


LOBBY



No 1 | Autumn 2014 | The Bartlett School of Architecture

Un/Spectacle

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LOBBY

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DESIGN AND ART DIRECTION studio 4

EDITORIAL

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The Seminar Room _____ **Sophie Read**
The Lift _____ **Nito Ramírez**
The Crit Room _____ **Nahed Jawad-Chakouf**
The Staircase _____ **Laura Narvaez**
The Library _____ **Stylianos Giamarelos**
The Toilets _____ **Mrinal S. Rammohan**

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With Special Thanks to Thomas-Bernard Kenniff, Christian Parreño, Mariana Pestana, David Roberts, Danielle Willkens

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LOBBY is printed by Aldgate Press

ISSN 2056-2977

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Contributors

Can we experience something spectacular through senses other than sight? To answer the riddle we handpicked four of this issue's contributors and asked them the following question: **What's the most spectacular thing you've ever felt, tasted, smelled or heard?**

Fame Ornuja Boonyasit, Contributing Writer
@FameOBoonyasit



Fame is pursuing her Masters of Architecture at The Bartlett's Graduate Architectural Design programme. Apart from writing for LOBBY, she's also involved in art direction and writing for *Numéro Thailand* (though we want to keep her for ourselves). You can easily recognise her by her geometric bob which she admits is the product of her own cutting. Feel free

to turn to page 48 in the Exhibition Space to read Fame's article.

“Without any sense of sight, the taste of an ice-cream is always a spectacular feast. As a sense conductor, its taste flourishes as soon as it loses structure, while at the same time calling for the emergence of other sub-senses. A spoonful or a scrumptious bite brings about a sense formation comparable to that of a tree, with taste as a core, touch, smell and temperature fluctuation branch out in an immediate venation of causality.”

Laurie Goodman, Editorial Assistant
@_LGOODMAN



Laurie is a masters student in Spatial Design here at The Bartlett, and she's got a background in architectural history. She is a very, very serious and very clever academic, often using words such as 'phenomena', 'paradigm' and 'ubiquitous'. In between that, she enjoys naps and cat videos on YouTube. Laurie was a recurrent face in the

very official meetings between the magazine's editors, who felt compelled to invite her due to how fired up she was about being involved in the editorial process. We were dubious at first, but now we don't regret it. You can read the article Laurie's written for us on page 68 in the Lift.

“A potent combination of gin and Beyonce.”

Nick Elias, Contributing Illustrator
nickelias.co.uk



Nick is your boy-next-door-type, apart from being a little more scared of bees. He's a truly gifted architectural illustrator, and we're lucky to have him on our team, especially since we nearly missed him. Nick is now an official Bartlett alumn, having just finished his Masters in Architecture; it's a relief that we caught him in time before he made an escape.

If you're curious about Nick's contribution to the issue, be patient, you'll see his illustration in the Toilets. No pun intended.

“I think it's probably a smell. Smelling something is known in science to have a stronger connection to memories than any other sense. I guess I find it more 'spectacular' when a sense like this exposes otherworldly sensations of nostalgia and situation. It sort of tells a story, meaning that a poo could be more spectacular than a piece of Mozart.”

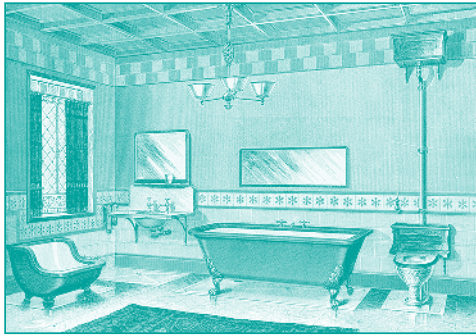
DaeWha Kang, Crit Room Contributor
@daewhakang



DaeWha is one of the non-Bartlett, external contributors we were keen to have on this issue. He studied architecture at Princeton and Yale University and is an Associate at Zaha Hadid Architects, where he's worked since 2004. You can read through his insightful, contributing student-critiques throughout pages 84–95 in the Crit Room.

“Smell is considered to be the sense most deeply linked to our emotions and our memories. I think of the smell of moist wood and dust in the air after a short spring rain in the stone garden of Ryoan-ji temple in Kyoto. In a culture that increasingly privileges the visual over our other senses, our connection with the scent of architecture might reacquaint us with the deep essence of materiality and the pathos of history that is so fundamental to our discipline.”

Flushing Without Forgetting



Words by Stylianos Giamarelos

LOBBY talks to **Barbara Penner** about *Bathroom*, her latest book about this most un-spectacular of domestic spaces that intriguingly raises many important questions about increasingly pressing, but usually overlooked, problems of our modern world.



How did you start developing an interest in the bathroom?

In fact, the book has a very strong Bartlett link. I did the MA Architectural History here in 1995–1996, and my thesis focused on the opposition to public conveniences for women in Victorian London. Studying these quite bizarre but passionate fights made me understand that, far from being neutral and functional spaces, bathrooms are incredibly complex. It's impossible to talk about bathrooms without finding yourself talking about so many other things too—deep-rooted social beliefs, cultural norms, religious practices, the body, sexuality...

This story is very interesting, particularly when one has in mind that the feminist-inspired architectural discourse initially seemed to focus on questions of domestic space. Yet, your own research started from a space that could be found both in public and

in private iterations. How did your work develop within this duality of the public and the private?

That's a very good question, and you're right. Even when considering the domestic bathroom, I regard it as hinge or an interface space. It's where we go to perform our most private acts, yet it's the space in which we're most directly hooked up to infrastructure. It's where individual bodies, technology, infrastructure all come together in a way that complicates traditional ideas about public and private. But what fascinates me is that we rarely acknowledge that our bathroom connects us up to a larger infrastructural network. In fact, we're actively participating in *not* acknowledging it—we prefer to flush and forget.

How did you see the work developing over all those years since then?

As academics, we like to think we can always plan out what we do, but the truth of the matter is that we are often quite responsive. In my case, I only got serious about bathrooms again in 2010 when I received a UCL Grand Challenges Small Grant to go to South Africa with Dr. Sarah Bell (from UCL Dept of Civil, Environmental & Geomatic Engineering). Going to Durban and learning more about the challenges facing the Global South, in terms of hygiene and sanitation, was a 'eureka' moment for me.

It also made me question what's happening in the Global North. We've inherited systems and spaces that have locked us into certain patterns of behaviour, but we are largely blind to this fact. Moving forward, this inherited system will be under far greater pressure—just consider the stress on the world's water supplies or the rise of natural disasters (which hit infrastructure very hard)—and will force us to examine our own spaces and behaviours more closely. Is it still viable to use 50 litres of drinkable water to flush our toilets every day?

So *Bathroom* is doing two things really. First, it tries to understand how we have ended up with the bathroom and the sanitation system we have and how it's been established as a kind of 'global gold standard' for dealing with water and waste. And, second, it considers cases of what I call "unlocking" where this model is rethought in some way.

Where do you think one can go now after this book?

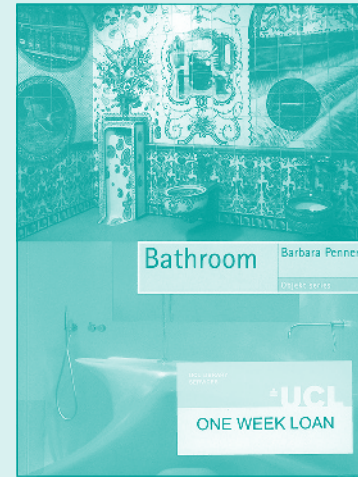
There's been an increased awareness of the importance of sanitation globally in recent years, as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and many NGOs address the 2.5 billion people in the world who don't have basic sanitation. So, this is where I see the challenge: how do you open up serious discussions around what are still considered taboo subjects? The areas where I see conversations developing in the future are around sustainable cities, healthy cities, and urban resilience—these are obviously conversations in which architects and urban designers should play a leading part.

Fostering these conversations has been the focus of my new projects. With my colleagues Sarah Bell and Tse-Hui Teh, we organised UCLoo Festival 2013. Its centrepiece was a rather beautiful working ecological toilet with a 0.2 litre flush installed in UCL's Main Quad. It was meant as a prompt and a provocation to the UCL community and to The Bartlett students specifically. If we can use toilets with 0.2 litre flushes, why don't we? What are the blind spots in our own practices? If The Bartlett and UCL don't tackle these questions in an intelligent, joined-up way, who will? ♣

Catalogue G Illustrating the Plumbing and Sanitary Department of the J.L.Mott Iron Works (1888)

BOOK REVIEW

An Architectural Historian Unlocks the Water Closet



Christopher Purpura is inspired by Barbara Penner's *Bathroom*.

I had often made the assumption that all toilets shared analogous plumbing, until I discovered that faeces usually land on a shelf for the doctor's inspection in Germany. We often make similar mistakes by assuming the bathroom is a discrete interior bounded by four (often white-tiled) walls, sealing off our everyday bathtubs, sinks and toilets from the wider public world. Barbara Penner's *Bathroom* demystifies that singular, iconic image in spectacular fashion. On its pages, the bathroom expands into a space intimately connected not only to the realms of sewage infrastructure and government legislation, but also to social beliefs and norms that are both historically determined and culturally specific. What are the practical implications of all that? Well, consider the Anglo-American Wet Closet where human waste flush out of site and mind into the water system, for instance. Can it really be considered more normal or rational than dry toilets in the Global South where urine and faeces are farmed and productively transformed into fertiliser? And it is not only fixtures, but also people themselves, as users, that are standardised. By unpacking the assumptions behind bathroom design—especially

those discriminating against gendered, disabled and ageing bodies—Penner calls attention to the need for architects, designers and consumers to understand how bathrooms were constructed in the past in order to imagine how they can be improved in the future.

Bathroom's politics are not didactic; they emerge much more fluidly through a social history illuminated by seductive material examples. The latter are a real gift to students since the visual richness of each image can sufficiently fill one essay after another. Spanning across media that challenge the boundaries between art, architecture and design, the toilet for example, is imaged both in an advertisement for the biometric curves of Luigi Conali's design from 1975 and in a studio portrait, where the inside of the toilet bowl is painted with a delicate, blue and white China-like, floral pattern from 1886. The urinal alone appears both as Duchamp's un-functional *Fountain* and as Alex Schweder's fully functional Siamese twin of an installation for two users.

Penner's attention constantly shifts between iconic and lesser-known subjects, including her protagonists of choice. While Le Corbusier and the modernist mantra that "form follows function" constantly reappears throughout *Bathroom*, so does Alexander Kira, whose 1975 interdisciplinary research at Cornell countered the assumption that the standardised forms of the bathroom were unnatural for human anatomy. However, the narratives of Le Corbusier and Kira converge in their common plea for the semi-squat—crouching, feet back, legs lifted—and against throne-style toilets. By referring to Le Corbusier and Kira as protagonists of this story, I am drawing upon questions raised in seminars and tutorials with our Bartlett tutors—including Penner—about the writing of history as a narrative—complete with characters who inhabit and contest spaces framed carefully by storytelling devices. Since history writing is neither the transparent reflection nor objective recuperation of past events, Penner clearly announces her role in its construction. Bookending this survey of incredibly diverse breadth is the figure of Penner herself who makes two pilgrimages: the first to the Kohler Arts Centre in Wisconsin and the last to Zumthor's Therme Vals. By beginning and ending in the twenty-first century, this narrative device resists a clear linear progression from past to present. The historian's active writing of history is foregrounded, and thus, the story's complex oscillations between disciplines and scales—from water-treatment facilities down to the very "shit" itself—become rooted in the here and now. As a result, we encounter history less as readers and more as participants whose agency faces a decision to support Penner's call for better bathrooms—rationally designed, ecologically sustainable and inclusive of all users. ♣