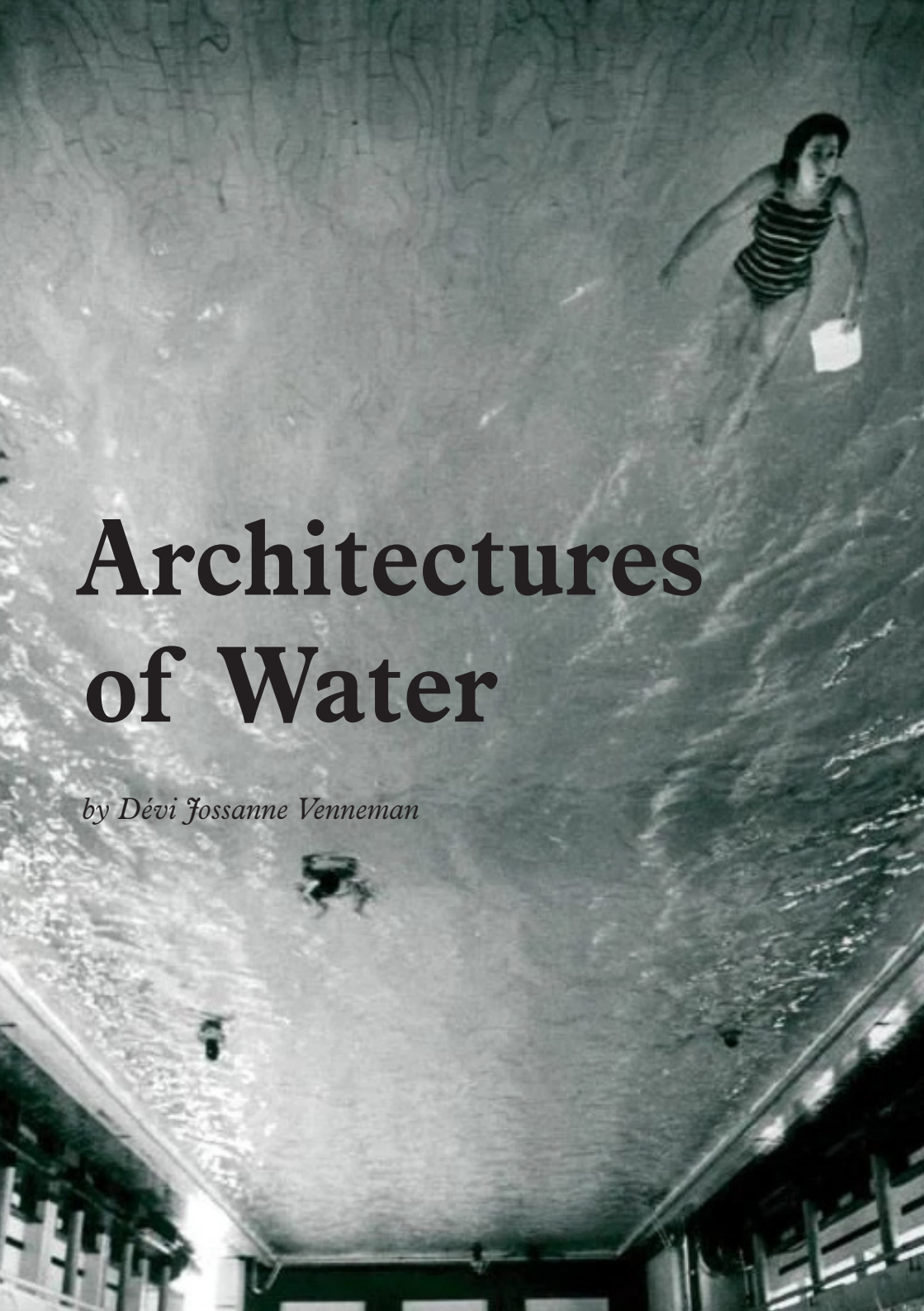# Architectures of Water

by Dévi Jossanne Venneman

Architectures of Water

Lost and (re)found; Space and Spaces for Water, People and Dreams in the City

Dévi Jossane Venneman

Contents

SWIM, Amy Scharrocks, 1918

Introduction

On the 12th of July in 2007, 50 people swam across London, connecting the blue of public lido's, swimming pools and ponds against a grey city scape. *SWIM* was an event, a live artwork in which people of all ages, sizes and abilities were invited to explore an idea of freedom, of gaining access to London's water by means of their bodies. The spectacle of oddness created by people running around the streets of central London in their bathing suits questioned the "usual nature" of things. By *swimming the city* Londoners were challenged to explore a different way of living in their city, swimming invited them to reimagine it from the inside out and make the city's water their own.

The current relationship between Londoners and their water is preceded by an incredibly rich, diverse and complex historical narrative. As the presence of water within the city slowly turned from a network of streams into engineered pipelines and so from natural into service, arrangements of ownership, management and use grew more complex. In todays global realm ongoing processes of growth, centralisation and privatisation have had the tendency to deteriorate the relations between citizens and water, contradicting its existential value to the cities' systems and human nature. A lack of understanding and engagement due to the alienation of individuals and community has led to a lack of connectedness and improper use, dislocating water in the contemporary context of the urban metropole.

Present-day structures of society represent water as a human made commodity, whilst it will always be an elusive element of nature, the human body and the environment. We have the responsibility, like the 50 swimmers of Amy Sharrocks, to reconsider and rethink our relationship with water. Architecture, as a physical manifestation of these arrangements of power, management and use, plays a vital role in developing practices and programmes that do or do not support a conscious and responsible relationship. There is an opportunity here to reformulate the city landscape, to reformulate our *architectures of water* that is capable of initiating new relationships, social dynamics and opportunities. *How can we redesign city water into practices that*

reconnect us to the element and its natural and social qualities?

This research examines the role of architecture as interface between people and water. It seeks to offer an insight into the dialogues that can be created between them in an attempt to devise new ways to relate to water in the context of the city. "City water" is understood here to be the natural streams of water that have entered the borders of the city and have thus become part of the urban system and its arrangements of management, power and use. The essay will start with a literature study investigating the meanings, values, qualities and opportunities that are embedded in water, defining what relationships exist en why. This offers a broader elaboration on the subject and poses as a contextual background for the following chapters.

  The literature study is then continued in the second chapter honing in on physical spaces and the relationships they produced throughout London's historical discourse. The chapter focusses on the timeframe of Londons 19th century industrialisation as the groundwork for Londons current relationship with water, the sewer system, embankments, monuments and above all daily personal hygiene, has been engineered during the course of this period.

  The literature study is followed by a case study analysis specifying the ways architecture can shape water rituals. The case study projects are elaborated upon using photographic imagery (new and archival), analytical drawings and textual descriptions. The case studies are chosen because they portray either a unique or underdeveloped relationship between water, people and architecture. They also vary in scale to give insight on the levels of impact of different scale interventions. Together they try to paint a picture of how the relationship between people and water can be architecturally articulated and the impact it can have on daily life.

  The essay provides a framework to understand the extent of city water, while at the same time hypothesise how, why, where and when in the city different practices, supported by an architectural programme and atmosphere, could benefit the restoration of city water in the context of London.

Delirious London, by Author, 2021

Victoria Embankment, 1923-1930

Ideas About City Water

We learn about water very early on, maybe even before the moment we are born. A sheltered float in the our mother's womb gives each and everyone of us a primal familiarity with and understanding of the element. It is the main component of our bodies and the earth's surface and carries symbolic and religious meaning in every culture. Water finds its way into our dreams and imagination, it is its receptive nature that makes it the natural conduit for reflection (Isaak, 2002). From the practicality of hygiene and the essentiality of ingestion, to its atmospheric power, the complexity of water and its relations is highlighted by the fact that almost every academic discipline deals with it in one way or another. In the process of unraveling what water entails, or better yet, could entail in the context of the modern city I rely on theories and ideas from the realms of sociology, geography, urbanism, arts and architecture. Not with the intention to exclude others, but as a starting point in view of the fact that, in their nature, these realms are closely connected to the human experience and the socio-cultural realm that I think are undervalued and maybe even disregarded in the current view of water.

The bacteriological model

In the spheres of today's city, water is often still regarded as one of the functional fluxes that makes up a space of interconnected flows. The city is celebrated as a dynamic machine of which its individual flows and networks can be understood like the functioning organ systems of the human body.

Urbanist and Geographer, Matthew Gandy elaborates on this metabolic view of the city and modern live and states that it is inherited from many critical developments that the grim, crowded and disease-ridden conditions of the nineteenth century initiated. Advances in sciences of epidemiology and microbiology and new forms of technical, financial and managerial expertise gave rise to a city in which the intersection between technology, space and society was carefully arranged into a sophisticated urban machine (Gandy, 2004).

This organicist model of the city represented an urban ideal, a cyclical system, a fully connected metropolis as a symbol for modern life. The water infrastructure that was put into place held a crucial role in the reconstruction of the city that we still recognise as the archetype of the modern urban form (Gandy, 2004). Whilst potable water supply and sewage were engineered out of sight, the urban landscape was adorned with embankments, pumping stations, ponds and celebratory fountains (p.12 & 15). As water was turned from something natural into a human made commodity, these "relics of water" acted as a symbol of power and at the same time symbolised a connection to the natural. When public bathhouses and the modern bathroom made their appearance in the streetscape a culture of personal hygiene and cleanliness was instigated.

Although the ideologies of this model have been cemented in the current urban tissue and, maybe for that reason, remain persistent in the prevailing view of city water, the model no longer holds the same value. Gandy argues that the analogies are too arbitrary and their capacity too narrow to take in the fluid tendencies of the modern city (2004). At the same time he states that, the idea of an urban metabolism might be useful if it grounds itself in the in the interweaving of biophysical and social processes. Planners need to let go of the idea of a sublime nature in the urban context and lean in to the idea that the interweaving of processes, that is inevitable, leads to a different kind of nature, an urban one.

Gandy's study on the metabolic model is valuable as it illustrates the origins of London's day to day water. The study shows how water infrastructures form pivotal and active agents in the production of public space, both in the process of social-technical evolution and the shaping of urban culture. However could question the limitations of the metabolic view, especially in relation to city water. Should it be limited to the the spheres of biophysical and social processes or could it be extended to recognise power relations and include the realm of the individual experience and mind?

Streatham Pumping Station, 1895

Water as power construct

The city's viability is reliant on the urbanisation of water, but that same transformation of nature into commodity also makes it a deeply social, cultural, economic and thus, political proces (Swyngedouw, 2004). These circumstances underline that careful attention and consideration needs to be payed about the power relations by which the urban transformation of water is organised and arranged. Professor of human geography Erik Swyngedouw (2004) raises the transcendent question to this process should be: 'Who owns the right to the city and nature?'.

The urban transformation of water systemically has been placed in the hands of engineers and technicians. While technology itself can be considered as an expression of politics, that for a long time now have hidden behind the argument that the waterissues are a matter of our power over the natural world. We need to recognise the technocratic view of which the current infrastructure has been put into place and ask ourselves if this is the approach we continue to run with? In fact, in light of todays climate crisis, we can argue that the 19th century belief that we have the power to control nature has backfired, there is a need to change our approach. Moreover it has put water at the disposal of the realm of society excluding the individual and more importantly; natural actors.

Experiencing water

As becomes clear from Gandy's bacteriological model and Swyngedouw's notes on the delineation of power, city water is undeniably involved with political and social processes. It might even be considered that "water is less a product of nature than it is of culture" (Kathy Poole in Bennet, 1999, p.74). Very early on we learn about waters primacy, albeit from lessons of life sciences or religion, stories in mythology and arts, and to consider it as much a metaphorical thing as a physical one (Bennet, 1999). Our physical, emotional and imaginative interactions with water transform it into something "mesmeric, sacred, comforting, stimulating, beautiful and fearful" (Strang, 2004, p.).
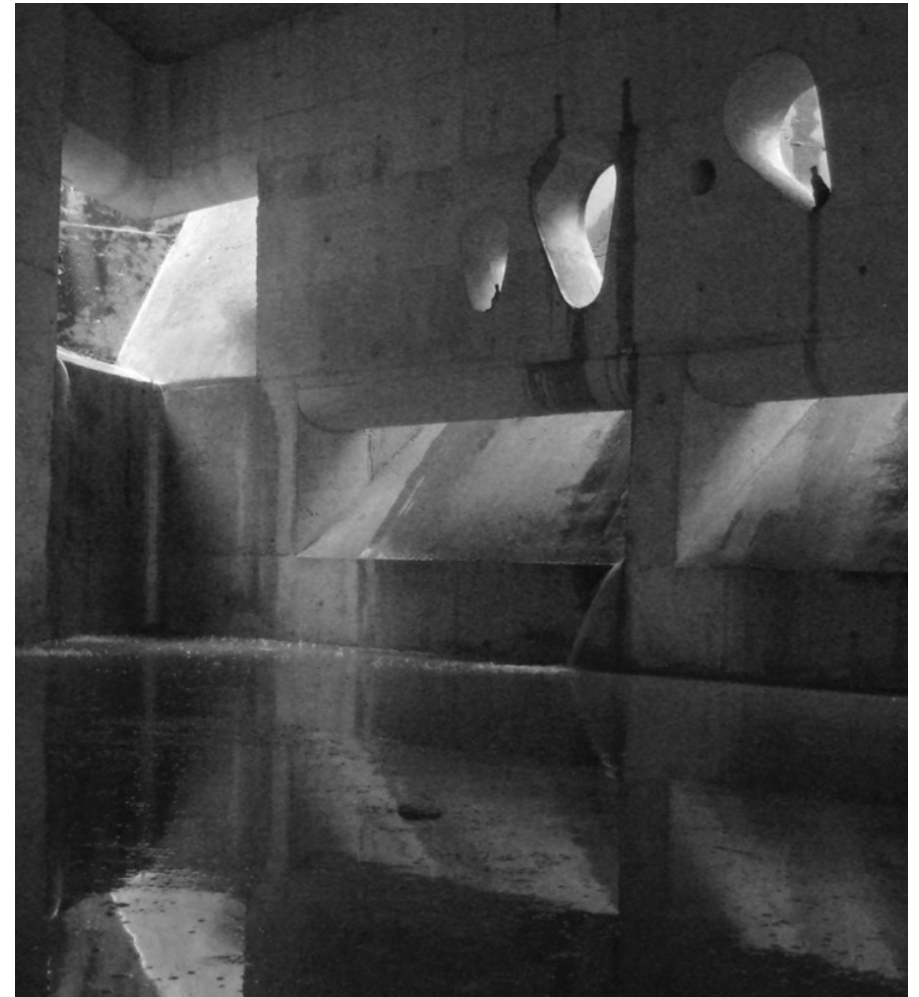
Despite the fact that the city is in a state of constant change, when the landscape changes necessarily so does the water that flows through it, these core values of that same water appear to be extraordinarily persistent (Strang, 2004). Waters essentiality, qualities and omnipresence render the cultural meanings a constant across time, space and cultures, which underlines the the importance of its material qualities and the physical, sensory and emotional experiences of it. One could argue that a more inclusive approach that values these experiential aspects similarly like its utilitarian ones, would create a richer living environment and improve our connectedness with this essential matter.

In past years there has been a returning interest among designers in a more sensory and experiential type of architecture (Borch, 2018). With a special attention for the relationship between architecture and water. Professor Juhani Pallasmaa for instance describes that the juxtaposition of water and architecture has the ability to evoke heightened and sensitised experience of duration. The fluidity of the water emphasises the permanent character of architecture and the passing of time, while the reflective surface conceals a depth and hidden world (Pallasmaa, 2016).

There are countless examples in arts and architecture that portray the emotions of time and spirituality that water can evoke. Think of John Everett Millais's dramatic Ophelia, in which Hamlet's lover, driven to madness, falls into a stream and drowns slowly taken away by the muddy waters. Or Enric Miralles's Igualada cemetery, where an array of openings in thick concrete structures let in the daylight and rain, changing the space through the course of the day and seasons. These experiences of emotion and duration are both comforting and healing, as it helps us to put ourselves in the continuum of time and space (Pallasmaa, 2016).

Architecture has the ability to arrange and direct the exchange of material properties and the immaterial human realm of projection and imagination, and water is one of the strongest conductors.

Looking at a multitude of theories we can begin to distill the different spheres that water in the city moves through. There are spheres to water one simply cannot be poetic about and then we have the ones we should be poetic about and value accordingly. The plethora of theories from different disciplines itself underlines that the current placement of water in the city has grown from a narrow minded approach and should not be left to be designed from the perspective of a single discipline, because water has the potential to offer so much more.

Igualada Cemetery, Enric Miralles, 1995

Ophelia, John Everett Millais, 1851

Liverpool community laundrette, 1950
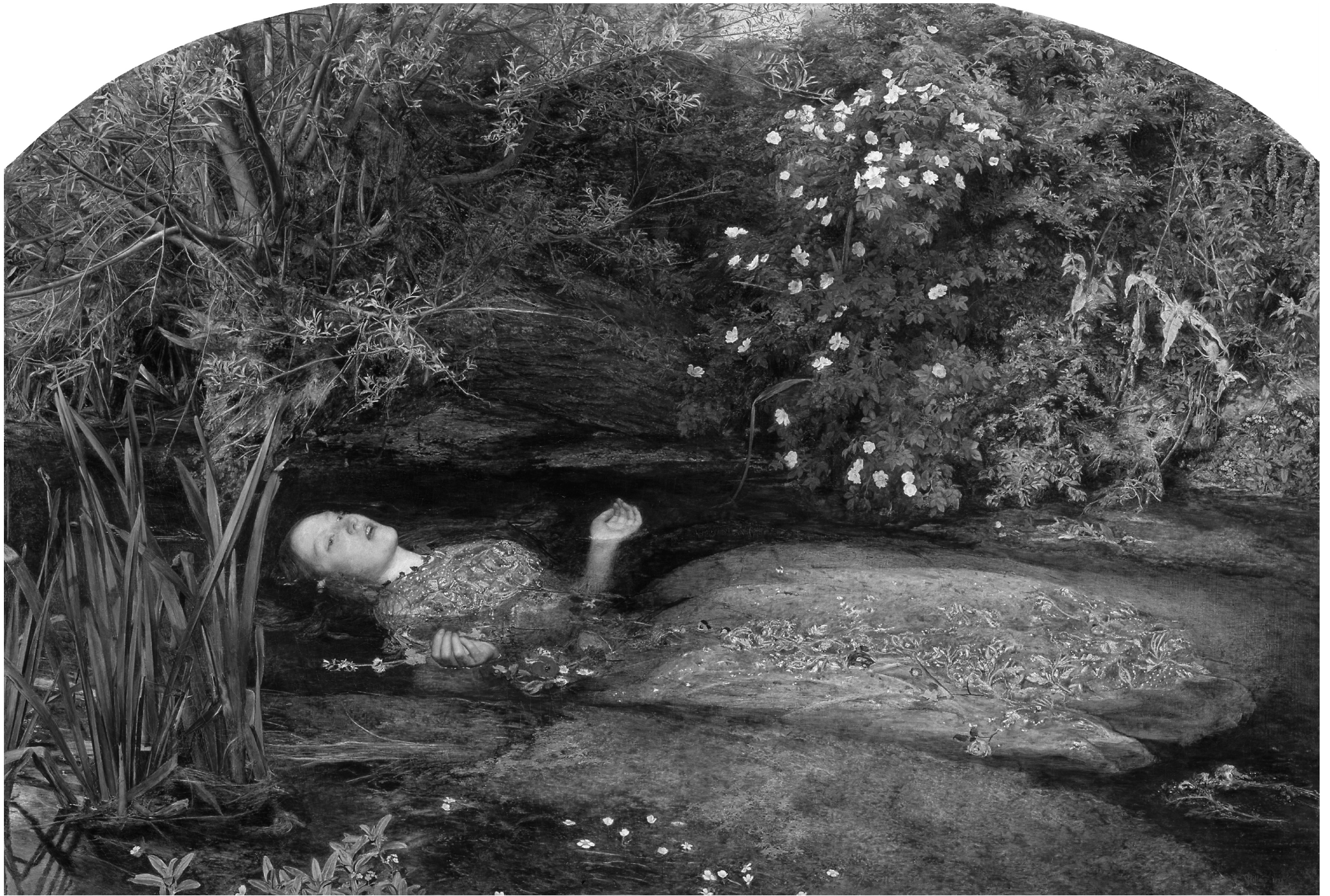
The Production of Social Space

One interesting architectural typology that stems from the bacteriological model and touches upon several of the earlier mentioned spheres; the utilitarian, the clinical, the political and the experiential, is the public bathhouse. By taking the bathhouse as an example and analogy for the relationship between city water and citizens I try to create an understanding and paint a picture of how those spheres translate into an architectural program and space.

The bacteriological model solidified the coalescence of nature and culture and simultaneously initiated a co-evolution between technology and the human body (Gandy, 2004). This evolution was not solely about the improvement of water management, it also translated into a transformation of cultural norms about the moral and behavioural patterns of society.

Bodily cleanliness for instance was not solely viewed as hygienic activity, but also served as a means of moral education. Bathing was a privilege and represented an active choice towards a respectable and proprietary lifestyle (Pasin, 2019). Until the mid nineteenth century bathing had been reserved for the intimate daily rituals of the elites. Born out of worry and contempt of notable citizens for the pressing conditions in "industrious" class neighbourhoods (Survey of London, 2016), a network of bath and washhouses spread out over the city (Campbell, 1918). The bathhouse became a paragon for status, self-respect and decency and was seen as one of the most effect tools in an attempt to combat the poverty, criminal activity and chaos that accompanied the industrial evolution of the city (Pasin, 2019).

However the bathhouses were more than a means to achieve an improved social standard, they sprouted as a locus for social activity. Facilities such as washhouses, bathhouses, Turkish baths and swimming ponds combined "practices of health and hygiene" with leisure and pleasure (Pasin, 2019, p.23). They became places of ritual and shared activity, one would go for their weekly bath or swim and would meet others on a regular basis. Often situated in a central location of the

neighbourhood they attracted the use of local communities. As the bathhouses gained popularity, especially in the middle of the nineteenth century, they attracted a wide variety of user from different social groups and classes (Survey of London, 2016; Pasin, 2019). The bathhouses represent a process in which the use of water in the city was translated into a deeply social space, both in the perception of state and individual as well as in physical space.

The Whitechapel Baths

One of the earlier examples of public bathhouses in London are the Whitechapel Baths of Whitechapel London. In July 1847 the bathhouse first opened its doors to the public, as the first initiative of many ambitious plans by the "Committee for Baths for the Labouring Classes". After a period of struggle mainly due to funding, first through private subscriptions and later public subscriptions and loans, the building was eventually completed in 1851. (Survey of London, 2016)

The two story high brick building housed bathing and washing facilities. The floorpan was roughly split into two and both departments were accessible through their own entrance. The washing department was only accessible to women, acces to the bathing department was provided by separate entrances for men and women. The layout of the building was highly functional. The double-hight space was either filled in with bathing cubicles, containing a modest cast-iron slipper bath, or individual washing stations in neat rows facing back to back. In addition to the slipper baths, there was also a small swimming pool on the north side of the building, the so-called "plunge bath", which was lined with dressing boxes. Use of the swimming pool was only intended for the first class male visitors.

Despite the architecture of the facility being criticised as functionalist, bare and guilty of a general lack of beauty, it grew into a national and international exemplary project. The attention the building attracted contributed to the eventual passage of the Baths and Washhouses Act of 1846, which enabled boroughs to support the construction and operation of bathhouses. (Survey of
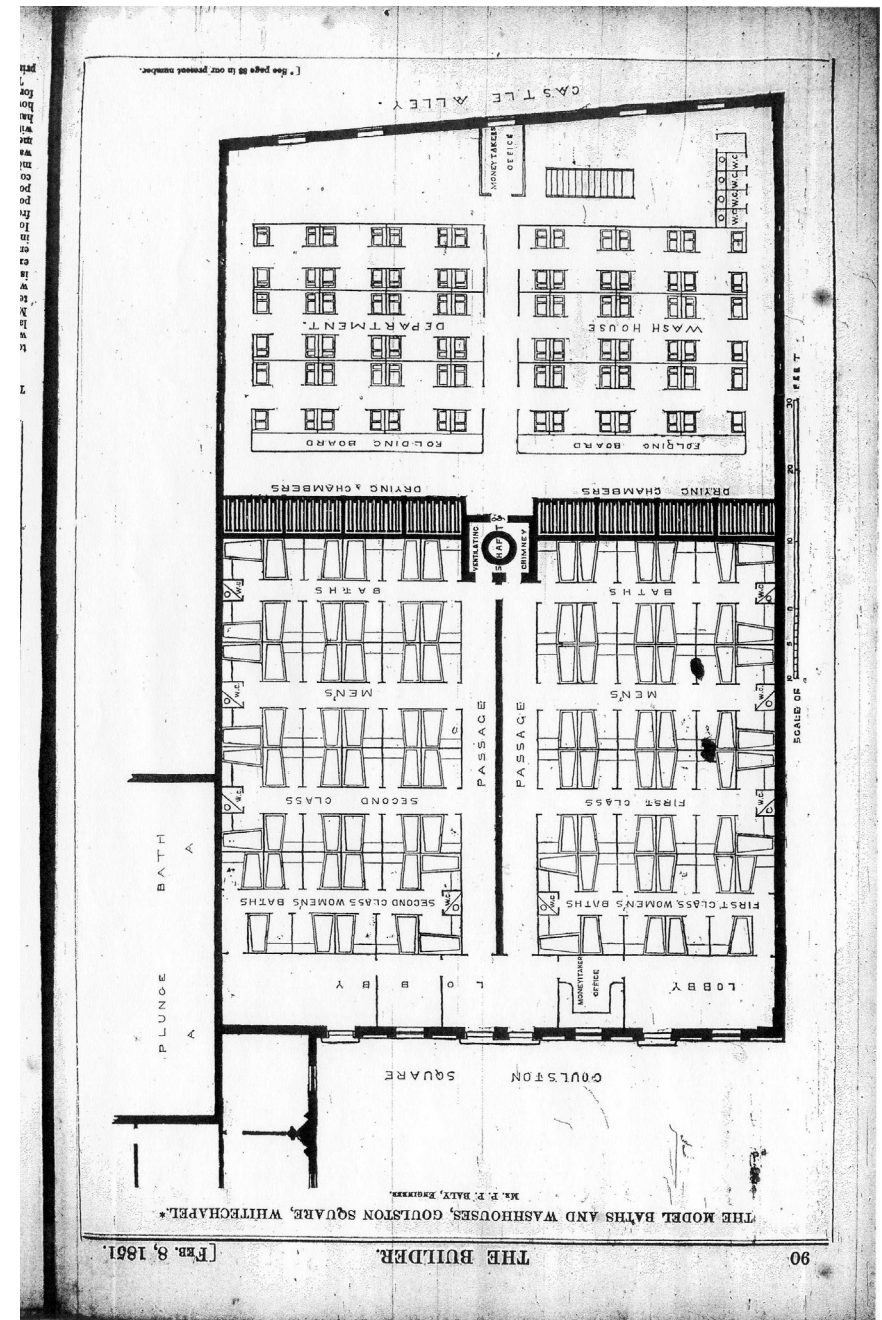
Whitechapel Baths, 1851

London, 2016)

In line with "the great recreational explosion" the Bath and Washhouses Act was extend with legislation that stimulated the build of swimming facilities (Survey of London, 2016). The Whitechapel Baths were extended with two new swimming pools and a viewing gallery. The addition of the swimming pools marked a change in the nature of the use of the bathhouse en exemplified its central social function in the neighbourhood. The public bathhouse moved from a programme with a purely clinical intent to supporting a recreational use for the working classes. It offered the chance for many local schoolchildren to learn how to swim and opened permanently to a female audience (Survey of London, 2016).

Later extensions included the addition of a floor to the mens first class swimming pool. The bathhouse acquired an entertainment license for music and dances and a cinematography box which equipped the bathhouse for galas and other events. The bathhouse provided a wide variety of local groups with a place for 'business meetings, plays, concerts, film nights, bazaars, lady bridges, boxing galas, political rallies, sabbath meetings and swimming galas'.

The history of the Whitechapel baths illustrates how a particular architectural typology can simultaneously move through several spheres of city water. Although not always intentionally the bathhouse sprouted as a locus for social activity, providing local communities with a public facility adding to the liveliness and quality of their living environment.

However there are question marks to be placed by the course of events, the public bathhouse was initially both a public facility and means of exerting influence over in particular the industrious class population. The "proper" state of body and mind were no longer left to the citizens themselves. The same goes for the accessibility of the facility to different groups, in particular the gender division has had a disabling effect.

Neither was their much attention for the experiential dimension to the intimate relationship between body and water in the functionalist programme. Although this can arguably main-

Swimming Pool at Moseley Road Baths

Gathering at Moseley Road Baths

ly be attributed to a tight budget. Other typologies such as the Victorian Turkish bath showcase a more elaborate and ornate architecture with rich materials and extensive amenities such as: a cafe, hairdresser, reading room, biljart room, lecture hall and gymnastics hall (Pasin, 2019). Open air places such as the Hampstead Heath Swimming ponds or Tower Beach (p.30/31) offered a richer experiential encounter with the water as their more "natural" surroundings were able to involve different stimuli such as the feeling of the wind on ones skin or current of the river.

The closing of facilities like the Whitechapel baths was often accompanied by a lot of uproar (p.29), people felt that conveniences were being taken from them, dissatisfied that the state was no longer willing to maintain a part of their weekly rituals (Imray, 1974).

The Swimmers, Attilio Fiumarella, 2014

Interior World at Jubilee Pool

Spaces for Water, People and Dreams

While the parks and ponds remain, facilities like the bath- and washhouses have disappeared from Londons street scene. With a focus on the social qualities of water and benefits this has to the individual experience in the city, the loss of spaces for water, people and their dreams initiates the question to what those place could be in the future. With the help of three contemporary projects, that are still in practice today I investigate the uses and supporting architecture that define and shape relationships between people and water.
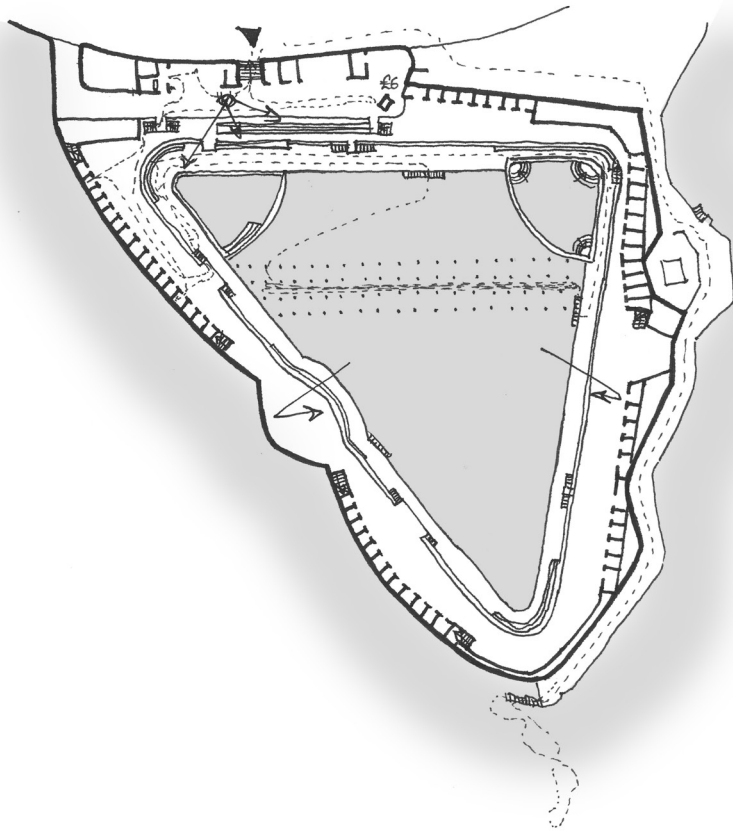
Jubilee Pool

The Jubilee Pool is set along the the southwestern shoreline of Cornwall England at the town of Penzance. The pool nestles itself in-between the boulevard and a natural rock formation and can be identified as one of the remaining 1930's sea lido's in which a sheltered swimming environment is created in sea water. Recent renovations, in 2019, enabled the pool to run at full capacity again. Its continuous central role in the community of Penzance makes it a valuable example to analyse.

During the renovations the programme received several valuable upgrades, accommodating different types of swimmers and activities. The original cold water swimming pool and children's pool (nestled in the eastern corner of the basin) were extended with a geothermal pool that is kept at 35 degrees Celsius year round and accessible via ramp and hoist. The clubhouse was renovated and complemented with a new cafe and seating area providing double the seating from the former establishment. Next to that, treatment rooms and multi-purpose community spaces provide a welcoming environment for therapy, meetings, small exhibitions and sports classes. The Jubilee pool is an extension of the village (p. 36/37), a place for meeting and interacting with the seawater that is so inherent to the Cornish culture of Penzance.

The sea pool has a triangular shape derived from the locations pre-existing edges and is surrounded by a continuous

wall that creates a sheltered environment (p.34). Despite not having a direct visual relation to the sea from the pool itself the salty water, temperature, open skies, saline air, crashing of the waves and screams of seagulls all add to a strong connection between inner and outer world. The wall is more than just a means of protection, it houses functions such as dressing boxes, seating areas and viewing points, it creates places to stop or move around.

Plan of Jubilee Pool

Clubhouse at Jubilee Pool

Jubilee Pool as Extension of Public Space

Bagno Publico

The bagno publico is situated on the floodplain of the Ticino river valley in Bellinzona Switzerland. The architectural organisation of the project demonstrates how architecture is able to relate to and can be an adaptation of the landscape. With the backdrop of the mountains the Bagno Publico presents itself almost like an extended arm connecting town to river. Both physically and metaphorically. A long elevated reinforced concrete pathway stretches from the edge of the town to the river, crossing the emptiness of the flood- plain (p.39). At the same time this longitudinal architecture functions as the backbone to the programme of the public baths. The elevated walkway relates the public space with the empty plain, town, sky and the river. The programme of the baths brings the natural element of water closer into the town, or at least a controlled version of it.

Users follow a route along the pathway from path to bath, on the decent down, the materiality changes from concrete to wood to grass to water (p.40 & 41). Different levels along the route bring a change of perspectives over the landscape creating different relationships between user and view. In this way the intermediate floors and pathway fulfil a role as stage, and become spaces of seeing and being seen. The elevated street, as from the brutalist tradition of Alison and Peter Smithson, is moved from the context of central London to the context of the valley.

Water itself at the bagno publico is about discovering, playing and swimming as exercise(p.42/43). The liveliness and movability of the catwalk continues in the pools. Playful architectural elements such as slides and diving boards bring about swimming as well as jumping, running, throwing, pushing and diving.
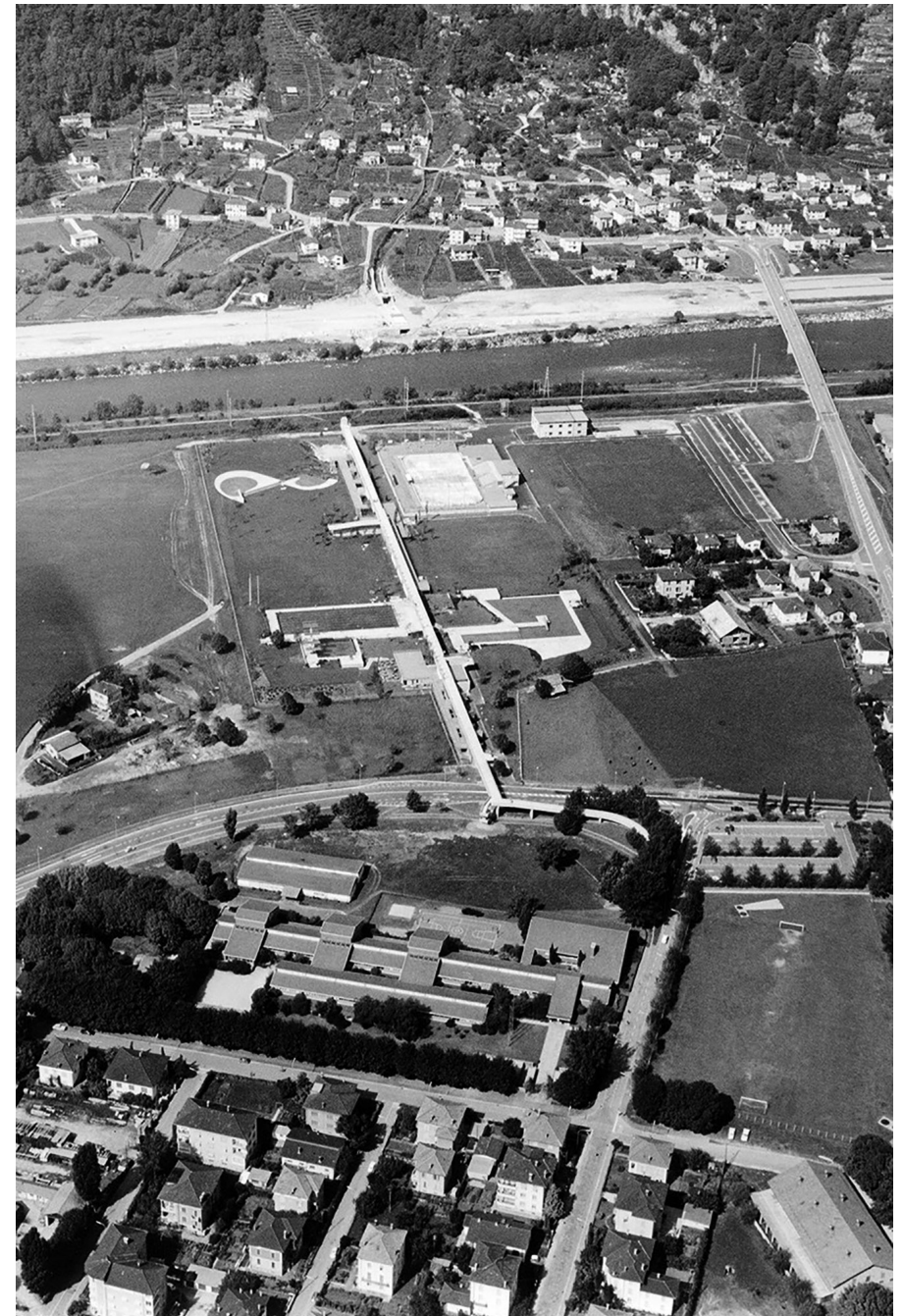
Ticino Flood Plain, 1970
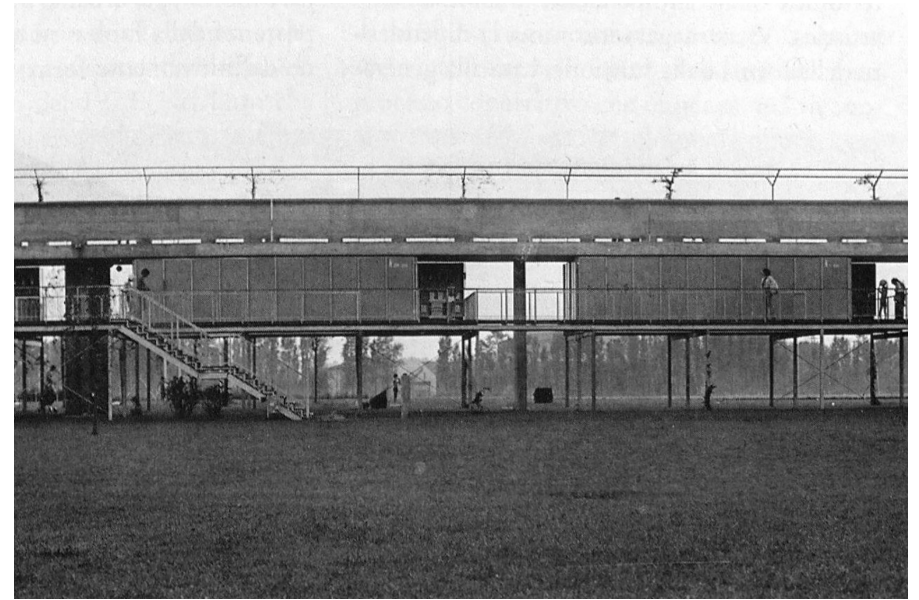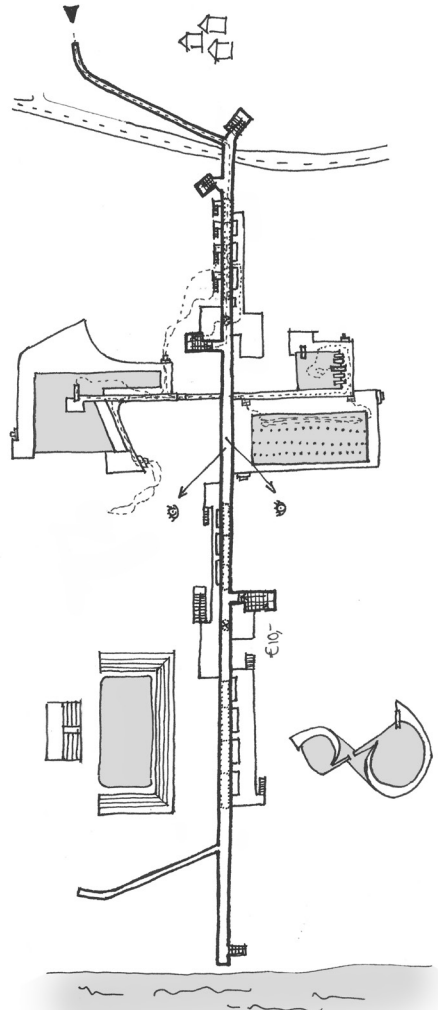
Pathway and Functions, 1970

Access Platforms and Pathway, 2009

Swimming Pool and Slide, 1970

Therme Vals

Just beyond the warm waters of a natural spring, the thermal baths of Vals find their place in the Valserrhein river Valley in Switzerland. The 1996 building by Peter Zumthor follows in a succession of spa hotels that have been at Vals since 1893 (Zumthor, 1996). The baths, now set in an independent building, are nestled in the slope of the mountain and can be accessed through an underground passage via the Hotel. The space was designed to indulge and rediscover the ancients benefits of bathing by focussing on the primary bodily experiences of stone, water and light (p.47).

The building takes on the shape of a solid monolith structure build out Valser stone mined from quarries further on in the valley. The goal is to engage a special relationship with the mountain landscape and its natural power convinced of the mistic and sensual qualities of a stony watery world in the mountain (Zumthor, 1996). For its experiential power the architecture relies on the tranquil primary rituals of bathing; cleansing oneself, relaxing the body in a water and the contact between water and skin.

The sequence of rituals or experiences is to a greater or lesser extent predetermined by the architecture. After a set route along the ticket desk, changing rooms and showers the bathers enter a continuous internal space (p.46). The cave-like surroundings emerge as the negative space of a composition of seemingly scatter but carefully placed enclosed blocks. The blocks themselves house even more intimate bathing spaces. The baths speak to our primary bodily senses by presenting the bather with different compositions of texture, temperature, sound and smell of the stone and water. The light guides the user through the landscape of enclosed blocks, wandering between comfort and stimulation (p. 45). As one moves away from the interior of the mountain and meets the facade, the openings between the blocks unfold as paintings of an untouched grotesque mountain landscape (p. 49).

By using the interior world of the mountain grotto, the architect creates an enclosed space by which he enables himself to be very precise about the encounters he establishes between

Negative Space of a Composition of Enclosed Blocks

the body and the water (p.48). The stimulation of the senses is carefully arranged by the choice to take away or allow certain stimuli and spheres to water, allowing the bather to experience the poetics of the element.
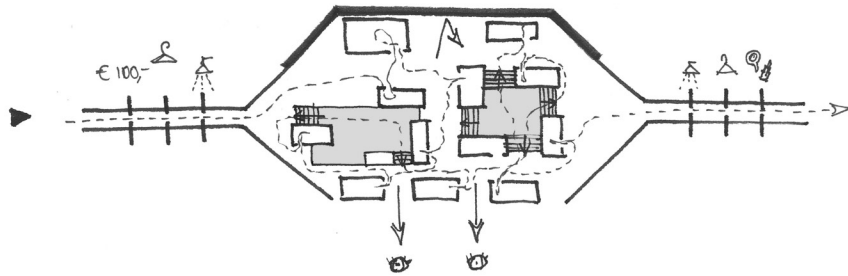
In Comparison

Accessibility for all types of swimmers and the addition of other community and health functions, can turn the bathhouse into a valuable extension of the neighborhood. Architecture also has the power to involve and engage the landscape, the physical place. In all three examples the architecture creates a series of unique encounters with water and atmosphere around it that invite you to disconnect from the everyday and stimulates you to explore, discover, play, feel and move with your body. In the Jubilee Pool that is about adapting the sea environment to make it accesible to everyone all year round. At the Bagno Publico it is in the various activities (free swimming, lane swimming, diving) and the paths and levels that lead you to them. In the cave like atmosphere of Therme Vals it's about presenting the visitor with the different appearences of water, fluid or steam, temperature, smel and sound. In al three cases the program and adressment of the senses are the key architectural instruments used to direct the relationship between people and water.
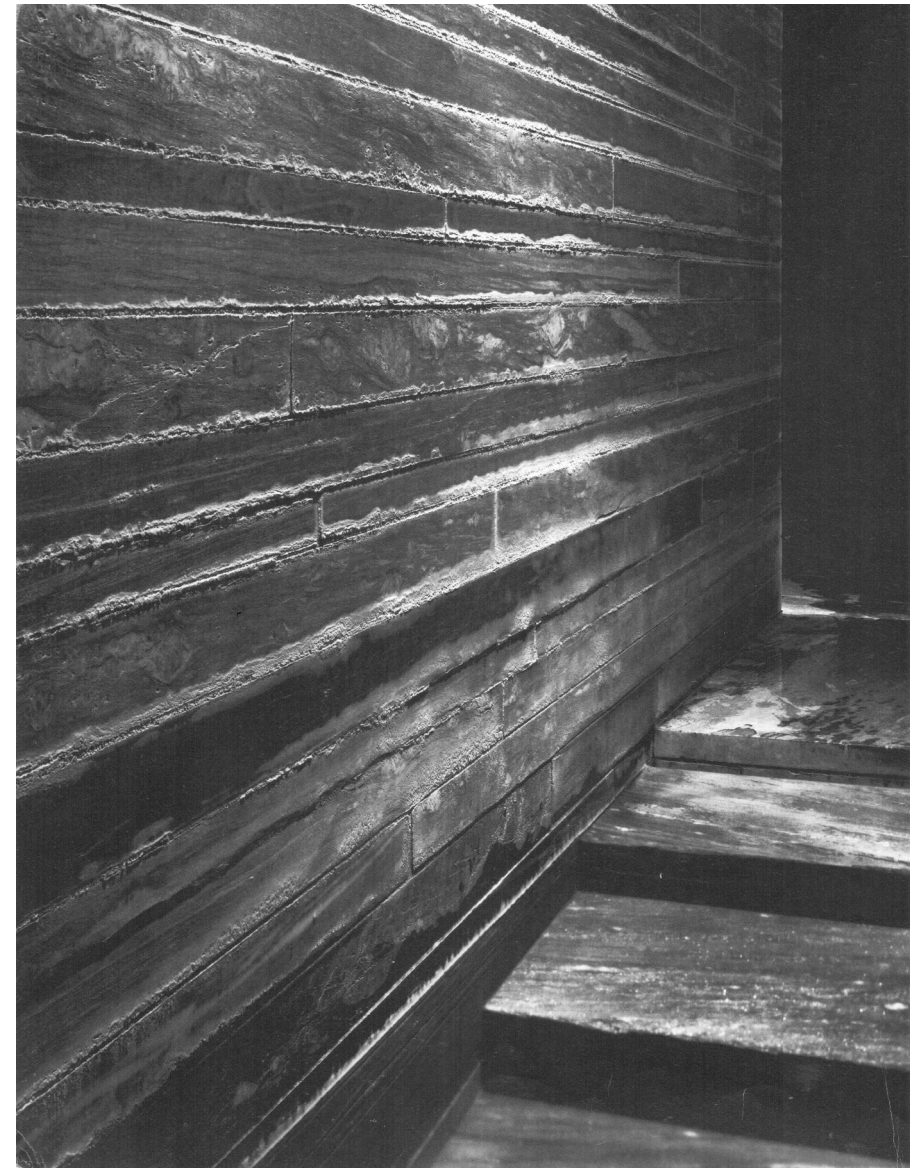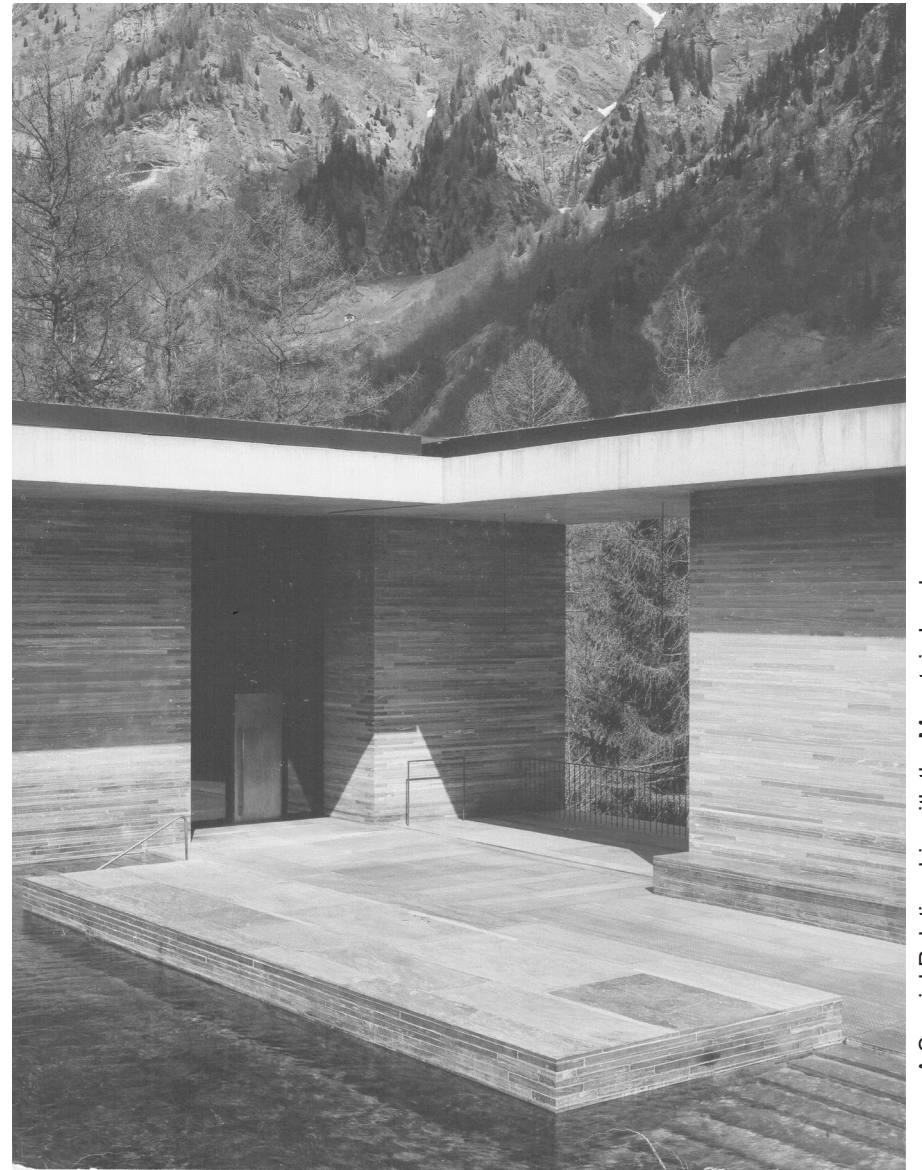
Conclusion

Like the swimmers of Amy Sharrocks taking to the streets of London in their bathing suits, this essay is an act of exploring freedom. It is an attempt to gain access to the cities water, not by jumping in, but by unraveling the underlaying structures and architectures that makes it to what it is and could be. *How can we redesign city water into practices that reconnect us to the element and its natural and social qualities?*

From chapter one *"Ideas About City Water",* we learn that water moves through a multitude of spheres, from technical to socio-cultural and individual. The river Thames cuts the city dramatically in to north and south, but most of the time its actual presence is much less obvious. The engineering of the bacterio-logical city hides how the natural streams were engineered away and water appears "magically" from the tab, "the connections be-tween water and humanity remain hidden: (Bennett, 1999, p.70).

The transformation of natural into commodity, the urbani-sation of water, is a deeply social and thus political proces. Water infrastructures are active agents in the production of urban space and culture. Our encounters with the element are nevertheless not merely physical, we also have emotional and imaginative interactions with it. Waters essentiallity and omnipresence render the spheres of interaction persistant acros space and time.

In the context of the city water is more a product of cultu-re than it is of nature. Technology, hygiene and our power over water have been the predominent factors in shaping the urbani-sation of water, but given the persistence of interactions it is time to bring the spheres closer together. Architecture has the ability to shape and organise these interactions.

A recurring architectural typology to do with the use of city water is the public bathhouse. In chapter two *"The Production of Social Space", t*he 19th century public bath and washhouses of London demonstrate how the use of city water, the deployment of the element as public commodity evolved into a parogon for status, self respect and decency and became a locus for social activity.

The bathhouse took on a central role in local communities. Not only did it provide neighborhoods with public facilities and ame-nities, it provided them with livelyness and a better standard of living. The 19th century functionalism however, left little room for the intimate experience and exchange between body and water.

In the current landscape of the metropole the thypology of the bathhouse has been replaced by swimming pools for lessons and sports and pricy spa experiences. In chapter three *"Spaces for Water, People and Dreams"*, modern examples from outside of the metropole region show how we could establish a richer use and relatioship in the city.

Accessibility for all types of swimmers and the addition of other community and health functions, can turn the bathhouse into a valuable extension of the neighborhood and its residents.

Next to architectures ability to direct the exchange bet-ween material and immaterial experiences, it also has the power to involve and engage the landscape, the physical place. It has the power to create a series of unique encounters with water and atmosphere around it that invite you to disconnect from the everyday and stimulates you to explore, discover, play, feel and move with your body. It does so by presenting you with stimuli from the surrounding landscape or in the intimacy of it's own ma-teriality and architectural composition that plays with the senses.

There are spheres to water, like consumption we cannot be poe-tic about, however there are ones like our emotional and imagi-native interactions that would flourisch if we embraced the expe-riential, romantic and poetic. The idea of a sublime nature or a nature we have control over is a lie. A more hybrid mentality that encorporates the differnt spheres would lead to a more sustaina-ble view of city water. One thing has become clear, water in the city is a common good, it's part of society and the individual and should therefore be accessible and understandable. Architecture is not the solution to the disconnect, but has the responsibility to touch upon the different spheres. With that design is maybe not about right or wrong but in the first instance about transparency and accesibility.

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Abstract

Key words: architecture, water, bathhouse, city, public, experiential, relationship

Water and the relationship we have with it are dislocated in the contemporary context of the city. Present-day structures of society represent water as a human made commodity, whilst it will always be an elusive element of nature, the human body and the environment. *How can we redesign city water into practices that reconnect us to the element and its natural and social qualities?*

A litterature study sets out the extent of meanings and underlaying structures of water in the city. The typology of the 19th century bathhouse is used to elaborate on the way architecture has shaped use and culture. Three contemporary case studies expand on architecture that supports a richer relationship with water.

Water moves through a multitude of spheres, we have physical, emotional and imaginative interactions with it. The idea of a sublime nature or a nature we have control over is a lie, in the context of the city water is more a product of culture than it is of nature. A more hybrid mentality that encorporates the differnt spheres would lead to a more sustainable view of city water. Water in the city is a common good, it's part of society and the individual and should therefore be accessible and understandable. Architecture is not the solution to the disconnect, but has the responsibility to touch upon the different spheres and is in the first instance about transparency and accesibility.