

LOBBY



No 1 | Autumn 2014 | The Bartlett School of Architecture

Un/Spectacle

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LOBBY

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Regner Ramos

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**

Editorial Assistants Cameron Clarke, Laurie Goodman, Carrie Lai Tieng Leong, Daniel Stilwell

Contributing Writers Ricardo Agarez, Marcela Araguez, Heidi Au Yeung, Jaime Bartolome Yllera, Fame Ornuja Boonyasit, Lea Collet, Ines Dantas, Patch Dobson-Pérez, Nick Elias, Laurie Goodman, Danielle Hewitt, Thomas-Bernard Kenniff, Fani Kostourou, Athina Lazaridou, Claudio Leoni, Kieran Mahon, Tim Norman, Christian Parreño, Pekka Piirainen, Sophia Psarra, Christopher Purpura, Louise Bjørnskov Schmidt, Emilia Smeds, Costas Spyridis, Daniel Stilwell, Italia Rossi, Freya Wigzell, Tom Youngman

Illustrators Nick Elias, Rayka Luo Guanghui, Kaiser Ulla

Cover illustration Stina Löfgren

Photographers Lester Cheung, Patch Dobson-Pérez, Nick Elias, Stylianos Giamarelos, Thomas Bernard-Kenniff, Josh Redman, David Roberts, Louise Bjørnskov Schmidt

Published Student Work by Shuchi Agarwal, Bernardo Dias, Bernadette Devilat, Felix Faire, Eizo Ishikawa, Francois Mangion, Tamon Sawangdee, Kate Slattery, Claire Taggart, Andrew Walker, Chiaki Yatsui, Qiuying Zhong

Contributors DaeWha Kang, Carlo Menon, Luke Pearson

Copyeditor Jamie Timson

Social Media Madalina Hanc, Carrie Lai Tieng Leong, Daniel Stilwell, Jacob Westmoreland

Online Editor Duarte Lobo Antunes

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

The Bartlett School of Architecture
132 Hampstead Road
London NW1 2PS
info@bartlettlobby.com

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www.bartlettlobby.com
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instagram: @BartlettLOBBY

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 alum, 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



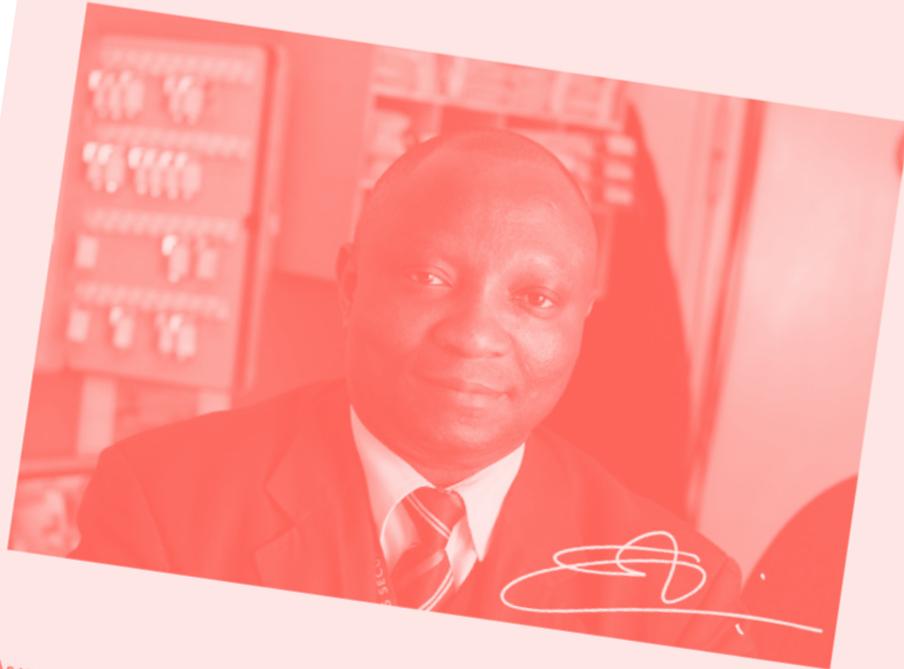
DaeWha is one of the non-Bartlett, external contributors we were keen to have on this issue. He studied architecture at Princeton and Yale University and is an Associate at Zaha Hadid Architects, where he's worked since 2004. You can read through his insightful, contributing student-critiques throughout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

Photography: Josh Redman (Nick & Laurie)

Foundations (Wates House 1975, Lobby 2014)

Lobby is conceived on the eve of the destruction of Wates House as a response to historic and contemporary criticisms. In this foreword by the originators of Lobby: Thomas-Bernard Kenniff, Christian Parreno, Mariana Pestana, David Roberts, and Danielle Willkens, quotes from the *Architects' Journal's* damning review of the building in April 1975 are presented in bold.



As you enter this **architectural mumbling**, there is no **absence of wit** at the gates of Wates House. Don is the face of The Bartlett, welcoming coffee-infused constituents through steel turnstiles to the **ill-defined spaces** and **horrifying junctions** where the **decent grubbiness and indecent graffiti obscure the worst features**.

Don't forget to sign in before entering. Welcome to Wates House; welcome to Lobby.

LOBBY_CONCEPT

Lobby is a noun and a verb. The verb itself derives from the practice of frequenting the noun. Lobby takes the building and dematerialises it through print. Its spaces are reflected in the structure of the journal and used as a platform from which to critically discuss what is missing from the institution - opportunities for exchange, internal communication, exposure to the outside world.

The publication intends to open a common space to discuss and showcase work produced at the Bartlett in dialogue with the outside architecture context. So far we developed a self-editing structure based on the floorplan of the Bartlett building, which allows for the voices of different students, from undergrad to PhD, to be heard.

It will be divided into sections named after and informed by the character of the rooms and transitional spaces of the school. So, for example, the lobby is the space to receive guests - where we invite external collaborators, the lift is a space in which one travels at a higher speed - where we conduct quick interviews, the toilet where all demarcations between teachers and students get diluted.

LOBBY_STRUCTURE

- We came up with six rooms (in no particular order):
- 1) Library: reading lists, recommendations, contents
 - 2) Lift: conversations, 60 seconds aphorisms
 - 3) Staircase: serendipitous meetings
 - 4) Exhibition space: design work
 - 5) Toilets: gossip and graffiti, the great equaliser
 - 6) Crit room: imbalance and injustice
 - 7) Seminar room: essays

The inaugural issue of Lobby, printed nearly forty years after the *AJ's* denunciation of Wates House, is composed of work from the **socially aggressive students** [who] **commandeer the carpeted spaces** [and the] **more passive students left out on the lino**. Lobby was founded to revel in the **accidents which disgrace the interior** of the building, to question the **drastic mistake of sharp demarcations** within the faculty, to bask under its **harsh overall lighting**, to challenge claims that work has a **lack of rigour**, and to celebrate the (un)spectacular of the **simple brick box** that houses the The Bartlett.

Note to LOBBY editors and graphic designer (and maybe a shorter note within the text itself): this Foreword is presented as an annotated layout of archival documents from the originators of LOBBY. The images, quotes and captions of this spread are composed within visible printer's mark, to represent the 'behind the scenes' nature of the Foreword and how LOBBY was intended to be a response to historic and contemporary criticisms of Wates House.

The Spatiality of Boredom

Asphyxiating yet bare

Words by Christian Parreño

CHREMYLOS There is too much of everything.

Of love,

KARION Bread,

CHREMYLOS Songs,

KARION And candy.

Aristophanes in *Plutus*¹

“The flight took fifty minutes and seemed much longer. There was nothing to do and nothing would hold still in his head in all the confined noise and after the nuts were gone there was nothing else for Sylvanshine to do to occupy his mind but try to look at the ground which appeared close enough that he could make out house colors and the types of different vehicles on the pale interstate the plane seems to tack back and forth across.”

David Foster Wallace²

The sentiment of unconformity with life, temporary or not, has been a constant preoccupation during more than two thousand years of Western culture. It has been expressed semantically and often structured through concepts of spatial occupation. For instance, before the emergence of *boredom* in the nineteenth century, *acedia* in the middle ages denoted a flight from the world that lead to indifference and spiritual instability. *Melancholy* appeared in the fifth century BC to diagnose

a physiological malfunction that caused fear and despondency; and *taedium vitae* and *horror loci* were configured in antiquity to signify discontent with stasis, limits and boundaries. These manifestations not only coincide in describing a negative reaction to the offerings of the environment, but also gesture to the possibility of diverting or overcoming the undesired status through counteracting actions. With historical specificity that entail connotative difference, the infiltration and popularity of such words constitute indicators of deficit of meaning as well as of capacity of involvement.

The condition of boredom did not come into existence when the term was coined.³ It surfaced to articulate and explore the redefined limits of the subject in modernity. The overpowering processes of progress, including capitalism, industrialization, secularization, rationalization and urbanization, demanded new vocabulary. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the etymology of *boredom* is uncertain.⁴ Its meaning refers to “the state of being bored; tedium, ennui.”⁵ It resulted from the combination of the verb or substantive BORE and the suffix—DOM.

While the latter, from Old English, forms nouns that create domains or general conditions, the former has two possible origins—both with spatial

associations. The first, supported by the *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*,⁶ lexicographer Eric Partridge⁷ and philologist Walter Skeat,⁸ suggests the figurative use of ‘to perforate’, probably as a reference to a forgotten anecdote. This sense can further be traced to two variations. One derives from the Old English *borian* that indicates the masculine action of drilling a solid with an auger or gimlet.⁹ The other stems from Aryan roots and the Latin *forāre* that means to cut or to pierce in order to generate something new—as in ploughing—with a feminine tone.¹⁰

In the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, these two modes of creating a void fused into *boredom* as an allusion to the result of a repetitive movement that creates annoyance as well as emptiness.¹¹ In a contrasting manner, the second origin of BORE, posed in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, links this component to the French *bourre* and *bourrer* that mean ‘padding’ and ‘to stuff, to satiate’.¹² Although the two possible meanings of BORE are contradictory, they base the conceptualisation of boredom as an ambiguous space completely full yet entirely void. One capable of germinating from multiplication as well as from subtraction—from too much as well as from too little.

As a common feature in this equivocal etymology, boredom arises involuntarily, prompted by an external agent but

concentrated on the receiving entity. It is porous and entropic. The zone affected by this condition lacks any defined quality because there is no indication of the characteristics of the missing piece or because the abundance of material does not allow the identification of a uniform essence. Although *The Oxford English Dictionary* dates the first public register of *boredom* to 1852–53, in the periodicals that composed *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens,¹³ the term can be found previously in his private letters¹⁴ and in literary work by other authors. In July 27th 1851, in correspondence with his secretary H. W. Wills, Dickens employed *boredom* to expose his concern with the effects on the visitors of the contentious architecture of The Crystal Palace, designed by Joseph Paxton for the Great Exhibition in London:

“My apprehension—and prediction—is, that they will come out of it at last, with that feeling of boredom and lassitude (to say nothing of having spent their money) that the reaction will not be as wholesome and vigorous and quick, as folks expect.”¹⁵

The same understanding of boredom as an infliction of the environment appeared several years earlier in the first and third volumes of *Women as They Are, or The Manners of the Day* by Catherine Gore, published in 1830. In the novel—a story depicting the gentility and etiquette of the British high society during the Regency era—boredom accompanied the everyday life of Lady Lilfield, a character in physical and dimensional movement despite the monotony of her surroundings.

During her pastoral seclusion, by a careful distribution of her stores of gossiping, she contrived to prose, in undetected tautology, to successive detachments of an extensive neighbourhood, concerning her London importance—her court dress—her dinner parties—and her refusal to visit the Duchess of...—while, during the reign of her London importance, she made it equally her duty to bore her select visiting list with the history of the new Beech Park school-house and of the Beech Park privilege of uniting, in an aristocratic dinner party, the abhorrent heads of the rival political factions—the *Bianchi e Neri*—the houses of Montague

“The conceptualisation of boredom depicted an ambiguous space completely full yet entirely void.”

and Capulet of the County Palatine of Durham. By such minute sections of the wide chapter of colloquial boredom, Lady Lilfield acquired the character of being a very charming woman, throughout her respectable clan of dinner-giving baronets and their wives; but the reputation of a very miracle of prosiness, among those men of the world, who know the world like men.¹⁶

The incapacity of these varied settings to promote immersion unveils boredom not as exclusive of a ‘boring object’ of a ‘bored subject’, but as a problematizing



The Weaker Sex, by Charles Dana Gibson, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [reproduction number, e.g., LC-USZ62-123456], Rights Advisory: No known restrictions on publication.



Charles Dana Gibson (1867–1944), *A Drama*, 1895, ink on paper, 18" x 28", signed lower centre, Life Magazine

“Similar to an opaque cloth of neutrality, boredom covers, filters, flattens, distances and exhibits all aspects of reality in their most essential form”

relation that points to something beyond itself. This lack of own narrative borrows from the particularities of the environment in order to acquire presence; however, the encircling spatial forces become still, impeding movement. Similar to an opaque cloth of neutrality, boredom covers, filters, flattens, distances and exhibits all aspects of reality in their most essential form. Everything and everyone turn equally important and

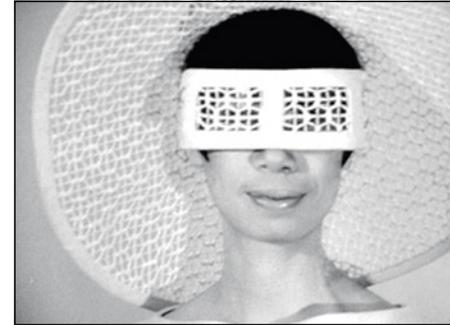
unimportant, demanding reconsideration. As in the case of Lady Lilfield and the sightseers of *The Crystal Palace*, boredom establishes a structural nexus between environment and experience—partly objective, partly subjective.¹⁷ It critically questions physical and ontological inhabitation while inducing idleness and restlessness as modes of operation. While the first moment rises from the passive desire to find a space of belonging, the second occurs in the active search for a genuine place to dwell in the world.

- 1 In Kierkegaard, Søren (1992/1843) *Either/Or*. London: Penguin Books. 225
- 2 Wallace, David Foster (2012) *The Pale King*. New York, NY—USA: Little, Brown and Company. 6
- 3 Spacks, Patricia Meyer (1995) *Boredom. The Literary History of a State of Mind*. Chicago, Illinois: Chicago University Press. 9
- 4 Murray, J., Bradley H., Craigie W., Onions C. (editors) (2001) *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Vol. II. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 414
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Barnhart, Robert K. (editor) (1988) *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*. Edinburgh: Chambers. 108
- 7 Partridge, Eric. (1966/1958) *Origins. A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 54
- 8 Skeat, Walter W. (1924/1879–82) *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 108
- 9 Murray et al., 413
- 10 Ibid., 413

The difference between where the subject is and where the subject wants to be not only suspends time and space but also begets a realm of latency. In order to identify a centre of gravity that sustains engagement, boredom promotes practices of transgression, experimentation and transcendence, potentially materialised in edification and/or obliteration. ♣

- 11 Ibid., 414. Skeat bases the reference to emptiness by recurring to a line in *Henry VIII* (c. 1613) by Shakespeare: ‘At this instant He bores me with some trick’.
- 12 Ibid., 414
- 13 Dickens, Charles (2002/1852-53) *Bleak House*. New York: The Modern Library. 152, 387, 705, 745, 775, 857. *Boredom* appears six times.
- 14 Dickens, Charles (1879) *Letters 1833–1856*. London: Charles Scribner’s Sons. 124. The earliest letter with the term *boredom* dates from July 22nd 1844, to painter Daniel Maclise.
- 15 Dexter, Walter (editor) (1938) *The Letters of Charles Dickens: 1832–1846*. London: Nonesuch Press. 333
- 16 Gore, Catherine (1830) *Women as They Are, or The Manners of the Day*. London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley. Vol 1. 51
- 17 Heidegger, Martin (1995/1929–30) *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by W. McNeill & N. Walker. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press. 87–8

Through the Eyes of the Situationists



Words by Nito Ramirez and Laura Narvaez

LOBBY reaches out to spectacle extraordinaire Dr Sadie Plant to discuss how the idea of ‘spectacle’ can be more mundane than we might expect

Film Still from *La Société du Spectacle*, by Guy Debord, 1973. No known restrictions on publication.

Very commonly, the notion of spectacle is often associated with everything from brilliant performances at the theatre to a drunken individual causing a lurid scene on the Tube. Although the two seemingly qualify under the vast umbrella of ‘spectacle’, as a performance, we clap and give standing ovations to the former, while some of us try to completely ignore the latter. It may very well be that our understanding of spectacle is skewed. So what exactly is spectacle, and how does it manifest itself socially? Is spectacle about an extraordinary event that disrupts our everyday lifeworld, or is it something so subtle that it embeds itself in our day-to-day life almost imperceptibly? Is spectacle fabricated, scripted and performed like that which we see at the West End, or is it spontaneous, unfeigned and expressed like that which we see—or try not to see—while we’re commuting at night on public transport? Or is it neither?

In the late 1950s, a group of revolutionaries composed of intellectuals, artists and activists began formulating a term called ‘the society of spectacle’, in an effort to draw attention to the ways in which capitalism extended not just to

the realms of production and finance, but the entire cultural experience of twentieth century life; they called themselves the Situationist International.

To discuss where spectacle as a theoretical construction originates, LOBBY teams up with British author and philosopher Dr. Sadie Plant, who opens up in a two-on-one interview about the theory of ‘spectacle’, as developed by Situationist Guy Debord in his book, *The Society of the Spectacle*, and the influence of this critical theory in architecture, urbanism and society over time. Sadie Plant is a writer based in Birmingham, she holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Manchester and is the author of *The Most Radical Gesture*, *Zeros and Ones*, and *Writing on Drugs*.



How did the Situationists socially define ‘spectacle’?

The situationist notion of the spectacle as a social phenomenon came in part from Marxist analyses of advanced capitalism as a profoundly alienating system—a world in which not only

relations of production and consumption, but those of everyday life as a whole have been commodified. They could have simply referred to ‘capitalism’ or ‘advanced capitalism’, but they wished to show that the capitalist tendency to turn everything into commodities—things to be bought and sold—knew no bounds and was reaching into every aspect of daily life. This was the late 1950s, early 1960s, the first years in TV, the advertising industry, and a culture of conspicuous consumption. But it was clear that people were not just caught up in the system when they were at work, nor even simply when they went shopping—they were buying off-the-shelf lifestyles rather than living their own lives—and worse still, that when they wished to go back to doing their own thing, they no longer knew where or how to find it or what it might be.

Both needs and desires are packaged and sold back to us as spectacle—images, appearances, and superficialities. The life drains out of things and experiences, which become flattened and remote, rendered equivalent to each other—a world in which we know ‘the price of everything and the value of nothing’,