

# ENQUIRY WEEK: WATER AS RITUAL

## An ANCB-AXOR Workshop

22 - 28 August 2014

**ANCB** THE AEDES  
METROPOLITAN  
LABORATORY

**AXOR**<sup>®</sup>  
hansgrohe

RESEARCH  
REPORT

This research report summarises and reflects on the **ANCB-AXOR workshop 'Water as ritual'**, which took place at Aedes Network Campus Berlin (ANCB) from **22-28 August 2014**.

The ANCB-AXOR research workshop is a format developed as part of the collaboration between ANCB The Metropolitan Laboratory and our research partner AXOR. Following the theme "Water as ritual", we gathered, edited and produced collective knowledge on processes of water, the bodily experience and everyday use of water in private and public surroundings in international contexts.

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# 01 PEOPLE

## CONCEPT

**Miriam Mlecek** ANCB, Berlin **Dunya Bouchi** ANCB, Berlin **Roman Passarge** AXOR, Schiltach

## WORKSHOP CURATORS

**Miriam Mlecek** ANCB, Berlin **Roman Passarge** AXOR, Schiltach

## COACHES AND CRITICS

Category 1: **Wellness, Spa, Bathing in Private and Public Spaces**

Working Coach: **Jörn Frenzel** eyLAND vatnavinir, Reyjavík/ Berlin

Co-Coach: **Regina Viljasaar** Linnalabor (urban lab), Tallinn

Input Coach: **Ahmet Igdirligil** Sans Mimarlik, Bodrum

Category 2: **Water as Design Element. Corpus:Ritus**

Working Coach: **Gunnar Hartmann** New Dialogues, Berlin

Co-Coach: **Birgit Hansen** hansen innenarchitektur, Köln

Input Coach: **Dr. med. Harun Badakhshi** Charité Berlin

## WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

**Farzad Akhavan** Architect, Iran/Germany

**Julia Ledderose** Neuroscience researcher, Germany

**Marija Kesic** Architect, Serbia/Germany

**Annette Fromm** Architect, Germany

**Andres Roberto Ochoa Riegner** Urban Planner, Colombia

**Katharina Bellinger** Product designer, Germany

**Catalina Pollini** Architect, Costa Rica

**Jose Paredes** Architect, Mexico

**Kate Shelegon** Architect, Ukraine

**Omar Akl** Architect, Egypt

**Ismail Elabd** Architect, Egypt

**Oluwaseun Ojo** Architect, Nigeria

## **KICK - OFF SYMPOSIUM SPEAKERS**

**Roman Passarge** AXOR, Schiltach, worked as a managing and commercial director at cultural institutions in Eisenach and Würzburg after studying economics. From 2001 to 2006 he was the commercial and organizational manager of the Vitra Design Museum, and from 2007 to 2011 he was managing director of the Hamburg Kunsthalle. Since January 2012 he is head of the Hansgrohe Aquademie in Schiltach.

**Dr. med. Harun Badakhshi** Charité Berlin, works as a senior attending oncologist (Oberarzt) at the Charité School of Medicine and University Hospital Berlin. In addition to clinical cancer research and to intensive graduate and postgraduate teaching, his activities are focused on visualization strategies and technologies in medicine, science and meta media, herein examining the epistemic, aesthetic and cultural relevance and impact of digitally generated (body) images in a medical context.

**Ahmet Igdirligil** Sans Mimarlik, Bodrum,

was born in Bursa in 1955. He graduated in 1983 with an M.Arch degree from Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul. In 1984 he moved to Vienna, where he undertook a Ph.D. with research focused on “The Renewal of Thermal Baths in Bursa on the basis of Austrian Spas”. In 1989 he settled in Bodrum, Turkey, where he founded Bans Architectural Office. He has participated in various national and international conferences, and been published in several media such as The Architectural Review, Cornucopia and Confort.

**Jörn Frenzel** eyLAND vatnavinir, Reyjavík/ Berlin,

is an architect with over 10 years of professional experience, particularly in spa and hospitality projects. He has worked in Berlin, London, Reykjavik and Hong Kong. In 2008 he co-founded vatnavinir, an association on sustainable health and wellness tourism. He has been actively involved in multi-disciplinary projects involving architects, philosophers, brand strategists, artists and business experts. His research interests include socio-economic innovation, design as a mediation and networking process, spa and wellness architecture, and sustainability.

## **ADDITIONAL INPUT SPEAKERS**

**Tim Edler** realities united, Berlin

**Jason Scroggin and Akari Takabayashi** Kentucky University, USA

**Birgit Hansen** hansen innenarchitektur, Köln



## 02 INTRODUCTION

### THE COLLABORATION

ANCB seeks to generate exchange on global urban issues and to create a synergy between a wide range of partners involved - architects, industries, clients, policy makers, artists, designers and the interested public - on a regional, national and transnational level. Collaborating partners benefit from the established position of ANCB as a laboratory for interdisciplinary activities and the opportunity it offers to come together with key figures from different fields to debate the most pertinent urban questions of international concern and search for new potential to improve global urban living conditions.



**Collaborative AXOR-ANCB Research Workshop, Partner Roman Passarge of AXOR**

Each ANCB Collaborative Research Project is conceived with an industry partner and undertaken over a one- to three-year period with tailor-made inquiry strategies that include a combination of surveys, reviews, debates, design studios, and written papers. The outcomes of each step are collated, summarised, reflected upon and written up in a research file, which is continually added to as the project progresses. The advancement in knowledge and innovation produced by the research project can be included in company developments and is thus a valuable benefit for the industry partner as well as the wider public who gains access to this new knowledge.

The cooperation between AXOR Hansgrohe and ANCB concentrates on studies, proposals and actual projects that are innovative in their way regarding the management and experience of water. The research collaboration aims at small, visionary projects that raise awareness of the sustainable use of water. The workshop „Water as Ritual“ brought different experts and disciplines concerned with urban, design and social aspects of water together, to discover rituals as social experience and the role of water therein. Students, graduates and young professionals from South America, Africa and Europe were selected through an open call. The workshop participants entered into an interdisciplinary but also an intercultural dialogue in which the theme of water was included as an important factor in the design process.



**Introduction of „Water as Ritual“ by ANCB director Hans-Jürgen Commerell and ANCB Research Manager Miriam Mlecek**

## **THE CHALLENGE: WATER AS RITUAL**

Water - although it is such a fundamental element for our societies, economies and environment as well as our own bodies - is often the great invisible factor in our cities, infrastructures and behavioural patterns. In a world where water plays the key role in most of the great global transitions from Climate Change via Urbanisation to Health and Habitat its role is clearly under-represented and calls for a reassessment of its challenges and potentials. Starting from the individual human level, the theme “Water as Ritual” strives to seek new narratives for the perception and strategic role of water on all levels – public and private; going from the simplest, purest individual needs for relaxation, spiritual experience or bodily utilization and nourishment of water to the needs for wellness of a whole city, region, society.

The workshop theme focuses on the relevance and value of water in connection with cultural, social, health- and wellness-related, technological everyday rituals. Based on the function of water, the element’s role for structuring everyday life, planning and awareness at the interface of water, man and nature was analysed. The perception of water influenced by cultural backgrounds and disciplines was found to be reflected in various formats of rituals; the power over and the use of water includes economic and cultural aspects on a global level, raising the questions: What are today’s rituals for water in everyday life? What is the relationship between space - ritual - water? Are new typologies needed - such as new bath houses or shared bathrooms? Does water in rituals change our perception of space on all scales-from the private to the public? And can water act through rituals as a socio-cultural platform and innovation for urban lifestyle?

In order to provide a starting point in the discussion of vast and multifaceted issue, the theme was divided into two initial categories, which – however – did not intend to restrict discussion:

## Challenge category 1 : Wellness/Spa/Bathing in Private and Public Spaces

### Task

What are currently practiced, past and hidden or forgotten wellness rituals?

In what social, environmental, cultural and economic contexts are they placed?

In what way can these human rituals re-enchant our feeling of communal wellness, of connected and thriving societies?

What kind of bodies of water exist in public space now?

Which – conscious or unconscious; individual or collective – rituals do they evoke?

What is the relation of such rituals to the meaning and formation of 'publicness' and public space?

This part of the workshop looked into new ways to bridge the notions of “bodily wellness” – the sensations and qualities of a human being in water – and “communal wellness” – the social, environmental, cultural and even economic implications water and wellness may have on a healthy community enlightened by water. Starting from the individual human level we tried to find new narratives of what water can mean for systemic change; going from the simplest, purest individual needs for relaxation, spiritual experience, connection with natural elements and nourishment of water to the needs for wellness of a whole city, region or entire society. The workgroup also focussed on the question of how 'publicness' of public places may be further stimulated through rituals of water. The work began with opening the mind to (1) the various forms in which we meet water in public spaces – lakes and rivers, but also fountains and puddles of rainwater – , and (2) the varied actions and reactions connected to public water.



Input speakers category 1 Jörn Frenzel and Ahmet Igdirligil

Optional initial challenges included the following: “How can we combine and re-interpret individual water rituals and basic human needs as regards bodily wellness in order to improve communal wellness? The latter may include social factors such as public health, social interaction, sharing of resources, education, rituals of worship etc.” And “How could rituals in conjunction with public bodies of water be used to activate public spaces more as a place of connection, sharing, and co-creation? Who and how could be influenced, so that the transformative power of public water became part of future planning, real estate development or local business strategies that shape our future cities?”





Installation in ANCB garden by Jason Scroggin and Akari Takabayashi, Input speaker category 2, Dr. med. Harun Badakhshi

## Challenge category 2: Water as design element. Corpus:Ritus

### Task

The category 2 challenge aimed to bring participants back on a simple way to the roots: a real material body, mirroring itself without or against any large-scale connotation of “Geist” (the German lapsus or esprit), was to be the object. Talking body would mean fixing real material processes that enable us to live (to breath, to sleep, to eat, to think and to feel). The corpus acts in relation to water always in a ritus. We aimed to discuss on different levels the role water is playing within our corporeal existence (physiology, neurology etc), within our daily routines (hygiene, avoidance etc) in a non-comprehensive way in order to induce the participants thoughts afterwards.

Beyond metaphors and metonyms, water and its rituals relate unconditionally to the human body.

Just taking the term body literally in this case, it would mean to take all implications of water in a tight focus of attention. To us, as human bodies, water is *conditio sine qua non* and it is, indeed, the very ground of life and living. At the surface, the corporeal topography in all its components and colours is covering up a “container of water” that is the body, interacting and intertwining on a daily base with water in profane rituals of normality. At the deep, the corporeal functioning in all its complexity and its simplicity is grounding on a “water machine” that is the body, looping in endless cascades of catalytic reactions and mediated replications of living.

## 03 RESEARCH STRATEGIES

The inquiry week was laid out as an open format, allowing to approach the topic from different perspectives; due to the very scale and complexity of the object of research it was paramount to provide a certain overview and holistic understanding of the challenge's very scope as opposed to push for early solutions or results. Providing time, room for thought - and even for failure - as well as bringing together a diversity of inputs and disciplines was of key importance to this approach of the workshop topic.



Individual coaching and group coaching

A succession of opening and closing research and design methodologies ensured that the field of research was not over-simplified and that it would not produce pre-mature answers. Orientation of design process, feedback on intermediate results and further input by guest critics provided a sound, reliable structure for work and invested the participants with the necessary confidence to tackle novel challenges within a flexible, dynamic workshop environment. As these methodologies were shared by the organisers, lecturers, coaches and participants alike in a non-hierarchic way free of excessive curriculum the open workshop format enabled both team intelligence and deeply personal approaches alike to produce a broad range of insights and innovative ideas.

An initial input symposium introduced the participants and their respective „rituals“ in context with water. This was framed within a pecha kucha style format followed by three input lectures to provide an impulse from various angles as variations on the theme. As the next part of the workshop the participants undertook a series of tours, which gave them the opportunity to visit innovative, realised projects and discuss with leading experts from different disciplines. All investigations, ideas and strategies considered possibilities across a range of scales - from the city to public space, from urban space and rivers to the individual bathroom or sauna. The medium of film was used to analyse the characteristics of water and then to visualise new concept ideas on the themes by telling a story.

## 04 PROCESS

The workshop was developed by Miriam Mlecek, Dunya Bouchi and Roman Passarge and directed by Miriam Mlecek and Roman Passarge. Further input was provided by a team of international guest critics, speakers and guest coaches.



Workshop participants at the public kick-off symposium

### Day One

The workshop week began with a public input symposium including a welcome address from ANCB Director Hans-Jürgen Commerell and an introduction to the theme by ANCB research manager Miriam Mlecek, explaining the task to the participants. Roman Passarge continued by connecting the theme to the AXOR agenda and his personal showering ritual at home. Ahmet Igdirligil, architect from Turkey, gave an overview over the history of hammam culture and architecture. Dr. med. Harun Badakhshi of the Charité Berlin framed the topic of water as ritual within the context of the body and architect/ strategic designer Jörn Frenzel of eyLAND vatnavinir suggested in his presentation that rituals containing water create a public social space.

### Day Two

An excursion to the office of urban pioneers “realities united”, where founder Tim Edler gave a presentation of the „Flussbad“ project to students, continued along the river Spree to look at urban structures relating to water and everyday rituals such as the Freischwimmer restaurant, the LURITEC plant and the Badeschiff swimming pool.

### Day Three

On the following day, the participants divided into self-organised teams and set to work after the two categories were presented through the respective of the coaching teams.

## Days Four to Six

The coaches discussed individually with the groups their thematic focal point and helped them to formulate a corresponding vision and position. The coaches were available to the students between the core hours of 10 am - 12 pm and 5pm-7pm each day. Individual and group discussions centred on progress so far and the action plan for the coming days.

From early in the day to often late in the evening, the participants worked independently on preparing their material. The evening of Monday the 25th of August saw a further presentation by Jason Scroggin and Akari Takabayashi from the University of Kentucky about a spa bath student project and their installation at the ANCB garden called “cloud garden”. Interior architect and bathroom expert Birgit Hansen from Cologne added a lecture about materiality and colours in context of bathrooms and water features. The range from emotional knowledge in relation to water to practicality of materials was covered.

On Tuesday the 26th of August the interim presentation took place, where participants presented storyboards or concept sketches of their ideas for the coaches to respond and clarify a focus for each team respectively. Using feedback from the interim presentation, the projects were refined over the remaining two days. Two teams concentrated on the social aspects, two more on the physical experience, one adopted a poetic approach and a further one a theoretic design research.

## Day Seven

The final presentation of the videos took place on the eve of Thursday the 28th of August in front of coaches and guests, followed by rewarding the participants with certificates and a final social gathering.



Field trip to the Spree “Badeschiff“ and “realities united“ studio

## Process and Challenge Category 1

Focussing on interdisciplinary, process-driven design practice this group tried to establish a democratic, non-hierarchical working mode.

### UNDERSTANDING and SYNTHESIS

On the first day an initial session combined a recap of everybody's understanding of the workshop theme as well as the learnings and insights from inputs and field trip. After unpacking individual observations and stories of the participants they were encouraged to crystallize thematic clusters in relation to water, which resonated the most with the group and enabled them to form a common understanding of the workshop theme within the team. These thematic clusters included issues such as: awareness, visibility, value, transformative power and public/private qualities of water.



Examination of best practice examples and follow-up debates

### EXAMINATION OF SPACE

This initial session was followed by identification of rituals and spatial situations matching those clusters. The notion of the “WELL” as a public ritual and meeting point was introduced by the team as a symbolic synthesis of the thematic clusters. This symbol of the well was then discussed on different potential scales from the object and service level via public space to the meaning for the whole of society. The team found out that it was still lacking real needs of real users in order to ideate design proposals for WELLness. A two-by-two diagram linking the scope of small to large scales on one axis and uses/ functions on the other was placed within the thematic space of the initially found clusters. This enabled the group to respond to individual as well as communal and even macro-economical needs and come up with a whole system of ideas addressing those needs. Further discussion of the problems related to awareness/ visibility of water, the very personal transcending power of water-based rituals gave rise to a second main idea; „Wasserzeichen“: Water Painting as a private drawing ritual with water was born.



It is important to stress that it was key to the coaches that no prescribed ideas or themes were fed into the team to be verified as the process went on. The outcome of the workshop rather relied on the creative process itself and on building consensus within the student team. This open process allowed for the team to amplify and mirror each other and - most importantly - diminished the fear of failure and allowed for a deep inquiry into the very broad nature of the topic.

## FEEDBACK

Feedback provided on the first ideas and the prototypical script of the film on the third day brought further iteration of both ideas, which made it into the final films. Feedback was here employed as an opening tool again, not as much in the form of evaluation or criticism than in the form of encouragement. Proposals were tested against new lines of thoughts, thus enabling mutations and evolutions of the ideas.

## Process and Challenge Category 2

To enter the subject of water ritual via the body demands some simplification. As a collective group, rather than focusing on the experiences of a water ritual by the bodily senses, i.e., hearing, touch, smell, taste, and sight, we imagined a simple diagram with a single line (representing the skin) distinguishing between the corporal space of the body and the space outside the body. While the first group decided to outline the spectrum of the body's engagement with water rituals (i.e. the affects of water rituals on the corporal space of the body), the second group decided to focus on the infrastructure of a rather everyday water ritual (i.e. the affects of water rituals on the space outside the body). As a reminder that water not always brings with it cleansing or well-being, an input lecture on water as disease (the waterborne Cholera) was provided on Monday the 25th of August in the evening.



Guest coach Gunnar Hartmann set students on their way

## 05 PROJECTS

### Project 1/ Category 1: Wellness, Spa and Bathing

#### WELLness

Katharina Bellinger, Marija Kesic, Kate Shelegon

The “Well” stands here for two services of the old wells in villages: satisfying the basic need for water as well as providing en-passant for a essential, communal meeting point with ritual qualities: the conscious re-enacting of the “meeting by the well” reminds us of lost awareness and value of water, thus transcending our mere need for water to sustain our bodily and social functions; the well becomes a vehicle for play, sharpening our senses, looking inward and communication. The proposal beautifully traces the history of a forgotten and lost typology, that was once pivotal to everyday life, and sketches out possible first routes to its renaissance.

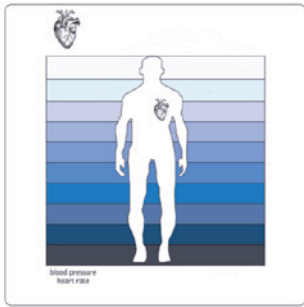


### Project 2/ Category 1: Wellness, Spa and Bathing

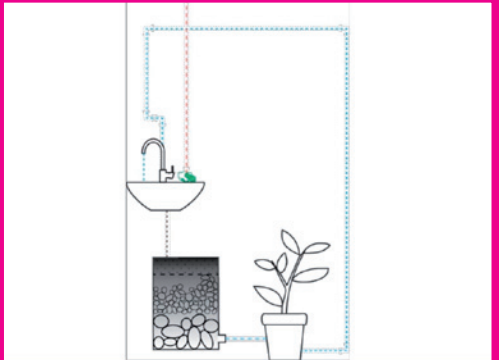
#### „Wasserzeichen“: Water Painting

Annette Fromm

This proposal rediscovers serendipity and aimless playfulness as an appropriate poetic approach to water and its rituals: picking up the Chinese tradition of calligraphy with large brushes in public places, the author proposes the bathroom wall as a canvas for painting, making notes, doodling ... as a personal morning ritual or self-forgotten dance. This contribution manages to combine an inquiry about a time in the bathroom well spent with questions about innovative surfaces and materials that might practically enable such activities.



Omar Akl, Ismail Elabd, Jose Paredes



Oluwaseun Ojo, Catalina Pollini

### Project 3/ Category 2: Water as Design Element

#### Body and Water

Omar Akl, Ismail Elabd, Jose Paredes

The third group was based in category 2 and explored how water through rituals acts as a medium first and foremost by physically affecting the body. In other words, the group focused on how the space outside the body, which has been conditioned by water, is capable of affecting the corporal space of the body. That is, the aim of a water ritual is to move the body ever so slightly out of its normal state temporarily. The movie emphasized atmosphere and suggestive space through a collage of film snippets and self-made animations.

### Project 4/ Category 2: Water as Design Element

#### Hand washing Ritual

Catalina Pollini, Oluwaseun Ojo

Catalina Pollini, Oluwaseun Ojo focused on a ritual of well-being: They explored how the everyday water ritual of hand washing has transformed over time and took on different meanings in various contexts. Even though the body was in this case a study reduced to the hands only, the two participants looked carefully at the interaction of ritual (hand washing), infrastructure, and medium (various forms of water or water substitutes). The group further suggested a potential alternative wastewater cycle for the hand washing ritual.

## **Project 5/ Category 2: Water as Design Element**

### **Ritual as Water**

Farzad Akhavan

This project is a highly personal meditation on the sensual qualities and flows of rituals with artistic and even erotic undertones. Water is here taken as an acronym for integrated bionic infrastructures inspired by entangled bodily organs and blurred boundaries between human body and technology, rational thinking and mystical dreaming. Ritual as Water turns the topic of the workshop on its head; not water is examined for its deeper potentials that might be informed by water, but rituals themselves take on a fluid and somewhat indecipherable tinge.

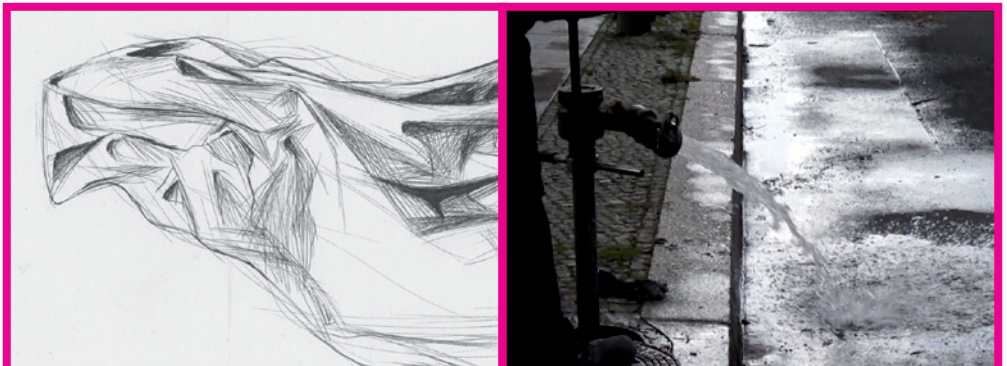
Not by chance perhaps, the author rediscovered hand sketching and drawing as the medium for a search and creative process producing complex forms, which he usually generates digitally.

## **Project 6/ Category 2: Water as Design Element**

### **Puddles in the sky**

Andres Roberto Ochoa Riegner

This work wants to change our awareness of water and our thinking about this highly precious resource - through the means of poetry. In our technical, scientific world water has been trapped in conduits, pipes and underground channels only to be detected by their surface openings in the form of a gully or drain. "Puddles in the sky" strives to remind us that we need to make a place for water once again where it belongs and where it is visible; the film tries to "liberate" water, as it were. Water has a memory transporting information; from reflections to stories about the places it has been to. This memory may contain valuable clues for a re-established balance of man and nature, of water and our environment.



Farzad Akhavan

Andres Roberto Ochoa Riegner

## 06 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The open workshop format proved to be very useful to trigger a very broad range of approaches - from highly personal, meditative concepts via playful, experimental inquiries to solution-driven service design sketches. Eventually, one of the main qualities of the workshop was the fact that more time and effort were extended to the process itself of understanding and synthesizing a very broad topic, rather than jumping to early “results” and “solutions” that would then have been merely verified and honed for the majority of time. The open exploration free of pressure, the good germination of thoughts and ideas as opposed to the adoption of formal solutions early on in the process (which is common in contemporary teaching and practice) provided for a valuable learning experience for coaches and students alike.



Debates and exchange continued

The idea of input for the participants from various disciplines works both ways: to widen the subject and to focus on a specific topic. Some participants might have had difficulties to process the input and incorporate it into their projects if the impulse was too broad. The theme “Water Ritual” was very open. Accordingly, it was interpreted by the participants very differently and diverse.

As a result, worked out projects/ proposals represent a number of interesting ideas, but - perhaps more importantly - also a range of good questions such as:

How can old public rituals and distribution systems related to water be re-interpreted into contemporary water-related services and new typologies of public spaces that increase awareness and interaction with water?

In what way can new personal rituals involving water help us to structure our daily routine in an increasingly fragmented society?

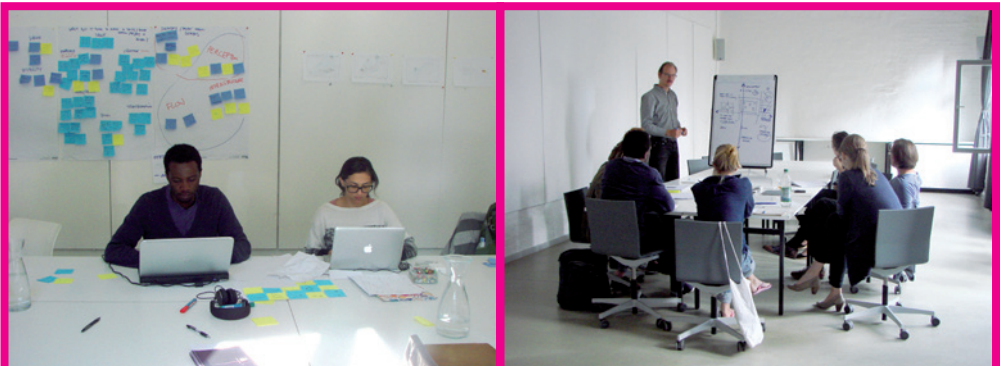


If the most basic rituals we take for granted – such as hand-washing – were to be reconsidered; what would this mean on a larger scale for sustainability and self-sufficiency?

How can we blur the separation between very rigid, technical infrastructure and systems embedded in nature or overcome it all together?

Which design implications do increased sensitivity for bodily factors represented in thematic combinations such as water temperature/heart rate or submersion in water/ body weight have in (preventive) medicine and therapies?

These questions hold enough potential for further, deeper inquiry over the found broad range of topics; further research questions can be deduced from the workshop results.



Asking questions and formulating goals



The setting at ANCB: garden and courtyard cafe

## Commentaries:

„In der offenen, konstruktiven Atmosphäre des Workshop entstanden gute, sehr unterschiedliche Ansätze und Ideen was ein Ritual in Bezug zum Wasser bedeuten kann. Auf den ersten Blick ist manches sehr theoretisch oder abstrakt, auf den zweiten Blick finde ich viele interessante Ansätze, die unsere Beziehung zum Wasser, zu unserem Körper und zu unserem Badezimmer vertiefen und über Rituale bereichern können. Die Intensität und Qualität der Arbeit der Studenten haben mich persönlich sehr beeindruckt.“

**Roman Passarge**

“ An open workshop format that encompasses a broader thematic scope and allows for failure as part of the process is a highly valuable tool of learning and designing. The time of merely verifying prevailing tastes, personal preferences or formal strategies is over; we need democratic, systemic processes that ask the right questions before finding answers.”

**Jörn Frenzel**

“I find the interdisciplinary approach of the ANCB particularly exciting and fruitful. This way, the theme can be analysed from all possible angles and addressed from different points of view. For me personally, the workshop was a good opportunity to think about water and how we deal with it fundamentally - a beautiful supplement to my very “normal” bathroom design work on a daily basis.”

**Birgit Hansen**