Toilet Talks: A Speaker Event on Bodies, Identities and Design

Speaker Abstracts

Morag Rose
Are you engaged? The secret world of Manchester’s toilets

Toilets have played an important role in the development of Manchester, one that isn’t celebrated enough. This presentation will share the stories of some extraordinary loos. We will explore issues of public health, social welfare, the blurring of public/private space, gender identity and current controversies about where we should go for a pee. Expect a blurring of social history, personal anecdotes and some really crap jokes.

Morag Rose is a PhD student in Town and Regional Planning at the University of Sheffield. In 2006 she co-founded psychogeographical collective The LRM (Loiterers Resistance Movement). They organise regular walks which uncover hidden histories.

Barbara Penner
'Redesigning for the User: Alexander Kira and the Ergonomic Bathroom'

A still unsurpassed ‘classic’ of bathroom design and of user-centered design, The Bathroom by Alexander Kira was first published in 1966, then revised in 1976. This book, the result of a 7-year study, carried out at Cornell University, was one of the first to draw attention to the importance to the bathroom in terms of physical health and safety, not to mention delving (controversially) into the psycho-social aspects of its design. Yet many of its recommendations for more ergonomic and inclusive bathrooms were never taken up and these failures can help us to understand the obstacles facing those who seek to revolutionise bathroom design today.

Leo Care
Around the toilet: From social mess to architectural touchstone

For many architectural practices, the job of designing toilets goes to the most junior member of the office; As long as functionality is preserved, the qualities of the space are not overly important... and anyway, toilets are only inhabited for short periods of time, so why bother too much…? Alternatively, toilets have the power to transform social behaviour, convey powerful environmental principles and provide moments of architectural delight!

This presentation will explore the transformational power of toilet design through a series of conceptual and built architectural projects.

Biog:
Leo is currently Co-director of the Masters in Architecture course at The University of Sheffield, where he also coordinates the Live Projects programme and is the joint Director of Live Works, a new initiative which aims to build on the civic engagement activities of the School.

Leo also maintains an associate architect role practicing with Prue Chiles Architects, where he specialises in project briefing and design concepts. Leo is currently working as architect and client on an ambitious co-housing project in Sheffield, which provides an opportunity to develop and test participative design and construction approaches.

**Jo-Anne Bichard**  
*Extending Architectural Affordance or How to Spend a Penny.*

Publicly accessible toilets present a site of entrenched cultures of tolerance and intolerance that centre on our relationship with our bodies, and those of others with whom we share the space. The research described in this presentation uses the case of the publicly accessible toilet to demonstrate how the design of these facilities has continued to present a ‘special needs’ approach, opposed to inclusive design. Based on interviews conducted with over 300 able and disabled people, the presentation will highlight some of the conflicts that arise between users of this space and the difficulty experienced in ‘spending a penny’.

Jo-Anne Bichard is a Senior Research Fellow at the Royal College of Art Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design and leads the centre’s Work and City lab. Her PhD from UCL in Architectural Studies focused on users experiences of the design failings in public toilet provision from an architectural, product and service design perspective. Her recent publications include ‘ExcLOOsion: How sanitary provision is failed by design’ in Diversity and Design: Understanding Hidden Consequences, Publicly Accessible Toilets: An Inclusive Design Guide (with Gail Ramster) and ‘Inclusive Design of ‘Away from Home’ Toilets’ in Designing Sustainable Cities (with Julienne Hanson). Jo-Anne worked with Gail Ramster as co-creator of The Great British Public Toilet Map, the UK’s largest database of UK publicly accessible toilet provision.