being 'on the bridge'? Of course, the other thing here is that each next action makes no sense until the preceding action has

been accomplished. Walking towards the canal makes no sense until he has reached the church. Which bridge to stop on makes no sense until he has reached the canal.

*Instructions on how to act:*

In a number of instances the instructions given in Ulrike and Eamon move beyond just matters of where to go and what order to do that in by specifying also particular acts to be undertaken. Here is a case in point:

*Participant looks along the canal once more as listening: "Now stand in the middle of the bridge and turn to look at the church towers. Can you see them? If you can see them nod your head slowly."*

*Participant says: You want me to nod my head? (she nods in an exaggerated fashion) Like this? (She continues nodding and laughing)*

In this example the direction to nod is simple enough and the participant has little trouble in complying, though her sense of it being an out-of-the-ordinary thing to be doing is made manifest by the way she also laughs about it. A number of instructions were treated as equally straightforward, but equally discomfiting, for instance:

*Now I want you to stand on the bridge. Can you see the grass in the distance? Put your left hand up to your head now if you see it.*

*Now find a bench that is free and sit down for a moment. I want to ask you a question. When you take your glasses off and lay them on the bench beside you I'll know you're ready to talk.*

*Instructions designed to create moods and tensions:*

Instructions to do things at specific times in ambulatory experiences are relatively rare. There can be instructions that imply that something has to be done within a certain time limit, as in the following:

*If you hang up within the next 30 seconds then I will know you have taken the easy route and are ready to quit. If you want to quit, hang up right now. I will sit quietly while you decide.*

The following of such instructions can be problematic [27]. This message is issued at a point in the experience where the participant can decide to go and be interrogated or else to just head for home. The difficulty here is that it is issued in advance of participants knowing what kinds of questions may be asked. It is also issued in a distracting environment where 30 seconds can pass quite quickly without people having really decided what they want to do. Apparent compliance by either hanging up or not (especially the latter) does not necessarily amount to actual compliance in that case from the participant's point of view. However, a major part of what the instruction is aiming to achieve here is to put the participant under pressure, building suspense and tension and perhaps encouraging engagement at a more intense level, echoing the trajectory of the underlying narrative regarding the terrorists, at this point, e.g.

*This is what Renate wrote in her letter: "Give up, Ulrike! You are not like that, Ulrike. Not at all the way people think you are when they have seen your picture up on a wanted poster. Those who know you better know that you do not shoot anyone who stands in your way. You have your fears like everyone else. But you are brave, braver than most. And you stand by your friends."*

This underlying interest in encouraging identification and developing tension is a recurrent feature of the instructions

in Ulrike and Eamon. Often, at first sight they are just further instructions regarding how to act, for instance:

*Now continue across the bridge and turn left towards the church towers. Start to stroll very slowly with the canal on your left hand side. You're going to walk to the next bridge. I'll stay on the line while you walk... Keep your eyes open, act natural. There is always a first time for this kind of thing and practice makes it easier.*

In each observed case of following this instruction the participant crossed the bridge and turned left and walked along past the pharmacy to the next bridge without visibly either changing pace or the manner in which they were walking. Indeed, one might wonder how ordinary walking might look any different than keeping your eyes open and acting naturally, posing a question as to what such an instruction might be hoping to accomplish. Furthermore, for many participants 'strolling very slowly' would stand in direct contradiction to the instruction to 'act naturally'. Of course, for artists scripting the instructions here the ambiguity is quite deliberate (see [24] for similar artistic intent), with much of it once again being about encouraging some appreciation of what it might be like to be a terrorist where blending in is critical. Several of the comportmental instructions in Ulrike and Eamon are like this in that they largely propose a *manner of doing things* as opposed to an actual action. The difficulty in terms of ensuring such instructions accomplish their desired effect is that compliance with them is rarely manifest unless they do demand specific acts, such as in the following:

*The participant stands looking over the parapet of the bridge down the length of the canal listening to a message... "As everyone else moves past you as you stand on the bridge"*

*The participant turns to the right looking along the bridge itself as the message continues, "I would like to know how would you describe your ability to make decisions. Are you a decisive or a hesitant person, Ulrike? Now please record your answer. Start by saying "My name is Ulrike" and then tell me are you a decisive or hesitant person? When you have finished your recording, hang up. I'm going to start recording now." The participant looks back along the canal and says: "My name is Ulrike and I think I'm a fairly decisive person. When I make decision it's usually final." She pauses for a moment then presses the call end button on the phone and drops her hand down to her side.*

And some instructed actions can be dismissed without leading to any obvious trouble in accomplishing *visible* compliance at all, for instance the following:

*Now I want you to pick a person as they walk past you. Choose someone and give them a name. Look carefully at them before they go. Now think about their home. Think about a treasured possession that they may have on their shelf. Who is it that they love? Stare down at the canal and hold that person in your mind for a short while.*

## DISCUSSION

Something to note about the vast bulk of the literature on instruction-giving and following in HCI is the heavy focus upon just a few basic topics. By far the largest part of work in this area so far has focused upon either matters of wayfinding [16][19][28] or learning [17][25]. However, with the possible exception of Bryan-Kinns et al's investigation of how instructions work in remote creative collaborations [11] virtually no interest has been shown to date with regard to the role played by instructions in shaping people's comportment or their engagement with

experiences. In that case much of the following discussion is relatively new territory for CHI with implications for those who are interested in how instructions work across a wide range of different domains.

Bearing this in mind, there are two key issues of relevance to HCI that come out of the data we have just presented. One of these relates to the character of the instructions which are, in the majority of cases 'thick' in terms of what they are trying to convey to participants, whilst the channel for delivery is very 'thin'. The other relates to the nature of accountability in these kinds of experiences and the tensions this throws up regarding how instructions will be complied with in any given circumstance.

### **Thin instruction**

Something we have already had cause to notice is that instructions in Ulrike and Eamon Compliant, and indeed in many ambulatory experiences like this, mostly come down a very thin channel, often as simple text messages or recorded messages on a mobile device. However, despite the thinness of this channel the instructions are actually trying to accomplish a number of things at the same time. What begins to fall out of the data we have just been looking at is that the delivered instructions are trying to bring about some degree of compliance from the participants at four different levels: with regard to location (they attempt to get people to go to specific places); with regard to sequence (they attempt to get people to do things in a particular order); with regard to comportment (they attempt to get people to act and behave in certain ways); and with regard to how they relate to the experience (they attempt to get them to engage with it in certain ways and experience certain kinds of tensions and moods). We will discuss each of these different layers of compliance in turn.

### *Locational compliance*

First of all, whilst it may seem an obvious point, in location-based experiences it is important to get to the right place. One might even say this is a baseline requirement.

However, there is some richness regarding compliance here that is worth taking note of. Although the basic premise in Ulrike and Eamon is that participants will go out on the streets and follow the route for about an hour, there are some actively used locations that *do* feature in the instructions, and some that don't. For some locations, such as we saw with a participant physically standing on a bridge, it takes confirmed arrival in one location to receive the next message that will guide you to another location. In cases like this it is difficult *to progress* in defiance of the locational instructions you have been given. Participants do get 'lost', of course, and 'being lost' works as an acceptable account for non-compliance with a locational instruction. At the same time, to simply decide to follow your own route and go where you please would effectively terminate engagement because events scripted into the experience would not unfold.

However, as we also saw, many quite deliberate locational actions relating to the route and its following, such as stopping and leaning against a specific wall, stand wholly outside of what they have been expressly asked to do, yet do not necessarily breach locational instructions. Nor do they necessarily demonstrate non-compliance. Rather what these actions accomplish is an elaboration of instructions into sensible ways of proceeding in the specific course of their following, for instance holding off on further action until the intent of an instruction has been clarified, because instructions always in some sense under-specify and their realisation always involves some measure of elaboration in any particular situation. So, although these subsidiary, unspecified locations stand outside of the body of instructions a participant may encounter, they are central to compliance with the instructions that they do receive.

### *Sequential compliance:*

At a layer higher than certain specific locations, each location people are instructed to go to also contributes to an overall trajectory that must be passed through *in a certain order* if the experience is to be completed.

Each particular location is not simply oriented to wholly in its own right, people understand that an unfolding experience is also an unfolding *sequence of happenings*, whereby each new instruction is not treated as free-standing but as a first instruction, second instruction, last instruction, etc., with each instruction being reasoned about in relation to what has been asked of them so far. We saw this in how a complex instruction involving a number of parts in order to direct a participant from an alley to a bridge turned upon relating each part to what had gone before in order to see what should be done next. We also saw how this can extend beyond just one specific instruction to a whole concatenation of instructions in the way one participant stopped prior to going up onto the grassy area, having come to understand that not all reference points are destinations.

What needs to be seen here is that each particular instruction actually stands itself as a resource whereby the next instruction (and other instructions to come) might be reasoned about and understood. Compliance, in that case, is not simply a for-here-and-now compliance but is also a retrospective/prospective compliance, looking back to what is understood about what has already been done and what is understood about what is being asked of one next in order to understand what appropriate compliance might look like. This being the case, what appropriate instruction following might look like is something that is ongoingly revisable as each new instruction is encountered. This inevitably leads to a growing understanding on the part of the participant regarding what it might take to follow instructions, so that by the end of the experience the participant is *apparently* engaging at a different level having *apparently* 'got into it'. The word 'apparently' is used here advisedly because what the above analysis reveals is that an important part of what increased engagement turns upon is a growing understanding of what it takes to comply with the

instructions you are receiving. What terms like 'engagement' and 'getting into it' are therefore really recognising in good part is a growing competence in adequate compliance with instructions, which doesn't say anything much one way or the other about engagement at an emotional level. This can clearly be a feature, but it cannot be said to be made manifest simply by a more 'complete' compliance with the implied sense of instructions. One needs to look beyond matters of sequence alone to understand how instructions might serve to prompt emotional engagement of some kind.

#### *Comportmental compliance*

Something that could make emotional engagement more manifest might be people's *comportment*: that is, what they do and the way in which they do it. The next layer up in terms of what instructions might be seen to be asking of people, then, is a specification of what people need to do when they get somewhere.

In the case of comportmental compliance the above data revealed that understanding of just what is being asked for is everything. So we saw, for instance, that instructions such as 'act natural' can be oriented to as optional rhetorical embellishments whilst being told to nod your head or actually say something obliges participants to produce something that at least superficially *does* resemble nodding or saying something. Indeed, one might ask how an instruction like 'act natural' could work as an obligation. It's a common instruction to people who might otherwise look guilty, serving effectively as an instruction not to arouse suspicions. In that participants in Ulrike and Eamon are being invited to enter the worldview of a terrorist this kind of instruction might seem to make sense. And, as we commented previously this invitation has a certain power of ambiguity in this setting that might serve to increase a participant's sense of tension. However, as participants in Ulrike and Eamon are *not* terrorists and there are no real world repercussions from arousing the suspicions of those around them, acting natural is an artifice and demands something rather different. It demands that participants accountably adopt a *role*, and compliance at this level is something rather different.

#### *Relational compliance*

We have seen how different levels of compliance with instructions might work in terms of what locations to go to, what order to go to each of those locations in, and what to physically do when you get to those locations. However, creators of experiences like Ulrike and Eamon are trying to accomplish something more than this: they are also seeking to manage how the participant *relates* to the experience by managing the impact of its various affective elements, and the prompts through which a participant might be persuaded to adopt a certain role.

Considerations here turn upon the extent to which designers of such experiences are successful in getting people to engage with not only the literal sense of instructions they

are being given but also the underlying sense of those instructions. This involves getting people to attribute some meaning to what is intended by the experience overall, even if that meaning is deliberately ambiguous.

Now, of course it is the case that people undertaking Ulrike and Eamon in Venice did not just understand themselves to be tourists taking a walk around the canals. However, as we've already commented, they did not understand themselves to be international terrorists either. Rather, the awareness of them being involved in some kind of experience brings along with it certain expectations and this serves to underpin the observations we have already made regarding locational and comportmental compliance. At its most manifest and obvious level what one finds is that most participants are oriented to doing what they understand to be appropriate and necessary as *participants in an event*. Minimal compliance here amounts to going to the specified place and possibly doing the action asked of you and that is what most participants manifestly achieve.

Something that hints at the fact that there is something more than just this going here and that minimal compliance doesn't quite cover it is what happens when participants are asked to step outside of behaviours that might be routinely undertaken in the environments they are passing through. Consider the following example:

*The participant is stood by a well looking around the square, phone in hand. .... The phone rings. Standing back from well he answers it 'Yep?' He receives the following message: "I want to walk you down to the water's edge. Look for the sign that reads Campo Drio Il Cimitero. You can see it from the well. It reads reads Campo Drio Il Cimitero. On the right hand side of it is an alley. Once you see it, walk right down to the water's edge." .... He looks to his left, then to his right, then behind him, before walking off towards the left, phone still pressed to his ear. He crosses a square looking to his left, then gets to a junction with a choice of going left or right. He looks up, then stops and turns round, and shakes his head, saying 'What?' The recording continues with an account of Eamon's sojourn in a cell at Gough Barracks. As he is listening he heads towards the left. Reaching the entrance to an alleyway he looks down it, stops and looks around uncertainly, takes a pace forward, then stops and looks around again, raising his eyebrows. Then he starts to walk down the alley. He gets to a point where water is lapping up onto the cobbles and there is a pile of rubbish gathered at the edge and stops, phone still pressed to his ear. Then he leans against the wall and carries on listening.*



Now going down a dark, dank rubbish-filled alley, off the beaten track and with nothing particularly to commend it, to stand on slippery cobbles at the edge of a canal is not the kind of action ordinarily undertaken by tourists, though of course it could be. But what it does do is make the participant visible as someone doing other than what ordinary tourists do, which in turn demands some kind of

account. The participant makes his reticence about going down the alley quite visible. Yet in the end he does. The account for this for participants resides in their participation in an experience and their compliance with a quite specific and clearly uncomfortable instruction is compliance *in relation to what they understand this particular experience to be about*.

#### *Working the layers*

In the above discussion we have sought to unpack what we mean when we say that designers of these kinds of experiences are trying to accomplish a lot of different things when they are sending instructions down a very thin channel. We have seen that they have to contend with providing for at least four different layers of compliance. There are important reasons why we have described these different kinds of compliance as layers or levels. Upon reflection it can be seen that there are ways in which layer turns somehow upon the layers that preceded it. So you must be in the right place at each step of the way to follow the right sequence of events. You need to be following the right sequence of events to be able to engage with the content. And you need to be displaying the right kinds of comportment if you are going to be able to be seen as engaging with the actual sense of spirit of the experience. However, we have also touched above upon another aspect of following instructions that can also impact upon the different kinds of compliance one sees: accountability.

#### **Accountability**

It is not possible to have compliance without some sense of accountability. Instructions never stand apart from who people receive the instructions to be coming from and who they understand to be potential witnesses of their following of the instruction. So compliance is never just compliance *per se*, it is compliance that some other party or parties might deem to be appropriate or inappropriate. There are at least three possible different parties people may consider themselves accountable to when they engage in experiences like Ulrike and Eamon. One such party is the people who have designed the game and who are somehow addressing the participants through things like the instructions and stories they are receiving on their mobile phones. Then there are, potentially, specific witnesses of their actions who are actually seeking to orchestrate the game and hold the participants to account for at least the more manifest aspects of following the instructions they receive. Finally, there is surrounding body of ordinary people going about their own ordinary business to whom participants are eternally accountable as members of the ordinary society themselves [14]. The interesting point about this matter of differing accountabilities is that it can lead to tensions, tensions that designers may themselves seek to exploit.

#### *Managed compliance*

Something important to note about Ulrike and Eamon, as performed in its original version at the Biennale in Venice, is that it did not simply deliver messages to the participants on their mobile phones and leave it at that; it made active

use of what might be termed *managed compliance*. Consider again the following:

*Now find a bench that is free and sit down for a moment. I want to ask you a question. When you take your glasses off and lay them on the bench beside you I'll know you're ready to talk.*

Participants who did not have glasses were furnished with glasses for the purposes of handling this instruction and, in all observed cases, it was somehow complied with. Sometimes the glasses were removed as they sat down on the bench, in other cases once they had already sat down. And in no case did the participants physically lay the glasses actually down on the bench, retaining instead a grip on them with one hand, showing once again how *precise* following of such instructions is understood, by this point, to not be what it is about. However, the interesting thing about this instruction, as with the instruction that they nod their head, or another that they raise their free hand to their head, is that it implies that there is someone able to *see* them undertaking the action and therefore act upon it. Very quickly each of the participants started to scan the people around them and the people they passed for who the observer might be.

In fact, as was mentioned at the beginning of the paper, there were some eight performers on the streets who attempted to hide themselves whilst observing the participants and manouvering them through the route by timing the delivery of messages according to where they could see the participants had got to. In this case, then, compliance with the instructions *was* necessary for the participant to progress (though the performers were prepared to send the next recording anyway if the participants did not comply). Participants having deduced that their actions were being observed, compliance was controlled in large part by recognition of the fact that they were directly accountable for their actions to this hidden observer.

#### *Doing being ordinary*

We have already seen how participants actively work to comply with the sense of instructions, and how compliance can be further shaped through varying degrees of implied and direct management. However, it should be stressed that this does not simply set aside all of the usual practices and accountabilities that might hold sway when people are out walking the streets of Venice or whatever. Often participants make quite evident the extent to which they are aware of how they are breaching ordinary practices in their fulfilment of instructions. We saw that in the case of the participant who hesitated before going down the alley to the water. We also saw this in how the participant nodding her head also took it to be something funny. Laughter is a powerful device for recognising potential breaches of behaviour and to offset accountability for them in various kinds of ways [18].

Beyond this, of course, there are numerous ways in which all that walking, stopping and looking, sitting on benches, or whatever, is being done in conspicuously ordinary ways.



It was Harvey Sacks [23] who first emphasized the powerful orientation we all exhibit towards doing and seeing everything in an ordinary way. This should not be seen as a suggestion that no-one seeks to excel or that there are not people who like to look different and 'stand out from the crowd'. Rather it is to stress that there are ordinary ways of going about being a star athlete or being a goth or acting up in public. For all things and for all those who are competent to recognize it there are appropriate and inappropriate ways of going about them. Now in the case of things like walking around and being a tourist the cohort of people who possess a ready competence is quite large. And the participants in these events do not stand outside of this cohort. So what one finds is that, another aspect of how instructions get reasoned about and get complied with is an orientation towards seeing what is ordinary about an instruction and understanding it in that way and proceeding to fulfil that instruction in an ordinary fashion. And, where it is possible someone might recognise the following of an instruction as just another routine way of proceeding in the environment you are in, people have equally routine ways of making it visible that they too recognize its oddness and are therefore just as oriented to seeing their world in ordinary ways, for instance by laughing or looking embarrassed.

So compliance does not set aside the fact that there are ordinary ways of walking around Venice, or ordinary ways of doing any of the other ambulatory experiences we have previously studied [3][6][7][27]. Rather compliance includes a presumption that these form a part of what is being asked for. Indeed, who could reasonably ask you to do otherwise?

#### *Managing tensions*

It is at this point we confront a certain difficulty with instructions and people's ready compliance with them in these kinds of events, namely the invitation to adopt a role. In Ulrike and Eamon participants are invited to enter the heads of terrorists and see the world from their point of view. However, out on the streets, how does one reconcile the basic orientation towards being ordinary with an apparent instruction to be a terrorist? What we have seen in our discussion of relational compliance is that engaging with an experience like this involves in good part arriving at a sense of what the experience must really be about and proceeding in that fashion. This provides the licence or accountability for certain behaviours such as were witnessed in the alleyway. However, it also provides for what might be discounted whilst still honouring the spirit of the experience. And it is at this point, at the point where instructions propose actions that are extraneous to the accomplishment of adequate performance, that aspects of instructions that are to do with the adoption of a particular role can quite simply be set aside as irrelevant to a demonstration of adequate compliance.

Listening to the story of a terrorist, nodding your head when told to, going down dubious alleyways are all found

to be open to compliance under the auspices of this being an ambulatory experience they are engaging in. However, actually *acting* like a terrorist when you're out walking the streets of Venice is something else, creating potential tension between the accountability of participants to what they see to be the intention of those who created the experience and their accountability to just anyone else.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has sought to explore the complex matter of instruction-giving and instruction following by analysing people's situated compliance with instructions in an ambulatory experience. This experience was chosen for that because it has some particularly pertinent features: it is sending thick instructions down a thin channel; it is delivering instructions into a complex environment; it offers little scope for feedback; and it offers little opportunity for rehearsal. In relation to this we have seen how people's compliance with instructions operates across four different layers: locational compliance; sequential compliance; comportmental compliance; and relational compliance. This in turn led us to a discussion of the challenges of trying to do all of this down a thin channel. We then noted how the particular experience we studied also provoked tension between people's *accountability* to three different parties: the designers of the experience; potential observers on the streets attempting to manage their compliance in certain ways; and the ordinary society constituted of just anyone else who might be around.

In relation to these observations we would make two basic recommendations to design at this stage:

1) *It is important to design instructions with the four different layers of compliance in mind.*

We saw how each layer of compliance turned upon compliance with something prior and more foundational. Relational compliance is made manifest through comportmental compliance. However, comportmental compliance turns upon getting to the right places in the right order and, for some kinds activity, at the right time. Ulrike and Eamon works well and the designers of the experience are skilled in their craft, turning the tensions in accountability and compliance into a deliberately ambiguous work of art. However, disregard for how different orders of compliance relate to one another could lead to instructions having less desirable outcomes, especially when they are delivered down a thin channel with little scope for repair.

2) *It is important to provide mechanisms for both managing and exploiting the different kinds of accountability at play.*

We have noted that there is a strong tension between instructions implying role enactment and the routine business of 'doing being ordinary'. Now many aspects of proposed role-play prove to be subject to dismissal on the basis of them not needing to be done for adequate compliance to be claimed. Aspects that are routinely rejected tend to fall into the category of things that would

make participants strongly open to being called to account in relation to what others around them might ordinarily understand them to be doing, with 'being involved in a experience' not being a to-hand account for such potential witnesses. However, we have also noted that, where compliance is actively managed, participants understand themselves to be accountable in different ways. The fact that these three different sense of accountability co-exist with one another in the pursuit of such experiences, whilst at the same time wanting to get something back out of your investment of time and energy, lead to some interesting and possibly productive design tensions.

At the end what we would wish to stress here is that *it is possible to deliver thick instructions down a thin channel*. However, doing this takes great design skill that attends to layers of compliance that step beyond traditional interests in locational compliance and learning and that embraces also matters of comportmental compliance and relational compliance, whilst understanding how different kinds of accountability will play out.

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