

1

LONDON : A CYCLE CENTRIC CITY



THE BICYCLE IS A PERFECT MACHINE. It fosters interaction in the public realm and offers a solution to the most relevant problems; congestion, pollution, obesity. However, we also all know the difficulties, dangers and discomforts facing those on the 480,000 cycle journeys made through London each day.

The recent London Mayoral elections saw candidates of all colours vie to be cycling's champion - this political ambition reflects society's desire for a more pleasant and sustainable cityscape. While a political lead is crucial to the modification of a city's habits, there is an equal need for designed solutions.

This is a sketch suggesting a structural intervention that might induce this change.

2

THE BICYCLE



China used to be synonymous with universal bicycle use. But rapid economic growth and rocketing material aspirations have seen the growing predominance of the car in cities like Beijing. This change has brought worse gridlock and choking pollution than is suffered by more established modern cities. London should be bold in diverting from this path. The dichotomy between the bicycle and the car should exemplify the difference between the sustainable city we seek and the energy-hungry, congested past we must leave behind.

In the new 'Green-Age' Londoners are embracing the bicycle. On going, trends to be environmentally aware have brought about a renaissance in cycling. Cycling has become fashionable.

Celebrated designer Paul Smith, himself an avid cyclist, has produced clothes in modern, smart fabrics that elevate everyday cycling from sweaty dishevelment to apparently effortless chic. Meanwhile the flock of lean, candy-coloured customised bikes now racing around London's streets show a renewed attraction for this simple technology. Just as the bold, chromed Cadillac of the 1950s exemplifies the thrill, liberty and excess afforded by the oil age, today's city bike is a stripped-down expression of the kind of elegant efficiency that the future must embrace. The environment in the city for cycling should be as brilliant as the machine itself.

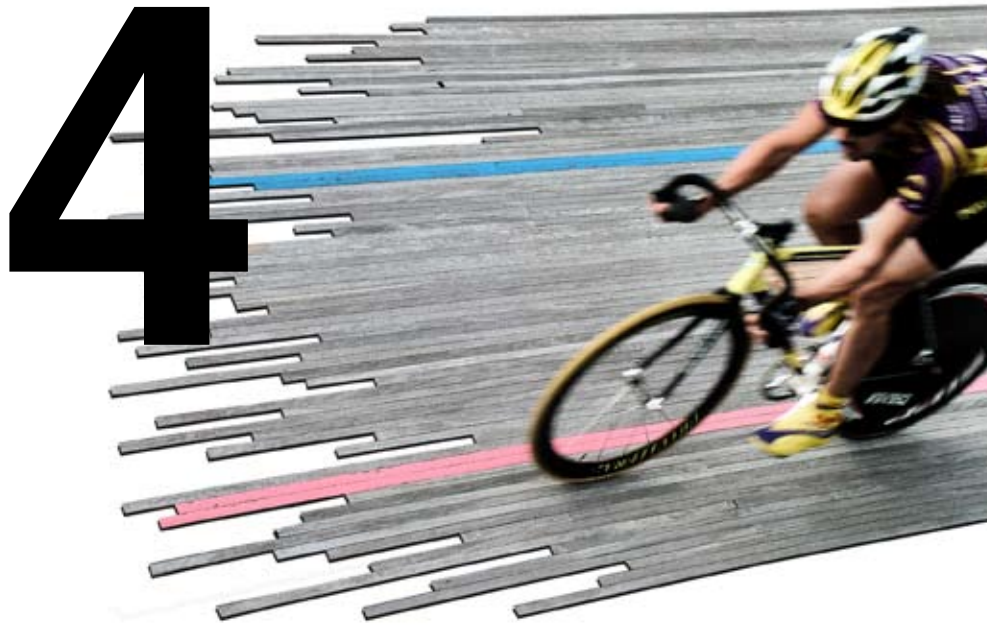
3

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM



A perverse characteristic of our designs on the city is the elements that are ignored. Planning policy, implemented by the naturally conservative Local Authorities, guard the integrity of the city's architectural landscape, protecting 'heritage' as well as human amenity. However, non-architectural elements, equally important in the cityscape, are left to roam unchecked. Collectively, the cars on London's streets and the resultant paraphernalia of safety and traffic management are a visual riot, a cacophony of offence. The design vocabulary of the car-centric street is clumsy and inhuman - kerbstones, bollards, railings, the highway code, ceaselessly flashing traffic lights.

Artist Eva Bensasson's photomontages explore the tension between architectural or urban spaces and the animated life that they frame. By applying Bensasson's reductive method to the landscape of a busy London street, merging cars and all the instruments of traffic management into a single void, their latent presence in our urban experience is revealed.



VELODROME / VELOCITY

Bikes are sexy, stylish pieces of engineering. They are also speedy, on an average journey of four miles in Central London, cycling is the fastest mode of transport. It is also three times as energy efficient as walking. The streetscape must reflect and enhance their dynamic potential and sparse efficiency.

London is not Paris; its citizens don't wander. It is not Italy; there is no passagiata. Londoners want to get somewhere quickly. We should not create a recreation of the genteel Dutch cyclepath, rather a tuning of London's vigorous engine. The velodrome is optimised for smooth, fast cycling. Its gorgeous, hyperbolic curves are tuned to maximise the ease with which the racers can travel.



Re-imagine the streets of London; not as the current uniform, line-painted tarmac plateau; instead they are a sinuous velodrome - an athletic continuum of smooth timber berms and banks sweeping silently through the city. Shaded by lightweight, spidery, canopies and gently lit by solar-charged luminaires. The reduced presence of the motorcar and the paraphernalia liberates space - space for vegetation, narrow bus lanes and pedestrians - this greened city is a pleasure to navigate.

Such extreme reconfiguration of the street illustrates how the urban experience can be designed to the same standard as products, fashion and architecture and impact societies behaviour just as meaningfully. Urban design needs to respond to our newfound love of the bicycle. It is a finely tuned, efficient, chic object; our streetscapes should reflect this.