London Liming: An Illustrated Report on a Public Social Display Co-Designed with Lime, Boyz 2 Men and Boys in London Boroughs

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Abstract: This article presents London Liming, a proposed co-designed public social display in Hackney, Lambeth and Southwark developed in relation to Lime and the youth charity Boyz 2 Men. It examines how participatory design can challenge stigmatising readings of shared bicycles and young male riders through peer-authored portraits, reversible bicycle wraps, public seating and transparent data notices. Drawing on semiotics, site-specific and participatory art, and scholarship on mobility justice, the paper describes a design process centred on youth authorship rather than externally imposed representation. The proposed implementation connects physical interventions with public communication, safeguarding and staged delivery. The article offers a practice-based design proposition; the workshops and pilot are proposals rather than completed interventions, and their social effects remain to be evaluated.

Keywords: participatory design; public display; urban mobility; youth representation; design ethics

1 Introduction

This report sets out my visual practice for London Liming, a co-designed public social display for the boroughs of Hackney, Lambeth and Southwark. The project works in partnership with Lime and the youth charity Boyz 2 Men. As the brief states, I am only the facilitator: “the boys at Boyz 2 Men have the privilege and they drive the design” (Module Brief, 2026). The report argues that a participatory display can change how people read the dumped Lime bike. Instead of being a sign of social decay and suspicion, the bike becomes a place where young men speak for themselves. The display uses poetics, colour, location, lighting and project management to do this, and it answers the brief on gender, design and space, ideas displayed, viewer engagement, and project management.

2 Discussion of Practice

2.1 Participatory Design Approach

In turn, I am borrowing my approach straight from the Module Brief and becoming more of a facilitator than an author, as the boys at Boyz 2 Men “have the privilege and they drive the design” (Module Brief, 2026). So my first practice decision is not a visual one but a procedural one, which will affect everything that follows. I want to propose four co-design workshops at the charity’s outreach hubs before any image is finalised, because de Certeau (1984, p. 30) says that everyday users will rewrite the institution’s strategies through their everyday practice. The approach is also inspired by Bishop’s participatory art approach, which provides a real voice to people who are normally observed (Bishop, 2012, p. 13) and Anderson et al.’s recent research, which found that youth-led urban design yields more equitable outcomes than expert-led urban design (Anderson et al., 2024).

The transition from the procedural to the image begins with how I read the bike itself, because the project's first design problem is the dumped frame on the pavement. The image in Fig. 1 is a photograph of a dumped Lime in Stoke Newington (Liu, 2026a, photograph), which serves as the primary brief for the project, rather than being illustrative. The bike is on its side, the front wheel facing out, the green frame lit by the low afternoon light, against a line of refuse bags. In other words, "dumped" is the inverse of glamour, which requires envy, and I argue the suspicion produced by the dumped bike is not in the metal itself, but is socially constructed.



Fig. 1: Liu, N. (2026a) Dumped Lime, Stoke Newington. Photograph.

Framing the bike as a sign that can be re-read, I turn to the semiotic apparatus that allows me to re-read it, and the apparatus is older than the bike. The analytical move is made possible by Saussure's distinction between signifier and signified, which Barthes applied to 'second order' mythic meaning (Barthes, 1972, pp. 155–156). The first-order signified of the Lime bike is electric mobility, and the second-order myth, when it comes to the boroughs I am talking about, is "the brown male youth riding a Lime with a pall of suspicion" (Lubitow, Abelson and Carpenter, 2020, p. 197). It is at the second-order myth that my display intrudes, and only my display will get there, no matter how many redesigns of the docks or improvements to the telemetry.

Stehlin's investigation into the bicycle infrastructure and uneven development applies particularly to bike-share systems, which he describes as "already-splintered infrastructure" (Stehlin, 2019, p. 178). The proposed borough-level mapping relates Lime use to Greater London Authority free school meal eligibility data, suggesting that the use of Lime and youth deprivation co-locate.

2.2 Representation and Visual Identity

To work in the selected boroughs, I have to set the gendered terms of the project carefully, because the boys' image is already over-read before I begin. Bourdieu argues that taste functions as social positioning rather than free judgement (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 6), and the existing taste-system positions hooded boys on bikes as a category before they are read as individuals on a street. Stephen Graham, who has spoken about being "just a mixed-race kid from a block of flats in a place called Kirkby" (BBC, 2025), The proposed visual strategy rejects anonymised stock images of hooded riders in favour of portraits developed with participants.

Refusing the stock image is the first half of the gender strategy; the second half is what I put in its place, and the substitution has to do real work. Fig. 2 is a sketch of the proposed portrait wall, in which each participating boy is photographed by a peer, named, and given a one-line caption he writes himself. The form deliberately echoes the studio portraiture conventions Berger discusses in Ways of Seeing (Berger, 1972, pp. 134–137), because the conventions of dignity have historically been reserved for those who can afford to commission them. The wall also follows Kwon's argument that the strongest site-specific work grows

from the exact place and people it serves (Kwon, 2002, p. 11), so the portraits are not portable installations but are made for these boroughs and these boys.



Fig. 2: Liu, N. (2026d) Sketch for the Portrait Wall. Pencil and digital. Mock-up: AI-generated placeholder indicating intended workshop output.

From the portrait wall, the visual system extends outward through colour, and the colour decisions cannot be ornamental. Lime's brand green is non-negotiable, but the second colour of the system is not. The colour-and-typography approach pairs Lime green with a deep ochre drawn from the colour fields of Trinidadian carnival, and which sets the project word liming in a heavy slab serif against the boys' own captions in a hand-drawn display face. The choice rests on Lévi-Strauss's argument that cultural systems "are passed through the family" and embedded in symbolic communication (Lévi-Strauss, 1978, pp. 18–22), so borrowing the word liming is not free, and the colour palette is the project's acknowledgement that the term has a route, a carrier, and an inheritance.

Acknowledging the route of the word is not enough on its own, which is why poetics carries the rest of the load. In the lecture's sense of the term, poetics is "words that create" and "words that are productive" (Millette, 2026, slide 12). Proposed workshop wording for stickers, decals and posters would be generated collaboratively, with three lines running through the public-facing surfaces: "We park where we live", "We are not the trace we leave", and "Lime, but ours". McClish's account of liming as "the art of doing something" rather than idling (McClish, 2016, p. 1), and Nakhid-Chatoor et al.'s framing of liming as a Caribbean methodology of relational meaning-making (Nakhid-Chatoor et al., 2018), guard the project against the colonial drift the brief warns about.

2.3 Bicycle and Spatial Interventions

These lines need surfaces to sit on, and the surfaces dictate the rest of the design system. Fig. 3 is the sketch for the bike-wrap kit, a peelable vinyl skin that wraps the existing Lime frame with the participants' captions and Trinidadian-inflected pattern work. The wrap is reversible, which matters for two reasons. The first is contractual, because Lime keeps its asset visually intact under the skin. The second is conceptual, because the wrap performs the project's central claim that the meaning of the bike is something added to the bike, not something written into its metal. Debord's account of the spectacle as social relations mediated by images helps me hold that line (Debord, 1994, p. 12), and the wrap is a counter-spectacle that admits its own constructedness.

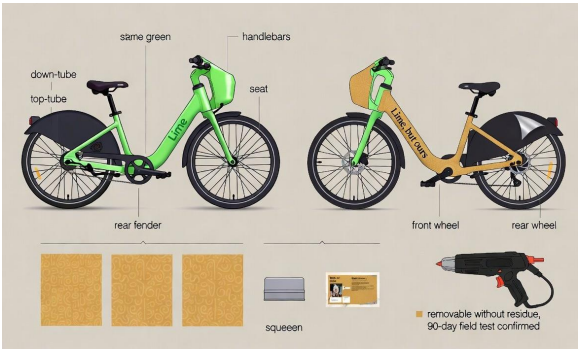


Fig. 3: Liu, N. (2026g) Reversible bike wrap kit. Pencil and digital sketch.

Beyond the bike itself, the project must reach the street, and the street is where Lime's commercial brief and my social brief actually meet. Fig. 4 is the parklet-dock proposal, a low-cost timber and steel structure painted in the project palette and designed to slot into existing kerbside parking bays. The structure does three things at once: it gives the bikes a recognisable home, it gives the boys a designed seat (Liming, in its Trinidadian sense, is a sitting practice), and it gives the borough a small piece of co-authored civic furniture. Stehlin's critique of bike-share as splintered

infrastructure (Stehlin, 2019, p. 191) makes the parklet's distributive role explicit: it converts one car bay into eight bike spaces and four public seats.

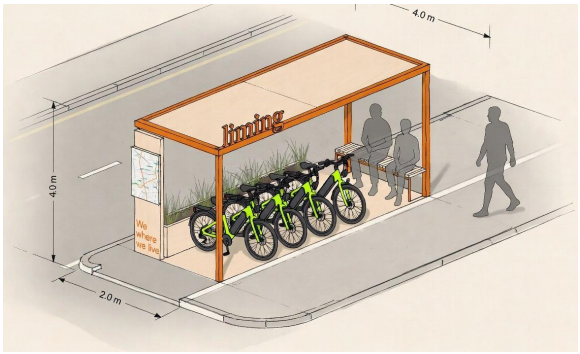


Fig. 4: Liu, N. (2026h) Parklet dock proposal: timber and steel kerbside structure. Axonometric sketch.

Lighting and sound are not built beneath the parklet because, if used after hours, they must be safe but not obtrusive. Under the parklet canopy, low-level warm downlighting is installed and designed to activate at dusk using the daylight sensor. There is a small, conversational-sized Bluetooth speaker in the canopy so that each participant can listen to their own music during the workshop hours, and it is turned down at night, so the soundscape is on the boys' terms when they are there and removed when they are not.

2.4 Surveillance and Ethical Considerations

Once I identified the design on the street, I must now consider the street's visibility to riders, as it is a two-way street. As Lyons (2019, p. 18) and the Transport Policy article referenced in the brief both point out, any 'tracking' would likely perpetuate the surveillance problem the project seeks to address. Lime's initial reaction is directly in question here, though, as more cameras and more telemetry can find the bike but can also make the second-order myth harder to dispel. Thus, Fig. 5 is an explicit anti-surveillance signage, a series of small wayfinding plaques on each parklet, explicitly stating the data the dock collects and the data it does not, in plain English, to be easily readable from a cycling distance.

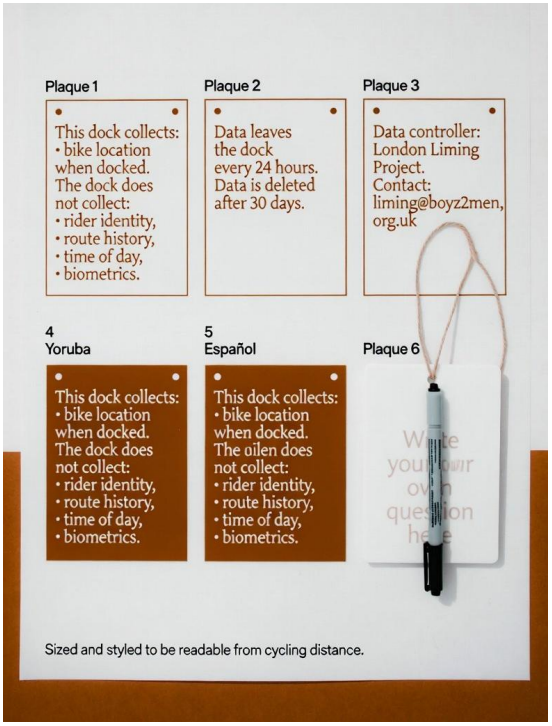


Fig. 5: Liu, N. (2026i) Anti-surveillance plaque sheet for parklets. Digital.

The proposed workshops require safeguarding procedures for photographing minors, including participant assent, guardian consent where required, and oversight by Boyz 2 Men staff. Youth-created portrait material would be subject to participant approval before publication. Cultural appropriation risks associated with the term liming would be addressed through co-authorship and consultation, while data retention and collection would need to be explicitly agreed with Lime before any pilot.

The study of surveillance at work has identified location data as one of the most behaviourally revealing forms of data that is gathered by urban systems such as bike-share (Lyons, 2019, p. 6). The smaller correction, represented by the plaques in Fig. 5, is the minimum correction possible, while the larger correction is a contractual cap on data retention.

2.5 Public Engagement and Implementation

The street and the data are laid out, the display is extended online, and the second-order myth lives more on social media than on any kerb. Finally, a proposed tile suite extends the project onto social media. The

formats are intentionally platform-specific. It is available in square portrait formats for Instagram, vertical for TikTok and Reels and a single horizontal poster format for press. The caption for each tile is taken from the poem of one of the boys, and the small project mark is in the bottom corner, along with one of the poetic lines from the workshop itself (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 97–98).

The online layer needs to land in the right week, and landing is a project-management problem as much as a design one. Lecture 10 is explicit that public display "must be EXTREMELY well project managed" (Millette, 2026, slide 13). My delivery schedule has five phases: four co-design workshops over six weeks, a closed pre-launch with Lime and Boyz 2 Men, a kerbside pilot at three parklets for twelve weeks, a public launch event timed to coincide with London Cycling Awareness Week, and a six-month iteration period in which the wraps and lines are refreshed. Marketing release dates would be aligned to each project phase.

That public launch event is itself a designed moment, not a press call, and it has to look like the rest of the display rather than like a corporate hospitality evening. Fig. 6 is the floor plan and poster for the launch evening at a Hackney community centre, with Stephen Graham invited as the announced patron, the boys' portraits projected at scale on the back wall, and a short film I am storyboarding running on a side-room loop. The lecture's reminder that video "should run on a loop in a side room" and "should come from a 'Common Mouth' and seem 'home-made'" (Millette, 2026, slide 18) is the rule I am following, so the film is shot on the boys' phones, edited under their direction, and never replaces the people in the room.

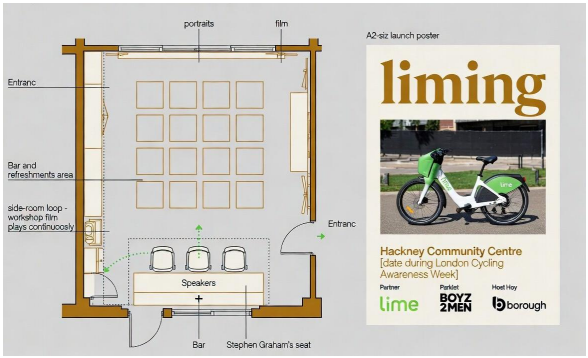


Fig. 6: Liu, N. (2026l) Launch event floor plan and poster, Hackney community centre. Digital.

Each partner is given a press pack containing the wrapped-bike images, the parklet renders, and short interviews conducted by the boys themselves, not by Lime. The working principle is as follows: No image should be designed to do everything alone, and the press pack takes care of spreading the message over the various formats.

The project's politics are overlaid onto all this, but they are not painted on, and that is what I want readers to read clearly. Class and race are not displayed. It confronts them in a way. The boys are identified, the word 'liming' is explained, plaques and a contract clause answer the 'surveillance' question, and the bike is covered in the boys' writing rather than a marketing campaign about the boys. This project takes place at the end of the process, as community engagement is integrated into the approach proposed by Zhou, Sanz-Hernández, and Hernández-Muñoz (2024); public art can only achieve sustainable social effects in this way.

That is a correction for two time scales at once, and I want to show both, since the question itself is posed on that scale in the brief. There is a short time frame here with the wrap, the poster, the social tile, and that can be consumed in seconds by a passerby. As a returning passerby reads the Parklet, the workshop archive and the co-authored zine that emerges from each workshop cycle, the drawn-out timescale is what is at stake.

3 Conclusion

The Lime bike has been read in London as a marker of social decay. London Liming does not deny the

dumped bike. It asks instead who owns the word liming, who writes the captions on the kerbside, and who decides what counts as data. By placing the boys from Boyz 2 Men inside the design loop, by wrapping Lime's asset in their own poetics, and by building parklets that double as public seating, the display proposes a small but methodical reframing rather than a campaign. It answers the brief on gender and images, on design and location, on lighting and project management, and on the question of immediate against drawn-out engagement. Whether the project succeeds is a question only the boys, the borough and the bike will answer over time.

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