

Seeing + Believing

LISA HASKEL



The camera appeared during autumn 2000, at the corner of Lawrence Way and Loughborough Road, at the top of this pole (#01).

Highly visible to the slow moving and people using the bus stop on Brixton Road, this street corner was a gathering place for local (mainly black) young people.

I walked past this corner almost every day.



That summer there had been a series of street robberies.

I lived in a large block of flats at the end of the road (#02). I am 36 years old, a woman and white.

On the street after dark I am alert, but don't want to be afraid.



My bag was stolen from me under the cameras of my own building's entrance (#03) by a group of boys, maybe 5 of them, all under 15 years old (I'm guessing). It was not a violent crime.

A few days later my friend, who shares my demographic profile, had her bag stolen from her right under the new camera.

The police ask us if we would like to talk to a counsellor from the 'Victim Support' agency.

The building that I live in was built by a charity in the 1950s – a utopian post-war social experiment for housing 'single people' cheaply; a block with 160 flats, one room each. In common with most 'social housing', the building is densely populated by people with a lot of problems. The elderly tenants tend to know each other and often go out in pairs. The building is unsuitable for children; families live in the local authority estate over the wall (#04) and we don't know them.

Generally speaking, young people are feared in this building.

LONDON



A minute away is Myatts Fields. A lovely nineteenth-century park, originally the private grounds of the rich, but now a well used civic amenity. The houses around the park sell for a million pounds or more.

The residents around the park on Knatchbull Road (**#05**) have cars and back gardens. You don't see their (mostly white) kids. Mostly, they drive down Loughborough Road to reach their houses.

2000 was the height of the most recent property boom. House prices soared: now only well earning professionals can afford to own property in this area.



After the camera went up, the kids from the corner went to hang out across Brixton Road (**#06**), around and about the 24-hour shop where food and drink is the least of what sells. Small packages traverse the counter and people lurking outside ask you if you have everything that you need.

The shop is much further from their homes, on a busy through-road where no one stops. The faces outside get younger and younger.



The 'Crime Strategy Coordinator' for the local government, in the 'Strategy, Regeneration and Planning Department' sounded well meaning but jaded. She told me that they do get informed by the police when they put up cameras, and are sometimes concerned about the displacement of people. But she didn't know of this specific case.

The corner (**#07**) stays empty, the young people stay milling around at the crack shop.



The camera casts the local population into polarised roles of potential victim and potential perpetrator.

The camera displaces the young and the black; mythical versions of safety are defined in favour of a privileged demographic.

The camera attempts to create an illusion of comfort, invisibility serving gentrification. The camera further fragments urban space, obscuring our shared social reality.

The camera is propaganda before it even generates an image.

