

## Objects That Look

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*Michael Atkins, MA Visual Anthropology, University of Manchester*

Despite police 'crackdowns' and the increasing availability of willing sexual partners online, the canal remains popular with men seeking anonymous and impersonal encounters with other men. During my fieldwork I employed a combination of ethnographic voyeurism and online ethnography to gain an insight into this capricious and difficult to access group. Sketch enabled me to place the witnessed body into a photograph of the empty site, avoiding the ethical, legal and practical complications of recording participants' identities during 'the act'. The downside of the technique was that ultimately the other becomes my creation in the collages. However this feels a more honest representation of my experiences and the men's objectification of each other when cruising.

Participants create cruising grounds in environments most able to accommodate, perpetuate and protect their ambiguity. The cruiser negotiates the encounter with their body; its language and location. To function as a cruising ground a site must enable men to see each other, yet provide shelter for the sexual act from the social gaze. Cruising is an art of bodily and architectural recognition, every movement; placement, used condom and architectural feature contribute to its negotiation. I wanted to show how darkness, obstruction, ambiguous physical performance and scene selection contain the sexual act in a semi-physical yet imagined private space. When social discourse is undesirable, desire must be communicated by the body and its choice of location. The exclusion of the other's and my voice from the social exchange made conventional procedures and permissions difficult and in some cases impossible. Although particularly pronounced in my research, I believe this is a dilemma in most anthropological study. Social research always involves an element of deception (Mitchell 1993), even where consent forms can be obtained and research agendas explained, it is naive to assume the participant can appreciate

the range of potential implications of being involved.

Despite explanation of my research to many participants, I am unavoidably involved in the embodied communication exchange before permission can be obtained from the potential informant. The anthropologist's body is part of the social world being studied, as such they are afforded information and access that the status of social player grants. Anthropological dialogue is arguably made possible through the investment of the other in us as part of their social world.

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